

Trinitarian Conversations Volume 2

Interviews With More Theologians

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CONTENTS

Introduction	vii
Jeremy Begbie	
Music and Theology	1
Douglas A. Campbell	
Our Participation With Christ	11
Sin and Its Seriousness	21
In Christ — Conversion and Calling	30
Understanding the Book of Romans	41
Cathy Deddo	
Theology in the Everyday	50
Gordon D. Fee	
How Should We Read the Bible?	59
Like Father, Like Son	68
The Book of Revelation	75
David Fergusson	
Faith and Its Critics	84
Jeannine Graham	
The Connection Between Jesus' Incarnation and His Saving Work	92
Jesus' Exclusive Connection to Human Nature	101

Myk Habets

Jesus the Anointed Son	109
Jesus and the Spirit.....	121
The Creeds and the Trinity	128
Theosis: Participation in the Divine Nature	138

Trevor Hart

Art and Imagination in the Church.....	149
God the Father, Reflected in Jesus Christ	160
Zooming in on Salvation	170

George Hunsinger

What Christ Did Was Effective for All	179
Our Lives Are Hidden in Christ	189
Focus on Christ.....	197
The Eucharist and Ecumenism	206

Michael Jenkins

Invitation to Theology	219
------------------------------	-----

Alister McGrath

Apologetics and Theology	226
--------------------------------	-----

Steve McVey

The Grace Walk	237
We Will Never Overestimate God's Grace	249
The Father Gets a Bad Rap.....	260
What Is God's Wrath?.....	271
The Grace Walk, Revisited	283

Paul Molnar

Keeping Christ at the Center	293
God Chose to Enter Our Humanity	304
God's Will and Our Decisions	312
The Giver and the Gift	319

Cherith Fee Nordling

What Does It Mean to Be Human?	328
What Will the Resurrected Body Be Like?	337
Image Bearers for God	346

What Jesus' Humanity Means for Us.....	356
Robin Parry	
A Trinitarian Perspective in Worship.....	365
Lament and the Role of Israel in Salvation History	374
Andrew Purves	
What on Earth Is Jesus Doing?	382
Theology for Pastoral Work.....	392
We Are Not Generic.....	402
Let the Lord be the Lord	410
Fred Sanders	
How the Trinity Changes Everything.....	420
Adoption and Prayer in the Trinity	429
Stephen Seamands	
From "What" to "So What?"	438
Ministry in the Image of God.....	448
Wounds That Heal.....	456
Daniel Thimell	
John McLeod Campbell and Grace.....	463
Christ Atoned for Everyone	472
Christ's Completed Work.....	481
The Trinity, United With Humanity.....	490
Alan Torrance	
Grace Leads to Godly Living.....	499
God's Wrath, Hell, and the Role of Science	508
Being in Christ	516
David Torrance	
The Grace of the Finished Work of Christ.....	523
Not I, But Christ.....	532
Not My Will, But Yours.....	540
The Importance of Prayer in Pastoral Work.....	548
Already Forgiven	557
Robert T. Walker	
Christ Has Faith for Us	565

Why the Incarnation Is Good News	573
The Implications of Jesus' Resurrection	581
N.T. Wright	
How God Became King	588
How God Became King (part 2).....	599
Geordie Ziegler	
Trinitarian Grace and Participation	605
A Trinitarian Approach to Spiritual Formation.....	611
About the Contributors	618
About the Interviews	635
About the Publisher... ..	636
Ambassador College of Christian Ministry	638
Grace Communion Seminary	639

INTRODUCTION

The chapters in this book are transcripts of interviews conducted as part of the *You're Included* series, sponsored by Grace Communion International and Grace Communion Seminary. We have more than 130 interviews available. You may watch them or download video or audio at <https://www.gcs.edu/course/view.php?id=58>.

When people speak in a conversation, thoughts are not always put into well-formed sentences, and sometimes thoughts are not completed. In some of the following transcripts, we have removed occasional words that did not seem to contribute any meaning to the sentence. In some cases we could not figure out what word was intended. We apologize for any transcription errors, and if you notice any, we welcome your assistance.

Grace Communion International is in broad agreement with the theology of the people we interview, but GCI does not endorse every detail of every interview. The opinions expressed are those of the interviewees. We thank them for their time and their willingness to participate.

We incur substantial production costs for these interviews. Donations in support of this ministry may be made at <https://www.gci.org/online-giving/>.

MUSIC AND THEOLOGY

Gary Deddo: I've been reading your book, *Resounding Truth*, and find it fascinating. It's an important topic that you bring up there, of the relationship of Christian faith with the arts, and music in particular. I'd like us to talk about that. But before we get into that, you have an unusual background that brings together music and theology. Can you tell us how that happened?

Jeremy Begbie: The theology came much later than the music. About the age of three or four, I started playing the piano and improvising. I was entranced by this world of music and the kind of sounds you get out of this strange instrument. My mother was very musical (my father, not so), so I was surrounded by music from an early age. I knew that's what I wanted to do for the rest of my life – there was no question of anything else. Right through my school years, that was the chosen profession. I was composing; I started the oboe when I was 13; I was playing in competitions.

Throughout that time, I had no particular interest in Christian faith. My mother was a churchgoer. My father sporadically, but we didn't talk about those things much. I had no



evangelical background or anything like that. Then I went to the University of Edinburgh to study music and philosophy. It was during that time that I caught up with an old school friend of mine called Alan Torrance. We'd been at school together in Edinburgh. I had a spare slot in my degree program for an elective. He said, "Why not go along and hear my dad lecture in theology." It was a crafty thing to do, but I thought, "Yeah, I'll do that." I sort of snuck along there like Nicodemus at night, concerned not to be recognized, and sat at the back. I listened to a lecture. I think he was talking about Hebrews and the High Priest of Christ.

GD: This is James Torrance?

JB: James Torrance. I don't think I understood a word he said, but he had something I didn't have. I knew that. He was full of a kind of profound joy that I had not met before. He was also intellectually very sharp. This is probably the first Christian I had met who was clearly very brilliant as well as very devout. Indeed, he started with prayer as well. I met a kind of wholeness in that person that I had not seen before, and that captivated me. I thought, "Whatever he's on, so to speak, I wouldn't mind having a bit of that or at least getting to that more fully."

Through many conversations with Alan and his father, James, I started reading the New Testament, which I had not read before, and reading the rest of the Bible as well, or at least large parts of it. I fell into faith over a period of about two or three months. Grace got hold of me. From the beginning, all I heard was a message of grace. I had never heard this before. I didn't know that's what Christianity was. That struck me.

Another thing that struck me, I think most of all... I didn't come to faith through feeling terribly guilty about something. If you had said to me at the age of 19, "Are you aware of a great gap in your life?" I would say, "No, not really." Isn't there some deep running unhappiness deep down in you? I'd have said, "No, not really. I'm quite content, thanks very much."

What initially attracted me about Christianity was it was a worldview. It was an entire way of looking at reality with Jesus Christ at the center. That was extraordinary. I said, "This is a way of accounting for things. It's a way of integrating things." Its initial appeal was intellectual, and I saw it lived out in a family, with the Torrances. They took me into their home and I had the kind of welcome that I had not experienced before. I asked crazy and very aggressive and angry questions. They just took all those and answered them gracefully. That's how I came to faith. It was later I was aware of sin and guilt and the cross, but that's not how I came into it.

Then the challenge was: how is music going to be integrated with that?

GD: Right. You were training to be in music performance.

JB: Music performance and possibly in the academic world, maybe a PhD, something like that as well, because I was academically very interested in music. There was a sudden change. I felt a strong vocation early on to be a minister for the gospel. That shocked my parents, but they took it sort of well.

Short of it, I was due to go on to Oxford to do another degree in music, but I decided to do theology with James Torrance at Aberdeen. He was an extraordinary teacher and gave me a Trinitarian, particularly Christological, but also Trinitarian view of reality; it just fired me up intellectually. My years at Aberdeen were incredibly happy.

As far as music was concerned, I was performing then. I was teaching. I was doing all that. I kept it going. But in those days, there was very little written that would integrate the world of music and the arts with vibrant theology. Now, we have a lot. Not so much possibly music, but certainly in the arts generally. There's been a great burgeoning of literature, but then there was not very much.

That was the challenge. Since then, I've been trying to hold those worlds together. Yet, even that's not quite right: I've been trying to see how they are integrated and can be integrated.

GD: Why is that important? It was personally important; that's clear. Aren't they distinct disciplines? Music, Christian faith, worship, theology itself, aren't they separate?

JB: It's important for all sorts of reasons. One is that there's no society known on the face of the earth that's not done something like music. However poor, however deprived, they'll always be singing. They'll always be playing. Music is at least as universally and ancient as language, easily so.

If we're giving a Christian account of reality and a concern that our entire life is Christ centered and integrated with our faith, then something has to be done with this extraordinary phenomena we call music. That's the main reason. If Christ is Lord of all, we need to see and show what it means to have Christ as Lord of music (he is already Lord of these activities that we call music). That's first of all why it's important.

Then along with that, music has been used in worship from the beginning. What's going on and how can we use it responsibly? Another reason is that music can be used for great harm as well, and has been. It can be very manipulative. It can be divorced from ethics, and in worship, sometimes divorced from the word or scripture and take on a life on its

own. It easily becomes an idol. We need to ask, “How do we avoid that or how are we going to get a grip on those questions?”

GD: Right. In your book, you talk about the importance of the doctrine of creation. I don’t know any Christian that would say, “I don’t believe God is creator.” That’s just standard. God is the creator. That’s fine, but they don’t necessarily take that much further. On the other hand, Christianity is about Jesus and Jesus is about the cross. Isn’t that the center? Jesus is interested in redemption. We tend to align creation with the Father, and redemption and the cross with the Son. But really, that’s not the whole story. In some ways, that music question and Jesus being Lord of all raises, what does Jesus have to do with creation?

JB: That’s the key issue. Jesus is about the cross and redemption, but what does Colossians say? “The one in whom, for whom, by whom all things were created and all things have been redeemed through the blood of the cross” (Colossians 1:16, 20; Romans 11:36). In other words, you have Christ at the center, at the center of the entire creation. He is the rationale behind the making of the universe. The risen Christ is the embodiment of the end of the universe. If we want to know what the entire created order is about and what it’s meant to be doing, that’s where we go first.

That’s Paul and the very earliest traditions. Christ was being linked not simply to the human sphere, though quite rightly and properly, but also to the entire created order. (Sadly, in a lot of Protestantism, and indeed in a lot of evangelicalism, these things have been separated out. Christ is about the salvation of your soul, but the world at large and also probably your body, physicality as well, these things can be set to one side because Christ is not interested in those.) That seems to be in Colossians, Ephesians, 1 Corinthians, virtually every book in the New Testament ... John’s Gospel is often forgotten; there is an incredibly important theme of the new creation in John’s Gospel. The one through whom all things were created is the one who will recreate all things. The resurrection is being portrayed as the new creation; there’s no doubt about that. It’s right through John’s Gospel as well.

That was the vision that excited me from James Torrance. I should also mention the name of Colin Gunton. He was the one who pushed that even more strongly, the kind of a creation-wide vista. That’s why it’s important to get that perspective on music.

When we’re thinking about the history of the thinking about music, musicology as it’s called, history of music and thinking about music, there

was a big change around roughly 1450 to about 1650. Up until then, by far the dominant tradition in thinking about music was a cosmological tradition, that music turned into sound the order of the cosmos. The cosmos, the creation at large, has an order to it, a glorious beauty about it. What music ought to be doing is that we're tuning into that and turning it into sound.

Sounded music becomes the embodiment of created order. That's behind the "music of the spheres." It's in Plato, Pythagoras, it's taken into the Christian Church, particularly via Augustine and then a little bit later Boethius, and right through the medieval era. It was just assumed that music was giving expression to lots of things, but first of all to the order of the universe. When it wasn't tuned into the universe, it was liable to do you a fair amount of harm.

For all sorts of reasons during the late Renaissance and then early modern period, music gets pulled out of that context. It becomes justified primarily and mainly in anthropological terms, or human-centered terms. Music becomes a way in which we influence each other, in which we persuade each other emotionally, in which we move each other. It's primarily a means of emotional communication and nothing else. The ancients thought that as well. They set it in this cosmic context. Music has been taken out of that context, largely in the modern years. Now we just take it for granted. It's nothing to do with nature at large. It's to do with whatever I make it to be. It's a very constructive view of music. As you know, Gary, that's not just in music, but right across the board in many disciplines, that's been the case. Charles Taylor I think speaks about the dis-embedding from the cosmos at large. Ethics taken out of cosmic context becomes what I...

GD: Yes. It can be reduced to, "What's the benefit to me?" If I can't discover what that is or nobody can explain it to me, then it's irrelevant.

JB: When I teach courses in theology and music, I say there's a question that is disallowed for the next thirteen weeks. That is, "Do I like it?" There's another question. "Dr. Begbie, what kind of music do you like?" They often want to know that. I say, "Not going to tell you." The reason, not because that doesn't matter, but because I think we need to learn the discipline of not making that the first question. The first question we ask is, "What's going on here?" Then yes, like it or dislike it. But we live in a culture that said, "Do I like it? Yes. Do I not like it? No. If I don't like it, I needn't even listen to it. I needn't bother with it."

To think if we treated everything like that, if we had no curiosity about

the world at large, but simply responded “Do I like it? Is it good for me? Is it going to give me a good experience?” It would be a very sad world.

GD: Very small.

JB: A tiny view of reality that would be, wouldn’t it? Depressing.

GD: Most Christians I know recognize God in nature. Sometimes you can see God in the waves and in the clouds, in the stars and things like that. There’s that recognition – there’s got to be some connection there even if it’s not directly connected to Jesus Christ. What about the arts? I find a couple of different things. For a small group, the arts is in some ways more spiritual, most spiritual and out of that, probably music is the most spiritual. Others are saying, on the other track, arts are like icing on the cake. It’s just extra. It’s embellishment. It’s fun, but it’s not essential. You can take it or leave it. I may like it, but there’s not that much missing if it’s missing. I find two streams dividing in that way. What would you say about that and how to address that?

JB: If I understand you on the kind of spiritual, are you talking about a view where the arts are kind of inflated in their significance?

GD: I think so. They would say pure spirituality is esthetic and sometimes non-cognitive, non-rational.

JB: In the nineteenth century, this was the Romantics’ view of music. In the high Romantics and particularly German Romantics, music offers the supreme experience of the infinite. That’s what they want to say. If you want to get high on the infinite and the infinite aesthetic experience, music is where you go. Along with that, they said the fact that it seems distant from language or that it can’t assert things like “this is a table,” this is a settee, or whatever, is an advantage. It can be free from the particularity of words and take you into the (well, there are various versions) infinite movement of the divine spirit or something like that. That is one extreme.

The modern versions of that pop in at all sorts of places. Often, people come up to me after talks and say, “I listened to this or that music and it was a spiritual experience. It was incredibly powerful.” What they often mean is it was a very strong emotional experience, which is fine. We need to be very careful in aligning that with the Holy Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jesus Christ as if we could divorce spirit from that entire theological nexus. I usually try to retranslate that language and say, “God is indeed giving you an experience of wholeness by his Spirit insofar as that prefigures the new creation and the final re-creation of all things. Hallelujah. But you might just be enjoying yourself and nothing else, so

be careful.”

Another thing we have to be careful of is running into ... This is the Romantics thing again, running into the arts for an extreme experience in order to get away from words. If I’m asked to speak at a church on a Sunday morning, they often say, “Will you need a piano and demonstrate lots of music?” I said “No. I just need a music stand or a pulpit or whatever you put your notes on.” Christianity is irreducibly verbal at its core. That doesn’t mean it’s exclusively verbal, but at the heart of it is a message that has to be spoken. I think we should be unapologetic about that. That’s not because of some kind of Protestant obsession with words. It’s because God has become a human being who has spoken. Words have been validated, sanctified, confirmed as vehicles for his self-communication.

There never comes a time, it seems, that a Christian absolves him- or herself from responsibility to words, supremely that means the words of Christ and the words of Scripture. But I want to say at the same time, God has also given us nonverbal media to access the realities of which those words speak. He’s given us J.S. Bach to access the glorious redemptive truth of the crucifixion of Jesus in the Matthew Passion. He’s given us Bach’s musical genius to do that. What’s happening there is we’re not running away from words or running away from Scripture. We’re saying God has given us different ways of accessing those realities and sometimes in ways that can’t be spoken.

GD: So they’re complementary.

JB: Precisely.

GD: And not in competition.

JB: There’s never been competition. There’s some kind of aestheticism around. There are evangelicals (I say this in all kindness. I count myself as an evangelical. There’s no problem with that...) who have been hammered with a certain kind of word-obsessed theology. Then they run away into the arts and hold hands and look at pictures and sing songs and say, “Forget all that wordy stuff.” I think that’s a big mistake. I can understand why it was done, but I think it’s a big mistake. It’s why I’m not ashamed to use words, but basically I’m a systematic theologian in the midst of the arts. Do you see what I’m trying to get at?

GD: I think it makes a lot of sense.

JB: That was the spirit thing. The other was “they’re mere frills.” To that I say, “Why then is it that every society has music of one sort or another?” When people say that, I say, “You go to church?” Right. “You sing?” Yes. “Suppose I said you’ll never have any more music for the next

ten years?” They respond, “Well, I don’t know about that.” Then I go to a piano and I demonstrate the difference between words sung to one tune and then to another tune, the dramatic difference in meaning. That’s another thing I do.

Then if I’m being interviewed like an occasional like this, I might point to pictures on the walls, in their house perhaps. I say, “Do you think these are just frills? How much did that cost?” They say, “It was about \$500.” I say, “Really? You spend \$500 on a frill?” In my own country, when Princess Diana got killed, what happened? Thousands of poems get written. Is it just a frill? When people lose a loved one, they will instinctively lament in some form, in musical form. Is that just a frill?

If we take art to include metaphorical expressions, it’s hard to speak without some kind of metaphor, without something approaching poetry. The Bible is absolutely stuffed full of metaphorical expressions and artistic forms. We often treat the Bible as if God unfortunately gave us the wrong kind of book. If we could just translate it into five points all beginning with P or something, then we would make the meaning clear. That’s not what he gave us. Are we going to respect the forms that God used? That’s the kind of reply.

GD: Jeremy, thanks for being with us. You have talked about the powers of various arts, and music is one of them. I was wondering if you might demonstrate for us some of those powers that might apply to life in general and perhaps worship, things like that.

JB: We were talking earlier about knowing your medium, and for some people, there’s a danger that they’ll think that music, for instance, is a mere thrill. It has no theological power or substance to itself. If I hear that and I’m anywhere near a piano and I’m with Christians who worship, I often speak about this tune: “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” right? That’s the well-known tune, and it’s fairly upbeat and fun and easy-going. “What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear.” There’s not a great deal about sin and grief there, but there’s plenty of cheerful joy.

If we set it to this [other] tune, everything changes, because this is heavy. It’s dark. We’re reminded that he is our friend, but he’s the friend who’s borne our grief, the griefs which we bear. March, that’s the kind of plodding marching thing. It’s different. The words are exactly the same, but they’re now inflected, nuanced in all sorts of different ways through the music. Film composers know this, of course. It’s just taken the church a little time to wake up to that, because then you can flip around these tunes and it makes a difference, as if the tunes were simply varnish on

what we could see quite well otherwise. No, the varnish can change the way you look at that wood very dramatically.

I've taught theology for most of my adult life, I suppose. I've found over and over again that music has distinctive powers, to help us not only feel and sense things, but actually understand them, as well. One powerful way I think in which that's the case is when it comes to thinking in Trinitarian terms, which is very much an interest of your own. Part of the difficulty we've had in Christian theology and thinking about the Trinity is we will tend to rely very much on our eyes. The way we look at the world, things will occupy bounded locations, but they can't be in the same place at the same time and visible as different things. A patch of red on a canvas that a painter has put there and patch of yellow on the same space, you try to put those together, either the yellow hides the red or it could be the other way around, red hides yellow, or if the paint's wet, they merge into orange.

In the world that we see, you can't see two different things in the same space at the same time as different. In the world of sound, you can and do all the time. That note or any note that I play, that note fills the whole of your heard space. You don't say of what you hear, "Oh, it's there, but it's not there." There's no interval between anything. It's just there in the whole of your heard space. If I add another note, that second note fills the same space and yet, you hear it as distinct. Undeniably, two notes. In the world that we hear, things can be in and through each other. They can sound in and through each other. They can inter-penetrate. Now if we go to John's Gospel, and all that language about the Son in the Father, the Father in the Son, I love that "in" language, what Richard Bauckham calls the "in-one-anotherness" of Father and Son. That is very hard to draw.

When I'm teaching, at that point, I would take a pen and give it to a student and say, "Would you like to draw that for me?" Of course, no one does. Not even those Bibles that have all those illustrations will try to demonstrate that visually. It's very hard, but it's very easy to hear, because what you're hearing there is two sounds in and through each other. It can go further than that, because if this was a real piano, then there would be two strings here, and they would be setting each other off. One string will tend to resonate with another if they have what's called a harmonic series in common. The more this resonates, the more that resonates. Now, between those two, you have Father and Son who love each other, who mutually establish each other, you might even say, in some Trinitarian theology.

Now we're into the Trinity, and I'm sure you've got there already. This three-note chord is, in my own view, by far the most potent way of not only sensing but also beginning to comprehend intellectually all that "in-one-anotherness" language that pervades the New Testament. The trouble is, a lot of Trinitarian theology has over-relied on the eye, and therefore what can you see? You can see oneness, you can see three separates, or you can go kind of modalist. You can think there's one in the middle but three on the outside. You can see how so many struggles of the church with the Trinity have been because they've over-relied on the eye.

If we begin to think sonically, that isn't the case. Here we have a kind of sonic space and a mutually resonating space that opens up the Trinity in extraordinary ways. Then what happens is other notes around that will resonate with that and get caught up in it, and you can understand, therefore, participation in the Trinity through the Spirit as a form of attunement. We are tuned into God. You can think of sin as a matter of being out of tune with God, radically so, and unable to communicate, therefore.

What the world of sound has done for me is help rethink all that area, and also re-read the history of doctrine. I think there's a lot of work to be done, but it's a lovely thought that something as simple as a chord, something as simple as something you could strum on that guitar in the corner of your room that you've neglected, it's just sitting there waiting. If you ever preach on Trinity Sunday, as you do in my denomination, I'm telling you, I think it's a lot better to be using that kind of personic metaphor and embodiment, you might even say, not just a metaphor, than many of the visual illustrations we typically trot out and confuse people with. Also, with the Trinity, we tend to present the Trinity as a problem to be solved. That way, it becomes a mathematical problem to be solved. The Trinity is not a problem to be solved — it's something to enjoy.

GD: That certainly opens up for us the connection between theology, the words of theology and the arts and music. Thanks so much. It's been a pleasure.

JB: Thank you very much indeed.

OUR PARTICIPATION WITH CHRIST

Our guest in this interview is Douglas Campbell, Professor of New Testament at Duke Divinity School. Dr. Campbell is author of *The Deliverance of God* and *The Quest for Paul's Gospel*.



J. Michael Feazell: Thanks for being here.

Douglas Campbell: You're welcome.

JMF: I would like to talk about your book, *The Quest for Paul's Gospel*, or at least some of the concepts that are in it. But I'd like to start by talking about the cover (it's a unique cover), and if you could tell us about how that came about and what the meaning of some of these symbols are on it.

DC: Well, this is the secret to the book. You have to be nice about the

cover because it was designed by my wife.

JMF: Very good.

DC: I think it was very funky. She's a very funky woman. Buried in the collage are codes about what I'm talking about in the book, so my students always pick it up and have a chuckle. At the top, there are two boxes and the arrow, A to B. Most people have a theory about how Paul gets you from Box A to Box B. Box B is where you want to go. But there are lots of different theories about how you set up Box A and Box B and how you get from one to the other. Some of these theories can get in the way of what Paul is often doing.



But the model that I like, that I really push for in this book, is sneaking through the middle here. It uses these letters. You've got two Ps and then an M and an E going around the corner. What I'm getting at there is that, I think Paul's gospel is all about P for participation, and E is for eschatology, which is one of those wonderful words you should use at a cocktail party from time to time. Meaning, there's a sense in which God has brought to us a new reality, a perfected reality, which is superior to the one that we're occupying. In Christ, he's managed to organize things so we participate in it in Christ.

How does that work? I think Paul tells us about this in some detail, particularly in Romans 6, but also with insights from Romans 7 and Romans 5, a little bit going on in Romans 8, but Romans 6 is really where it happens. What seems to have happened in Paul's mind is: Christ has entered our situation, the human situation, which is good, but there's a sense in which we're oppressed, and disordered (and fractured even) by evil powers. The power of Sin (Paul effectively spells that with a capital S—the power of Death, capital D). These demonic forces have unfortunately taken up residence in the stuff that we're constituted out of (our flesh), so that we're transient, we're corruptible, we decay, we sin,

and we die.

This is a very heavy burden for humanity to bear. What God has done to drag us back (because this is not God's intention for creation, for humanity, for any of us, he wants to pull us back into fellowship; this is something we've done to ourselves), he sends his Son into that situation to become part of it and to assume it. As the [church] fathers said, "That which is not assumed is not healed." So Christ takes on all of this mess when he becomes a human.

Then the crucial thing for Paul is that when Christ is executed, when he dies on the cross, that condition is terminated. I'm in the province of termination, and here we are. That places a massive full stop after all of this corruption, all of this dislocation, all of this disorder.

In order to get us through and transform us and heal us, God must provide a state beyond this. This is the eschatology, the eschaton, the things to do with the end. *Eschaton* is Greek for "end," *ology* is just "words about stuff." So we're talking about the end, but the end has come right to us, now. So, Christ has taken everything that we are, has terminated it, and then has been resurrected again into this new state where he's enthroned and sits on the right hand of the Father.

By doing that, because he is God, because he is also the creator, because he is also the new Adam, the second Adam, the one who starts off a new humanity, there's a sense in which this is now true for every one of us, a reality for every one of us. But God doesn't leave it at that. The Holy Spirit draws each one of us into this reality in a very powerful, palpable way.

So the second P is very important. The first P is important, that's the participation in Christ, the second P is the Spirit—it stands for *pneumatology* [after *pneuma*, the Greek word for spirit]. Our participation in Christ is by way of the Spirit. As we're drawn into what Christ has done, we're drawn into this new transformation of what we are. And this [pointing at the cover] is a humanity in which the power of sin and death and corruption has been broken. It's quite concrete. I want to say that this is Reality with a capital R. This is more real than anything else that you or I experience.

The sharp-witted among you will have noticed I've only covered three letters. I've done a P, a P, and an E. Why have I put an M in here at the risk of making the whole thing hopelessly complicated? Well, this reality, this new creation that we stand in the midst of, is not obvious on one level.

Paul's converts knew this. They sensed that when he talked about the new reality, sin being broken, the power of death being broken, they couldn't see it. Paul said to them, "If you're part of Christ's story, you are guaranteed the fullness of this reality. But you must be part of the front end of the story."

How do we know we're part of the front end? It's when we participate in Christ's sufferings. So the M stands for the *martyrological* side of what Christ did when he obeyed the will of the Father, suffered, was obedient to the shame of the cross, and died. It's the story of his faithfulness unto death. It's the story that Philippians 2:5-11 talks about so much.

Paul is emphatic that as we experience some of the suffering in this life, at the same time we experience some of the faithfulness and the obedience, we experience some of the martyrological side of Christ, and we know from that, that we are bolted into this story, and we are at the front end of a story that ends in the termination of all that's bad, but a glorious resurrection of all that's good.

That sounds complex, but this is the heart of Paul's gospel. This is what powers him up, what excited him, what he thinks God has done in Christ. This is what leads him to travel all over the eastern Mediterranean to suffer, to struggle, to found little communities everywhere. This gives meaning to the Lord's Supper, this gives meaning to baptism. Baptism symbolizes beautifully and nets this idea of participating in Christ's death and then also being resurrected to new life. I find it all incredibly exciting and helpful.

JMF: Not only Paul, but we often find throughout the New Testament it's as though the letters begin with the assumption that the recipients are undergoing some kind of suffering, it can be persecution, oftentimes. Then he's moving from that into "but it has this great meaning for you."

DC: Very true.

JMF: How is that any different from what all of us experience? All you have to do is listen to the adults, if you're a kid, and they're talking about what hurts, and how the government is doing something to mess things up. There's always something going on that's painful, a tragedy, a crisis. We live from one crisis and tragedy to the next.

DC: There's a sense in which, apart from Christ, it's hard to give meaning to suffering. We can try, but part of the struggle of life is we suspect often, "Does my pain have value? Does it have worth? Does it mean anything?" I think what Paul is offering us here is an understanding of suffering that has a real core of meaning in it. It's not any old suffering.

I think we get this from one of Paul's rather neglected letters – 2 Corinthians articulates at great length what it means for him as a leader of the church to suffer. He talks about this suffering—he hasn't gone looking for it, it's found him. But this is a mark of his authenticity, and a very powerful one. I don't want us to run off and look for pain, but there's a sense in which if it does encounter us, it can mean something.

The other thing we get from 2 Corinthians is the suffering that Paul catalogs there is suffering in which he is reaching out with the gospel to those who do not know about it, and in a way are even hostile toward it. It's the suffering that's generated when you take the incarnation seriously and you act in an incarnational way. That's when you begin to follow the Spirit into situations and locations where you're uncomfortable, with people that you're uncomfortable with, where God is calling you to go. When you have to push through these barriers and boundaries... (We love to surround ourselves with barriers and boundaries and keep out the people we're uncomfortable with, but God is ahead of us and is often pulling us through those to engage with those people.)

When you move through those barriers, get out of your comfort zone, get into cultures, get into languages and situations that you're not comfortable with, then you experience suffering. You experience incomprehension and rejection. To top it all off, you're arriving with this shocking gospel—a gospel that is a wonderful gospel of grace, but it's also a gospel that says to people, “You can do nothing to please God. God has done everything to help you. God has come the whole way to you.” That means, in effect, “All the things that you're offering me, you just have to put away for now.”

It's a message that in its very generosity can elicit conflict and hostility. Paul gives us a narrative in 2 Corinthians of the sort of suffering that is often associated with Christian ministry and Christian life. What he's trying to say is, “It's okay, this is going to happen, enjoy it if you can, rejoice in it, because this is an authentic mark of the reality of the Christian gospel.”

JMF: Where do you look for assurance of being in Christ if you're *not* experiencing that kind of suffering?

DC: That's a good point, and should allow me to clarify something that's important. I'm not advocating going and finding pain, but we often define it very strongly with reference to ourselves in an individual way. What Paul is talking about is an attitude of burden-bearing. The pain that Paul often talks about is, in part, the pain of other congregations and other

people and other groups that he is shouldering and carrying—the pain that he is feeling. I would say that God is calling us to carry the burdens of people. This is where we’re meant to be going.

The Spirit is often way ahead of us. I think of John 4—when Jesus brought out the disciples to look at the fields and said “a few more months until harvest, and I say look, the fields are white and ready for harvest now.” It’s true. The world around us that’s ripe for harvest is a world that is suffering and struggling. That’s where we’re called to be. There’s a sense in which well, it doesn’t have to be us.

I wonder if we don’t need to be in contact with people who are, in a sense, struggling. There should be, perhaps, a story that we can tell sometimes of relationships that have been set up that we’ve followed the Spirit into where we’re trying to help. And in helping, we are helped and enriched ourselves. Often when we come as people who are prepared to give, we are the ones who end up receiving.

JMF: Paul uses that kind of language in the opening to several of his letters where he talks about how one congregation’s heart is going out to the suffering of another and that sort of thing.

DC: Yes, the language of sharing is all over his letters. It’s because the reality that he’s involved with is a participatory reality. We are bound up with one another, and so what happens to you affects me in a direct way. The sort of community that we’re being birthed into by this process is a communion. It’s the communion of God, the divine communion, and we’ve been called to be part of that, and so we’re being called to be part of a community where every person is bound up with the reality and the life of every other person. We look at Christ, we look at the Father, we look at the Son, we look at the Spirit—they’re all defined and inextricably intertwined.

When we’re experiencing fullness of our personhood in Christ, what we experience is the reality that we’re involved with one another. We’re very relational. Personhood is all about these relationships. My relationship with my wife is a huge part of who I am. She is a huge part of my personhood. She’s not the only person that’s a part of my personhood, but she’s a very important one. This is a central truth. So, in a sense, we need to be engaged with the people around us who are hurting, and hopefully they’ll be engaged with us when we’re hurting.

JMF: When we talk about the gospel and salvation, we are not talking about details of rules and laws to keep—we’re talking relationships—restorational relationships, building right relationships, good relationships,

being together, being in communion with God and with one another.

DC: Absolutely. That's the church. That's the reality of the church, which is a reality that's in God, and you don't legislate a reality like that. That's to make a big mistake. There's a freedom to these relationships that's very important, because we're in touch with the person who's making the rules, as it were.

It turns out that this person, God, is not making rules. God is just calling us into these relationships that have a certain shape, so there's a flexibility about it, there's a malleability, if you like, which is liberating. Once you start to try to legalize it and legislate it, you mess it up. In the end of the day, there's one legislator, and that's Jesus Christ. If we have any problems, we can go to him and ask him about stuff, which is nice—it's a good feeling to be operating in a situation like that.

JMF: Often we read Paul as though we have a relationship with the rules. When our relationship is mediated by the law, our focus is on "where are we falling short in terms of this rule or that rule" instead of thinking about it in terms of living out the relationship into which we've been called, the relationship we've been given that we are a part of and participating in, whether negatively or positively.

DC: Yes. I think Paul was anything but a legalist, and you can see this when you lay his letters out alongside one another and look at their diversity and see the very different advice that's going to Philippi from the advice that's going to Corinth, even the advice in the second letter that goes to Corinth, the advice that goes to Colossae, the advice that goes to Rome—extremely diverse, which suggests to me that Paul is very context-sensitive. He's not laying down universal rules—he's speaking out of a universal reality, which is a very different thing. That reality is essentially personal. It's a community that involves people; it involves the divine community.

JMF: It's like he gets to the very different needs and conclusions by the same path.

DC: Exactly. Under the same Lordship, one might say.

JMF: A lot of similarity in Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, and yet addressing different issues.

DC: Right. Paul is what we might call almost a command ethicist. He's worried about the thought that you lay down a rule, because he thinks while that can be a good thing for a while, as he points out in Romans 7, eventually you can make that rule and go to some situation where it will do some damage—you can exploit it. The demonic forces that are unleashed in the world that stand against us are much more sophisticated

than we are, and they can manipulate these things and can break you down by putting them to work.

So Paul's approach is, he's no longer orienting himself primarily by written instructions or by rule after rule or even by propositions—he is orienting himself through Christ. He's listening to Christ, and Christ is telling him what to do. It's a living situation where he's getting instructions from the one who is controlling and organizing everything. He's getting his instructions from the Spirit and from the Father as well—it's not just Christ who's doing this. That's a very different mentality, isn't it? It's a much more intimate reality than we tend to live in ourselves.

JMF: An example of that might be in the way unity is often used with churches. Paul is talking about unity in the Spirit and in the faith, and we, instead of seeing that as being rooted in the relationship of love, we instead use it as a weapon as a church to compel...

DC: Right. Legislate.

JMF: We legislate a lock-step approach to something and *call* that unity as though it's unity, but it it's far from anything resembling communion.

DC: Right. What Paul is talking about is, the church *is* actually unified, because it is in Christ, and Christ is unified, and he holds everything together. It's a failure by people to recognize a unity that Christ has established. We don't have to go out and work at establishing this.

JMF: To create it.

DC: We can respond to something that's already there.

JMF: To live in the reality of what is already true.

DC: Exactly.

JMF: Which means I need to change, as opposed to making everyone else agree with me.

DC: Right.

JMF: Robert Capon calls it left-handed authority as opposed to right-handed authority.

You've mentioned that Paul illustrates some of his theological positions in his ministry in what he wrote about the slave Onesimus and also Lydia in Philippi. How do you see those playing out in...

DC: If I'm right about Paul's gospel and what was making it tick, you've probably detected by now that God comes down so far to us, and we're all so deeply involved in the situation that's wrong, and we're accountable for that wrongness on a certain level, that it levels out all the distinctions that we like to introduce to stratify our relationships. The

gospel of grace knocks down status and pretensions. When Paul talks about the new reality that we live in, he does so quite clearly from time to time, that these old barriers have been broken down and transcended, so that there is no Jew or Greek, there is no slave or free, there is no male and female, that you're all children of God in Christ Jesus. That's his most famous saying about those things, in Galatians 3:28.

We're fond of saying that from the pulpit and even our Bible studies, but it's another thing to actually enact the erasure of these status differentials on the ground and to push past them—that's hard work. So the question arises—was Paul himself somebody who was actually committed to doing that, or was he a bit of a theorist? Was this something he was happy talking about, or was it something he actually did?

I was enormously impressed when I pushed into his letter that he wrote to Philemon and reconstructed that situation there and realized that he was really practicing what he preached and the situation in that little letter.

Paul has written to a guy called Philemon, who's married to a woman called Apphia. Apphia is a Phrygian name, and I think Philemon was probably accompanying [the letter to the] Colossians, so it's going to an ancient territory in present-day western Turkey—it would have been ancient Phrygia. It looks as though Philemon and Apphia are a Phrygian couple, which make them members of an ancient civilized barbarian race.

Paul is writing on behalf of a guy called Onesimus. Onesimus is not his name, it's a slave name, a Latin name, just means "useful." It's like as we would call "Handy Andy." Slaves were so depersonalized in the ancient world that they weren't allowed to use their own names, but were just called things like Number 1, Number 2, Number 3, or they were called after places where they were born, or they were called pet names. Onesimus is a slave, this is his slave name.

When we read the letter to the Colossians, that's also going to the same situation, I think, we read a similar statement to Galatians 3:28 in Colossians 3:11, but it's oriented slightly differently. Paul says there's no Jew or Greek, circumcised, uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free. Barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free. What's a Scythian doing in Colossians 3:11? What is a Scythian? A Scythian is a barbarian that rides around the Russian steppes. It was a name that was applied to people who were enslaved from the northern part of the Black Sea. Everyone who was enslaved out there was called a Scythian—you often got a higher price for them if you called them a Scythian. These slaves were brought down into the Mediterranean, and they were mainly sold at Ephesus, one of the great

slave markets of the ancient world.

It's likely that Onesimus or his parents is some poor white guy who's been enslaved by pirates from the north shore of the Black Sea. He's come down, he's been sold at Ephesus, and now he's working for this Phrygian couple, and there's a problem in this household, there's great unhappiness, there's a fractured relationship.

Paul has run into Onesimus in jail, and Onesimus has come to him and said, "Please help me out here. Something is wrong in this household." This was something you could do in the ancient world—it wasn't quite as bad as running away. If you ran away and you were caught, you were branded, you could be executed, terrible things would happen to you. But you could run to a friend of the family and say, "I'm in deep trouble here, please help me out."

So Onesimus comes to Paul, and as we reconstruct the relationship, this is what happened. It doesn't look like he was a Christian when he arrived. He's a pagan boy that's unhappy. He is the lowest of the low. He's an unhappy slave, branded as lazy, he's a white slave from a far-off barbarian land. In terms of social status in the ancient world, he's as low as you go.

Paul practically falls in love with him. He says, "This boy is my heart now, he has become my heart to me while I'm in chains." He sends him back to his master, Philemon, with this letter, but also having converted him. He sends back a cover letter saying to the leader of the congregation, "Look, take care of this situation, look out for him."

Then he says, "Charge any money to my account, I'm coming to visit soon." What I see in there is that Paul has reached out to this, this probably teenager, and has grasped him, drawn him to the reality of Christ, given him that gift, and set up a relationship that seems deep and committed and genuine between a high-status religious figure and this very low-status marginal guy who's been causing trouble, this person from the bottom rung of society.

So I thought to myself, well, it looks to me as though Paul's really delivering on this from time to time. It's quite a challenge to us and for us as well.

SIN AND ITS SERIOUSNESS

JMF: In your book, *The Deliverance of God*, you focus a great deal on Romans 5-8 and the very positive, powerful assurance of salvation that is present in those passages. The question that seems to arise when we talk about the power, the strength, and the assurance of grace, which is most assuredly present, are all these nagging questions about the “but”s — the “but”s syndrome — “when it comes to grace, but....” What are some of those, and how do we work with those?

DC: A lot of people resist a gospel of grace for three reasons. They’re worried about judgment, they’re worried about ethics, and they’re worried about sin. They see those things as connected together. What one runs into here is the inability to step outside of an essentially conditional mentality where people think, “If I can’t threaten you with something, with a negative future state, how can I get you to behave well?”

JMF: Exactly.

DC: So [if I stress grace] I’ll be soft on sin, I won’t be doing my ethical job, and I’ll let judgment go, and all these things are held together. While this is the model that is pursued with the best of intentions, I think it’s wrong on all accounts: as an account of judgment, an account of ethics, an account of sin, and about how people behave. Most importantly, it’s wrong about God.

The gospel wants to do things very differently. Perhaps if we talk about that for a little bit, we can come back and see where the fallacies lie in these sorts of protests. The gospel of grace addresses ethics and sin in a radical way. It says to you immediately, you are so sinful that you can

contribute nothing to this process. That's a very strong judgment on your sinfulness and what needs to change, and people sense this. The flipside of the gospel of grace is this very stern word of judgment.

You say to me, "How do I behave, once this gospel of grace arrives? Does it just let me do whatever I want?" "Absolutely not!" (to quote Paul, who says that a lot, especially about this question). You've involved in a transformed reality now; you have to cooperate with it as much as you can. You need to throw yourself into this new reality, and it asks that of you. It asks you to respond, at least in the relationships that you're in. It will take every ounce of willpower and effort that you have, and more, to continue to respond to the Spirit and the presence of Christ in your life.

This is what true freedom is. As we respond in these relationships, we discover what liberty is, what it means to be set free from sin, and the tyranny of death, corruption, and sin, and to be free to live for God as God wants us to live. That's true freedom, but it's freedom that you have to be involved with. It's real freedom. *You* are doing this. But you're not choosing to step away from him or choosing not to be involved with him. It's a relationship that's given to you that you then need to respond to. It's the freedom of response and the response of freedom.

This is something that's hard for us to grasp because it's a very non-modern, non-Western way of understanding freedom, but if I can put it like this, it's rather like when a beautiful chord is played on a piano. Certain notes that are in harmonic resonance with this chord will resonate with it, and it's as if God is playing this chord, and we are free to resonate with what God is doing in our lives and to fit into this magnificent orchestration. If God is not playing this chord, we're not free, nothing happens, we're inert. But when that chord is played and when we are struck, when that note is struck, we resonate. That is the freedom of God. We can push back on that and refuse to resonate. We can reject the freedom that God gives us. We can reject the gift that comes to us. But that's not free, that's not a choice. The Bible calls it sin, and it's an irrational decision for slavery. I wouldn't grace that whole operation with the word freedom.

When the gospel of grace comes to us, it reshapes our understanding of what true human freedom is. As our minds are reshaped and our responses are reshaped, I think we live as we're meant to live, and we see more clearly why these other ways of approaching ethics and judgment and sin are wrong. You can probably see by now where I'm going with this in terms of having someone protest against the gospel of grace and says it's soft on sin, I don't know whether to laugh or cry. Because when I'm

looking at grace, I'm seeing something that treats sin with incredible seriousness. When I'm in this relationship of grace, and I know that God accepts me in Christ, I'm then free to see myself as I really am. I'm free to see the depth of the sin in my life because I'm secure.

JMF: Without fear.

DC: Exactly. I know that I cannot fall out of his loving embrace, and so I can be honest in a way that I cannot be honest in any other situation or system.

JMF: There's a huge freedom in that. All the burdens are lifted. There are no more pretenses.

DC: The burdens are lifted, but the reality is sometimes slightly horrible, because you begin to go on a journey when you get exposed to depths of sin that you hadn't even suspected were there. So a confessional quality becomes part of your discipleship — it becomes part of Christian leadership, where the deeper we go with God, the more sense, unfortunately, we have with our own struggle with sin...the more we appreciate the enormous accomplishment of Christ on our behalf, who shared this horrendous situation and didn't slip into that. It produces a more honest church culture; I hope it produces a slightly more honest culture of discipleship.

There are some lessons about sinfulness that I didn't even smell a whiff of until I had been a Christian probably 15 or 20 years, then all of a sudden, bam, you're confronted by something that you do, that's a pattern of behavior, that it's been in your life from the get-go, and suddenly God is asking you to address that — an issue like violence. You can't even see how deeply immersed you are in violence until one day the Holy Spirit puts you in an incident, puts his finger on it, and says okay, it's time for you to address this now. That is an utterly painful experience, but it's the sort of repentance that needs to happen in Christian lives. It's taking sin incredibly seriously in an ongoing way.

If you're pushing the other kind of model, the one that I'm not so happy with, the more conditional contractual model, you're protesting against my emphasis on grace and you're saying well, what about sin? Aren't you soft on sin? I'm saying no, *you're* soft on sin. If you're approaching the gospel as if sin is something that you learn about and confess before you become a Christian, I think you're treating sin in a trivial way. You're approaching sin as if you can understand it without God revealing this stuff to you in an ongoing way—as if you could understand sin without being confronted by the reality of Christ. You're treating sin as if it's something you and your sinful situation can deal with yourself so that you can become a

Christian.

That trivializes sin. The assumption seems to be that through your good actions, you've left it at the door of the church when you walked in and became a Christian. You *didn't* leave it at the door of the church — it walked into church with you — unfortunately it comes back to grab you time after time. So I have a deep worry that this fairly conditional contractual approach to the gospel doesn't treat sin with sufficient seriousness. I find that ironic when I get accused by advocates of that gospel, of being too soft on sin.

I also think that they're soft on ethics. There's this belief that human beings have it in them to generate a certain amount of good behavior in order to become a Christian, before they become a Christian. Once you're a Christian you keep on with the good work. But this is deluded about the depth of sin and the human condition. We cannot generate good behavior and good deeds until God has come down and transformed us and changed us. This is a wildly over-optimistic evaluation of human ability and capacity. These are things that I've learned from standing in the tradition of grace, standing in the reality of grace.

JMF: Isn't there also the idea of being forgiven, to have your past sins removed, and then the concept... now the Spirit will come and help you maintain some level of righteousness, rather than the model you're talking about.

DC: The false model has this sort of funny two-step pattern where you get sins wiped away and then you step into the church by doing certain things. For example, making a decision of faith...supposedly makes you a Christian. Then the Holy Spirit arrives like the seventh cavalry to help you out when you get into a difficult situation. There's something a little odd about that.

What really seems to be going on is the Spirit is involved from well *before* your involvement. Now, from the foundation of the world, the Spirit with Christ has been working toward your and my inclusion in all of this. The Spirit has been working on your journey often when you're not aware of it, leading you to an understanding of Christ, of the church, of God, of sin. They are all involved together. This is so much more than forgiveness of sins. It is forgiveness of sins, but it's release *from* sin.

There's a little word play that Paul does on the genitive connection [in the Greek grammar]...and you can talk about forgiveness of sins or forgiveness of transgressions, in which the transgressions are the object of the forgiveness. I'm going to forgive those sins over there. But there's also with the same word a sense of *release* from sins, which becomes release

from sin in Paul's genitive of separation — we're getting released out of or away from the sin. This is talking about actually changing us — not wiping away acts, but changing the way we function so we don't act in that way.

JMF: This transformation has to do with being in Christ in a way that he is our life, he is our righteousness.

DC: Absolutely. There's a danger that when God comes to us in grace, we then think "okay, so much has been done for me, now it's over to me to respond" — possibly I've been overemphasizing that. There's a sense in which grace from God doesn't just come all the way to us—it takes us back as well in Christ. Christ is the one who has walked in the way that we couldn't walk. It's as if we're in a massive snowdrift, helpless, bound there, but Christ is the one who has smashed the furrow through the snow — we walk behind him, he pulls us, he carries us behind him through the snow. God hasn't just come all the way down to us, he's also hauling us and Christ all the way back to him. All of our acting and responding, in a way, is an echoing of Jesus' perfect response for us.

We see this again in Romans 8, where Paul talks about prayer, for example. We struggle, we don't know what to pray. But then we realize the Spirit is praying in a deeper way than we can pray. Christ is praying for us as well. Christ is continually offering prayer to the Father, the Spirit is offering prayer to the Father (knowing much more about the situation than we do), and we're entering into that prayer that is being undertaken on our behalf. It is a gift that comes all the way down and comes all the way back. It's a marvelous thing. We could never dream this up. This is not something that a clever person has thought up. This is an act of God.

JMF: So we're participating in the prayers of Christ and don't have to worry about whether our prayers are good enough.

DC: We don't have to be anxious—we just have to respond to this divine community as doing things on our behalf. All our activity is like that — we're caught up into worship in Christ, we're caught up into the behavior of Christ by the Spirit of Christ. We're caught up in the understanding of Christ, the mind of Christ. The faithfulness of Christ is something we're caught up in as well. We don't have to generate this ourselves—God is giving this to us. It's a gift that's so much bigger than we realize, and yet Paul knew this. He wrote in Ephesians, "I'm going to pray that you would have power to grasp with all saints the height and the depth and the breadth and the width of the love of Christ which is past all understanding." He understood that you could fall forever into the love of Christ. That's a pretty powerful expanse of benevolence, is it not?

JMF: Yeah. So our faith that we have at the time of believing should not be thought of as a work that causes God to change his mind, causes God to look at us in a new way.

DC: No, not at all.

JMF: It isn't the beginning point of our salvation.

DC: I don't think so.

JMF: Or even our transformation.

DC: This is where we can get Paul wrong, by turning faith into a deed or a work that accesses the benefits of Christ. It's like our Visa card — we trot off to the ATM with it and get money out of the account. Without the card, you don't get any of the good stuff. No. This is a misunderstanding of Paul. For Paul, our faith is something that Christ has as well as us. In us, it's a fruit of the Spirit. It's very important, but it's a sign that we are in Christ in our responding to the Father as Christ himself did.

In a way, faith has many dimensions. It's correct understanding of what's going on, which is important. One of the most important elements is that we understand what sort of God we're involved with — the God of love. It involves unwavering trust, it involves fidelity through suffering. When struggles come, we can be faithful. These are all signs that the Spirit is bearing fruit in our lives and that we're echoing the character of Christ.

Here I am using this reading of a couple of phrases in Paul that the King James Version got right when it translated them as “the faith of Christ.” Modern translations can seem to emphasize our decision, making the role for faith, unfortunately, changed or reinterpreted, so they became “faith in Christ.” Recently scholars have begun turning back to “the faith of Christ.” Some have begun realizing that this makes better sense of the texts where these phrases occur. I'm persuaded by that; I think they're right.

JMF: The fact that it's the fruit of the Spirit...often we'll hear a sermon or a Bible study or group, and fruit of the Spirit will be listed or read from Galatians and then the admonishment is to start living like this because, after all, this is the fruit of the Spirit, so you need to get more of this in your life. Isn't that kind of turning around the whole...

DC: That's missing the point (laughing). It's not that we're not involved. God wants a response from us, and we are fully involved in this. But we don't have to generate this out of our own resources. We're not thrown back on ourselves. We don't have to strive to produce these sorts of things as proof that we're involved in the reality of Christ. We can chill out to a large extent, and attend to the glories of the gospel, respond to it as best we can, and Christ and the Spirit will do this work through us. There is restfulness and a sense of relaxation about people who are grasped

by this truth. Paul would say people grasp this truth because they're grasped by this truth. This is the hallmark of people who are walking in grace.

JMF: Going back to the title of the book, *Deliverance of God...* The subhead is, *An Apocalyptic Re-Reading of Justification in Paul*. Why is it an apocalyptic re-reading of justification in Paul?

DC: What I'm getting at there is that there's a bad way of reading Paul, a way that I don't approve of and that gets him wrong. That reading of Paul produces a false model of the gospel, and it springs out of what we could call "Paul's justification texts." These are passages where he uses justification words, which in the Greek are using the *dikaio* name. We could call them as *dikaio* texts.

In those texts, Paul is doing something interesting with faith and works — works of law over here, faith over there, someone's been justified or *dikaio*(ed) and is also the righteousness of God running around. Those are the texts out of which a very conditional contractual understanding of the gospel has been generated, particularly since the second and third generations after the Reformation. I think that is where the damage was done. I don't think the main Reformers got this wrong. There was a little bit of it going on, but Calvin, Luther, I don't get the sense when I read them. But later on, second, third generation — certain theological systems were developed in a very conditional, contractual way, and these are the ones that did the damage.

To understand Paul properly, I think we need to eliminate this false dogmatic way of reading Paul. The way we eliminate it from the justification texts is, we grasp they're all about revelation, particularly when Paul's talking about faith. That's what I mean by *apocalyptic*. Apocalyptic is just a fancy word for revelation, the Greek word for revelation. *Apocalypsis* is Greek, *revelare* is the verb in Latin. So what I'm getting at is, there's nothing conditional or contractual going on in these justification texts. Paul is talking about the disclosure of the good purposes of God through the faithfulness of Christ, which elicits from us a response and an echo of faith as we are involved in him. This is what Paul is talking about in these texts.

We've tended to miss that because we've taken away the faith of Christ and we've taken that faith and made it into an action that *we* undertake. We've made these texts about human beings and about conditions that we can fulfill. But I don't think that's what Paul was writing. When he says *dikaiosyne theou*, the righteousness of God (or even better, the deliverance of God) has been revealed through *pistis Christou*, he's talking about the

faith of Christ. It's Jesus' faithfulness to death on the cross and his resurrection where we see God's definitive righteous purpose revealed.

When we miss that, we misunderstand and misconstrue all of Paul's teaching about salvation. It's a great tragedy that's gripped a lot of the conservative church... We're used to saying that the liberal church has messed things up because they dumped the Bible and wandered off. But the conservative church tooth and nail will defend this as the true gospel...and it's a great tragedy for the church, because what was going on in Paul was the antithesis of this "gospel." It's time for us to recover that.

JMF: It seems like the Christian walk is a lot more fun and enjoyable than it's often made out to be by those who seem to take it seriously...in the sense of being very sober and uptight, unable to enjoy themselves, unable to have fun with other people. It's not fun, it's a burden as opposed to a joy, because it's laced with fear.

DC: I think so. What can be joyful about being flung back on your own resources and asked to satisfy...

JMF: Especially when you have none, so you have to pretend you have some, which leads to judgmentalism and to condemnation and to everything that divides people instead of bringing them together.

DC: And hanging over your head is this fearsome scenario of what's going to happen at the end of the age, and you're worried, you don't have any sense of assurance.

JMF: In the gospel, there is no fear of the judgment.

DC: Love drives out fear. I don't believe that God wants us to be afraid for a millisecond of anything, except perhaps our own stupidity.

JMF: There's a solution for that: by trusting, over against our stupidity.

DC: That's right — trusting what God tells us about ourselves instead of what we perhaps want to believe about ourselves.

JMF: That would take another full interview alone.

DC: Exactly.

JMF: What do you do for recreation, for hobbies?

DC: I have fun. I follow the suggestions of my wife, who is an expert at having fun, and we have cats and dogs, we run, we do Pilates and yoga, we go to the beach, we travel. I spend time with the kids, watch a lot of films, read. We have a terrific life. I feel positively guilty about the amount of enjoyment that I get out of life. But you can't have fun in your spare time if you're not having fun at work, often.

JMF: What's your next project? What project are you involved in that we'll eventually see?

DC: People are asking me to write a shorter version of *Deliverance of God*, and I'm hearing those cries, so I think I will. I don't know that I always explain myself as well as I would like to. The feedback is coming in on the big book. Folk are not grasping the theological issues with as much clarity as I had hoped. So I need to spell those out a little more clearly. I think I'm getting a hold of them more clearly as I talk in situations like this. So a shorter book that shows how to read Romans the right way I think is what I'm going to work on in the next few months.

After that I have a very long-running project on the life of Paul, because I've always been passionately interested in how he worked as missionary — where he was, what he was visiting, what ships he sailed on...in a concrete gritty way. I've visited most of these cities, so I wanted to write a book about that and then collapse. And I should come to you for another suggestion.

IN CHRIST — CONVERSION AND CALLING

Paul's method of preaching the gospel

Michael Morrison: You've spent a lot of your scholarly time on Paul. You've got a couple of big books here about Paul. You said in one of our earlier interviews that you are interested in the life of Paul. I thought maybe you could talk a little about that. I'm somewhat familiar with the conversion of Paul from the book of Acts. But how does Paul himself describe his conversion?

DC: We're a little too familiar with his conversion from the book of Acts. We don't pay enough attention to how *he* tells us he got converted. He never uses the language of conversion when he is describing what happened to him; he uses the language of *call*. He echoes the call narratives of Jeremiah and Isaiah strongly to emphasize that God encountered him in a direct and dramatic way. What took place was a *revelation*.

So on one level, what happened to him is extremely important for us to understand, which is that a meeting with God took place that God initiated, very unexpected. On another level, it's a little dangerous to make Paul's "conversion" the paradigm for our conversion, because he had something very special happen to him. He was called to be an apostle. I'm not sure that all of us are called to be an apostle. Some of us, maybe.

MM: I've never been struck down in the way that Paul was. But does his story have any exemplary value for the conversions that we have?

DC: I think it does. But we also need to look harder at what he was doing, how he was converting people. We find there's a network of friendships and relationships that's spreading. He's utilizing networks, sometimes in unexpected ways. People are converting in the context of relationships that they already have.

For example, he often tries to hook up with family networks or Jewish networks where he's visiting. When those don't work, he goes and takes employment as a hand worker, and he begins to make friends with the people in the workshop. This is roughly how he met Lydia. Lydia was involved in handworking and textiles. She's somebody who's networking with women. He's not just staying in the networks with men.

He's probably also working veteran networks when he can as well. Remember, there's a veteran at Philippi. There's another veteran probably at Colossae. These are colonies of soldiers who have retired from the Roman Army, they've done their 25 years of service, and they kept in touch with one another, and they probably were working in textiles.

We see Paul doing something typical of a new religion, which is sort of playing hopscotch from network to network and exploiting those networks and those relationships and people who know him and are friends of his, become friends of his, who are friends of friends, they're converting and forming the basis of his new communities.

MM: So could he go into a city and start a church in three weeks, for example? Is that...

DC: Well, this is a bit of an exaggeration. In the ancient world, if you went into a city cold and you didn't know anybody, you would die. They didn't know you, you had no food, you had no water, if you fell ill you dropped on the street, you had nowhere to stay. You had to have contacts. These are hostile missionary environments. They don't like strangers coming in and telling them that the way that they've been doing things for hundreds of years is wrong. You need to know somebody who's there already.

Once you've linked up with them, stayed with them for a bit, you need to try and hook onto the sorts of networks and friendships that that person has. This is what we see him doing. In each city around the Mediterranean, he knows somebody who knows somebody, and he goes and stays with them and then links up with somebody else. It's all about who you know.

MM: What kind of a message would he preach in that situation? How would he introduce them to Jesus?

DC: This undermines our slightly stereotypical notion of Paul arriving and preaching one dramatic proclamatory message that people then respond to with some sort of decision, the altar call takes place on the corner of the streets of Corinth and the Corinthians all come forward. This is not how it worked.

When you're working with somebody – say you're a handworker and you're working on leather or you're working on sandals or stitching canvas awnings or something like that – you don't preach at them all day. You chat with them. You get to know them. You're probably listening to them as much as you're talking at them. A conversation takes place over many days and weeks and months, and then you turn around after that process, and lo and behold, these people believe what you're saying. You're telling the story about how the Spirit who once created everything is also gathering us up into this person. It's language they can understand, but it's also language that challenges them.

It will make more sense if you've heard Jews speaking, probably, if you've hung around the local synagogue, which you could do, if you've heard these types of stories about the God of Israel before. That's going to help you. But Paul is happy to communicate even if you've never heard of that material. He can translate his good news into your idioms and your thought forms. He can talk about adoption or benefaction, grace. These are things that every Greek and Roman would know about. They would know about having a patron, they would know about being gifted things, they would know about being adopted into someone's family, they would know about being immersed as a ritual of entry.

This is Paul communicating also in the language of the street, in a way that makes sense. He's a very good missionary. He knows what he's doing. He's contextualizing.

MM: You mentioned immersion. At what point would Paul baptize these people? Did he realize that they had crossed over from one religious belief to another?

DC: I think so. Sometimes there's a dramatic moment when you can point your finger at something and say, an event has taken place here, and we need to acknowledge that Jesus is Lord, and you would get baptized along with all your household. Other times I suspect that the process was gradual. But at some point it's appropriate for you to get baptized to signify the reality that you're now standing in. This would be one of the things that took place.

You would attend the communal meals where the Christians gathered.

These are meals taking place every day, and these are *meals*. A lot of people in ancient times were hungry, maybe two-thirds of the population was hungry, one-third of the population was very hungry — they lived from hand to mouth. So you went to Christian meals, you went to Christian celebrations of the sacraments partly because they were offering you food.

But in the middle of the food was the breaking of the bread and the passing around of the cup. You're participating in this. As Wesley would say, probably the cup and the bread are functioning like converting ordinances at that time — they're making the reality of Christ present to you. The cup is going around and the bread is being broken and eaten, and people are saying, "We're all part of this, this is all one with us, and we're one with someone who died, but also who is alive now and who is present with us now in a real way."

I assume that, like most Greek meals, you had the food first and you had the entertainment afterward. The singing would begin, the Christian singing, people maybe would have brought along a song (which was extremely democratic), and the worship would begin, and you would get a sense, "Goodness me, we're in the presence of the living God here."

MM: People found themselves in a community.

DC: Exactly. A worshiping community. They were gathered up into its worship. In this way probably many were powerfully affected. This is pretty exciting stuff for an ancient Greek — especially if you're a woman. You didn't have access to this type of stuff ordinarily. But these Christians were kind of strangely democratic. If you're a woman you could come along, you could bring a song, you could prophesy, you could pray, you could participate, as long as you didn't humiliate your husband in public (which is still probably a good rule of thumb) ...this is how these meetings operated. They were very vital and participatory.

MM: Is it just a *story* that Paul is telling, or is there something there that he's also exhorting them to make a decision? How do you go about growing this community or solidifying it?

DC: It's not *just* a story – it's a story about a reality that you're a part of, and that reality has certain claims on you, if you like, has a certain shape. It has a certain set of relationships built into it that you have to respond to. Paul is expecting a response. He has high expectations of his converts. He's got high expectations of their behavior. There's a strong emphasis on ethics, in particular what we might call the ethics of relationships.

This is where Paul is innovating — where the Spirit of God is doing

something exciting, but also slightly intimidating — in the sense that if you're a Jew, you would be expecting to do a lot of your responding to God in the temple at Jerusalem, in a particular place, in a particular building, in a certain state of purity. You'd be expecting to do a lot of your responding to God in accordance with strict calendrical observances and diet. Paul's view is: that stuff is now purely negotiable. If you're a Jew you should still do it, unless you're called to engage with another constituency.

But the pagans that he's calling in his communities off the street...what he's challenging them with is the inter-relational stuff that we see so much of in the Bible. How do I relate to you? Am I bitter toward you? Angry, hostile, backbiting, slanderous, am I in a status game with you? All that stuff has to stop. How do I speak to you? How do I talk with you? Am I charitable? Am I humble? These sorts of things. This is what Paul is pushing his people to do. (Pushing is the wrong expression.) He's talking about something that's *drawing* them into this in a new way.

MM: So the motivation for the behavior is different than ...

DC: Very much so.

MM: He's offering them a gift of salvation, but once they're already saved, then what's the motive for them to do what is right?

DC: He's offering them participation in a new reality. When you're in that new reality, you've been set free from a whole lot of stuff that is dragging you down, fracturing you and breaking you and harming you. You see more clearly what the good things are in life that God wants you to do. Basically you're an idiot if you don't want to do that.

MM: So he's painting a new reality.

DC: He's not painting it in the way that we would *limit* things to that. You're right, he is depicting something that's really here. He's witnessing, in a way, to a reality, so his stories and his depictions are helping Christians understand what's going on.

It's exciting. This is why he calls himself an apostle. He's a diplomat who's announcing the good news of what God is doing — and what God is doing is really what matters. That's what's central, and that's what's real, and that's why if you're a Christian you're characterized in part by belief, which is, you understand what's going on. You're the one that's walking around with your eyes open. You're the one that's in the daylight. Other people are stumbling around in the dark with their eyes closed. You're the one that really knows what reality is all about.

That's an exciting summons. He's stitching away in his leatherworks, stitching the soles of his sandals, and he's talking about this stuff to these

other impoverished stone workers around, and they're getting interested in it. They're going, "Sounds like a good deal."

MM: Once he builds this community, then he leaves. What are they going to think of that? Or, how long would he be staying in a city?

DC: It looks as though he stayed for about a year and a half, roughly, depending on how things went. Then he shot off, which strikes us as shocking. But he did keep in touch with everybody. We've got all these letters, because even after he left, he was still networking with these communities. When you see the thought and the effort that has gone into these texts, you realize how much they're still on his mind.

If they get into trouble, he's on a boat straight away and shooting back to visit them. But he's a missionary, so he's church planting. His plan is to put these communities in place and then move on in the hope and expectation that they will flourish, and also begin to do the same around them. That's probably the plan.

MM: As I understand it, letter writing wasn't that easy in antiquity, and yet he invested quite a bit of, I don't know, maybe financial resources to be able to do this. As you say, he's keeping that relationship.

DC: It is a big investment. It's an investment of time, too.

MM: But he also wrote to some places that he had not been before.

DC: A couple of times, yeah. Paul believes, as I said at the start, that God has revealed himself to him and revealed Christ to him, and he also believes that God has revealed Christ to him in a way that has special significance for people converting out of paganism, not for other Jews. So, when pagans are converting around the place, even when they haven't converted through his direct ministry, he feels protective about them. And thankfully he writes a letter occasionally to sort them out.

So we have, I think, Ephesians written for this reason. There's a little group of converts, they've converted, they're not Jews, and Paul's view was you didn't have to become a Jew to engage with this new reality, because the Jew/Greek distinction was something that was being transcended. He's not down on Jews – it's just that the Jewish people and their history, the nation, is being fulfilled in *the* Jew, who is Christ, and we're stepping through into a new reality. There's no need to go back and around the long way. It's controversial, by the way – they said this, not everybody liked it.

MM: So the important part of a person's identity was not their ethnic category.

DC: Exactly. That is a shocking thing to say, and something that we're still coming to grips with, is it not? We love to group people. We love to

look at ourselves in groups.

MM: You're either with us or...

DC: Exactly. Paul is saying no, that's not where you are primarily. Primarily you're characterized by the fact that you're *in* this person who has died and been resurrected. Now you're beyond. That's where you are. That's the real you. So it's a shocking thing to say. It's exciting, it's liberating, but terribly, terribly hard to take on board.

Being "in Christ"

MM: Right. Even your expression there (which I know comes from Paul), that you are "in" a person. How does that translate into our modern concepts? We're not physically in a person, so what does Paul mean?

DC: Right. It's a special metaphor that is trying to convey to us a couple of things. The first thing that it's trying to convey is that this is real and concrete, so it's referring to your being. It's referring to what we call your ontology, what you're made of, the stuff that really matters that puts you together. When Paul says you're "in Christ," what he's saying is you're no longer "in Adam." Now, everybody is in Adam in some sense. It's what we all are, it's how we're all constructed.

MM: It comes with the flesh.

DC: So to say we're in Christ is a strong statement about what we're constructed out of. The other thing that he's getting at with the "in Christ" motif is when you're in something, you're inside it or it's in you — there's a sense of closeness and intimacy that's being conveyed by this expression. He's saying not just that this is the way you're made, but you're made in a way that's very close and intimate with this particular person.

MM: The word *identity* comes to mind here. Is it identification?

DC: You're closely identified, without losing who you are. There's a sense in which (paradoxically) the more involved with Christ you are, the more your own personhood is affirmed, and, in a way, the more you grasp the distinctions between you and him.

MM: He gives us freedom to be individuals, different.

DC: He gives us the freedom to be persons, not individuals. We're persons. I think we're being rescued from individualism, actually. But a personhood is something that we need, something we want to have. We want to have full personhood. That is exactly what being in Christ gives us.

MM: I see this distinction you just made between individual and

person, and I hear you saying that we are most truly persons when we are in community.

DC: Yes. In relationship. Very much so.

MM: Which ties back in with, our new reality is in these relationships.

DC: It's an interpersonal reality. Because it's a communion characterized by these relationships all interlinking or lacing together, it follows that the more invested we are and involved in this community, the more fully personal we are.

MM: And that's all in Christ.

DC: We tend to think of being in a community and being in an individual as a zero-sum game — the more community the less individuality, the more individuality...it's almost like people are bubbles. Little areas of space that can't exist with somebody else without popping.

MM: Yes, personal space.

DC: That's right. Our culture is telling us this all the time. This is a fundamentally wrong understanding of what being a person is all about, according to the gospel and according to what Paul is telling us. Being a person is all about, actually, investing heavily in these relationships with other people. It's all about being relational.

MM: That's why Paul spends so much time telling people....

DC: That's right. He is a very relational person. Your personhood is bound up with how these relationships are functioning. There shouldn't be a strong distinction between who you are and how you behave — they're both parts of the same thing.

MM: So in the first part of the letter he can say you're not saved by what you do, but then later in the letter he talks about what you're supposed to do.

DC: Right. He's getting at slightly different things there. When he says you're not saved by what you do, he's trying to emphasize that you don't access this reality yourself by doing anything, and you don't control it by doing anything. There's nothing that you can bring to this party that isn't being done for you. But when you're involved with that, there's a lot that you're asked to do by way of response. He's coming from a very different place when he says that. Asking people to behave ethically and in a good way by way of response...it's just a completely different ballgame from telling them to shape up so that they can get involved in something — very different things going on there.

MM: I like the way you put it earlier — he's inviting them to participate in a new reality, and that reality is in these good relationships.

DC: I could put it more strongly and say he's inviting them to *recognize* this new reality, because I think there's a sense in which God is reaching out to us and working with us and doing things for us even when we're not.

MM: It's already there ...

DC: It's closer than the heartbeat in your throat, but it doesn't help us much if we're not cooperating, recognizing, responding, and obeying.

MM: That's part of the faith response?

DC: Exactly. Faith, in a way, is just recognizing what's there. We're also gifted the ability to do that. My advice is not to resist it too strongly. I imagine that Paul's advice was kind of similar. Don't resist the reality that has come upon you. Why would you do that?

MM: People have choice in what they believe and accept. If you describe reality well enough, isn't it going to automatically [make me] say "that's right," without me making a specific decision, "Okay, I will have faith in this. I'm not sure if it's right, but I will have faith."

DC: It's easy to lose our way at this point. It's important that we respond to this reality freely; this is free. And we need to respond with everything we've got. There's no limitation, no "statute of limitations" on how much we need to give to this. We give it everything. All our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength. But I wouldn't describe this as a *choice* that we're making.

The only choice that we would make in this situation would probably be a choice to do the dumb thing, which is to sin or resist or reject. This is what gets us into trouble. We tell ourselves, it's okay if we push back on this reality, it's okay if we disobey, if we reject a certain amount of what's going on here, but the Bible basically calls this transgressing or sinning, because there's something stupid and destructive about it. My advice is not to do it. [laughing]

I wouldn't present the gospel in such a way that you had a choice to walk away from it, because it's a declaration of reality. You can respond to the reality that's in front of you and you can walk away if you really want to, but you're denying what *is*, and there's something a little foolish about it, and this is why we get the declaring language coming through so strongly.

MM: Proclaiming.

DC: Exactly. This is how it is. Why wouldn't you be involved with this?

MM: Right. The gospel is good news and not a good invitation.

DC: Right. It's a declaration. Exactly. It's a slightly different way of

thinking about what's going on, but it's not aggressive because, as I said before, it's worked through in these conversational settings. People are often converting as this washes over them in time.

MM: Not putting people on the spot.

DC: Right. You're getting to know them, welcome them into your home, feed them, listen to them, talk with them, have a good time with them, share this sort of thing with them, and particularly, if it aligns with how you behave, that will be a powerful witness. You will turn around and after a few months or years, most of those people will have joined your community.

MM: Those people will like what they see of the gospel in you.

DC: Right. You'll mediate the truth of the gospel. Fortunately, it won't be entirely down to you or me.

MM: That's a good thing.

DC: With God's grace we will imperfectly mediate the gospel. Very much so.

MM: You mentioned faith, and it made me think of something you have written about the faith of Abraham. The way that faith is described in Romans is astounding. Is this the kind of faith we need to have?

DC: I hope not. Abraham's example is used sometimes in a way that can be a little destructive and challenging, as if we are to access this reality by choosing to have faith like Abraham, which opens up the door for fellowship with God. The way Paul describes Abraham's faith is unwavering, without doubt. We need to read behind the lines there. We skip over the fact that Paul is playing with two stories; he's playing with Genesis 15 and Genesis 17 and also with Genesis 21 and 22. What's going on is the promise of a son, miraculously, to Abraham from his sterile loins. Abraham had to wait about 14 years from the age of 86ish through the age of about 100...

MM: Without ever wavering.

DC: Yeah. If that's what we have to do to become a Christian, we are all in deep trouble. But if in this unwavering trust in God we see an echo of Christ and then we see Abraham in anticipation of Christ's unwavering faithfulness to the point of death and his resurrection, then we see faith as a *gift* that we can receive in Christ, from Christ.

At that point all things become possible. If this is not something we're having to generate for ourselves, it's something that God is giving us, we're built into, and we grow into, then it starts to make sense. It starts to make sense as an aspect of our discipleship, rather than a criterion of entry.

MM: So when Paul was telling this story, he wasn't using it as an

example?

DC: I don't think he was using it as an example of how we get saved. He was using it as a story that spoke about Christ and spoke about unwavering fidelity, through suffering if necessary, until a miraculous life-creating event takes place. He was probably saying, if you go back to the start of Israel, what happened? It was a resurrecting event in which a person of great faithfulness endured for a long time and then suddenly the Spirit of God created somebody miraculously out of a situation that was basically dead. Now here we are, talking about Jesus Christ — somebody who faithfully in an unwavering way walked to death and then was raised from the dead, so life was miraculously created. So we're standing, my friends, in the presence of the very fulfillment of the nation of Israel. This is where it was always going all along.

MM: What Abraham only pre-figured.

DC: In the patriarchs we get this pre-figuration of what has come to fulfillment in the gospel.

MM: So he's not the example of what we do, but the example of what God does.

DC: Exactly — and what God does is gift us with life, life from the dead. It's an exciting promise.

UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF ROMANS

JMF: You've done a lot of work on the book of Romans, as evidenced by this huge book. It reminds me of a Harry Potter book, it's so big...

DC: Yes. I'm sorry.

JMF: And absolutely just as scintillating. You do a lot of work in the book on the book of Romans, and you tell us about the gospel as it springs out of Romans 5-8, where you spend a great deal of time.

DC: I think Romans 5-8 is where Paul tells us what really matters to him. It's where he tells us what God is really like. This happens because in those chapters he's addressing a couple of very important questions:

1. I think he's being challenged by somebody who was trying to frighten the Christians that he is looking after, and scaring and intimidating them with a future judgment scenario. Someone is trying to make them feel insecure.
2. The other question is, he's been challenged by somebody who is accusing him of libertinism. "According to your gospel, Paul, how can Christians behave in a good fashion? They seem to be out of control, riotously living, and they're pagans, they don't really know anything about behaving correctly. They're not proper Jews."

Paul pushes back on both these challenges very, very hard. At the basis of both of these pushbacks is Christology. He says, "The reason why we

can be secure against the coming judgment is because the God who does not spare his only Son but gives him up for us all can be trusted to take us through any judgment process, and in the judgment he will be on our side. He won't be on the other side. You can be completely assured when you face the future.

Second, the God who has not spared his only Son but who has given him up to die for us has also transformed us so that we can behave in a way that we need to behave. He's taken us, he's entered into our condition, he's terminated, he's executed the stuff that was getting in the way. He's resurrected us into a new condition, he's joined us to that new condition not only in the Son but through the Spirit. This leads to the only sort of right behavior that is valid and authentic. Romans 5-8 is where we see the heart of the Pauline gospel.

JMF: Isn't that pretty much the opposite of the way most of us have tended to look at the gospel? The gospel is usually presented with the idea "let's make people understand there's going to be a judgment and make them afraid of that judgment." So people respond to the gospel because they're afraid of the judgment and they want to escape it. They've got to do something to escape it, which is to have faith in somebody who is going to help them. Then we try to maintain that position of escape by trying to behave better. But the way you're describing Romans 5-8 is the opposite of that.

DC: People have got Paul very, very wrong. If what he's saying in Romans 5-8 is right, then the model that you've just described, which is widespread, has something wrong with it as a presentation of Paul. It could be that Paul was horribly muddled up, and on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays he was the good Christological thinker that we think he was and on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays he was the other guy, then on Sundays he had the day off.

But I think when you plant your flag on Romans 5-8 (That's where we need to plant our flag, because that's where he's doing all his work out of Christology. That's where he's talking about God in the light of Christ, and so that is solid information.), what you end up with is another perspective on the model that you've just outlined, which is usually articulated in relation to Romans 1-4.

JMF: That's where we're confronted with "Christ died for us while we were still sinners."

DC: Yeah, Romans 5.

JMF: And we're confronted with "if he's already done this much for you, how much more is he going to see it through the end."

DC: Exactly, yeah.

JMF: The judgment is usually thought of as something scary, like a final exam. What if I don't pass? But we're talking about the judgment being a *good* thing and something to look forward to.

DC: Yes. The judgment's already taken place in the cross. When Paul talks about Christ assuming what we are — the sinful nature, the flesh, as he calls it (the *sarx*, in the Greek), and terminating it, and cutting it off and executing it, that is a judgment. It's God's judgment that this situation cannot continue. It must stop. The hostile part of the judgment is behind us.

When we talk about any future judgment, I think there's a moment of accountability that's coming. Paul is clear that we will stand before Jesus on the last day. We may have to give some sort of account for ourselves, and that would be a potentially excoriating occasion...it could elicit some embarrassment. But I don't think it's a hostile judgment. I don't think it's a judgment where God is going to say, "You tried hard, you've been a Christian, you've done all the things you're meant to do, but..." It's not going to be one of those sorts of judgments where our deeds are laid in the balance.

You can't get away from the argument of Romans 8, which I think is the finest chapter that he ever wrote. The God who is giving up his own Son for us, giving us the Spirit, is on our side all the way through, all the way down, right through to the end. We should be living lives of joyful assurance.

The bit that you were worried about is the bit of Paul that's coming through from Romans 2. The big problem is, what do we do with Romans 2 when we're really rooted in Romans 5-8? Are we talking about the same gospel? This is where the controversies come from. This is what I was trying to do in my book.

JMF: What is it about Romans 1, 2, 3 that seems to be in contrast with what we're reading in 5-8?

DC: Romans 1-3 is usually read in a certain way. There's a consensus — what I call the usual reading or the traditional reading. It's in most of the commentators. They tend to assume that Paul is, as we put it, thinking forwards, and he's building up a picture of the gospel from a problem. He articulates a problem and then he matches a solution to that problem. All

the hard work and all the critical theological moves have taken place in the definition of the problem.

If you think that this is the way that you should be preaching the gospel, you will find that reading in Romans 1-3, because it works reasonably well. There was a guy running around there who preaches forwards, there was a guy there who has a harsh punitive understanding of God, a conditional understanding of salvation. You'll find it because it's a reasonably good fit.

JMF: You mean that the language of those chapters comes across as though there is a fear of a judgment to come in a punitive...

DC: Yeah. Something's going on that's talking about this future punitive judgment. Something, some sort of system where you are being threatened with a future evaluation. So you live in a situation of fundamental insecurity, building toward this final judgment. It's in Romans 1-3.

The question is, has the argument been understood correctly if you attribute all of that to Paul? When you have a very clear understanding of Romans 5-8, what you find when you come to Romans 1-4 is there are little hints and clues in the text that this is not what he was trying to do. He's not the person that's setting up this problem and pushing people through to a solution – he's going after somebody who talks this way. So it's almost the opposite of the way he's always been read, or almost always been read.

JMF: So in other words, in Romans 1-3 we're reading his presentation of the very argument that he's arguing against in 5-8.

DC: Exactly. Paul is setting up somebody, but he starts off setting them up in a Socratic way, which was typical in the ancient world, where he is using the assumptions of this person and driving them against one another to show how this gospel collapses.

JMF: So back and forth like a dialogue of Socrates.

DC: Right. He's pushing back on a religious person in Romans 1-3, which sounds too good to be true. I tell people, "We've misunderstood what Paul's getting at here. It's not really as negative as people think." And they go, how can you be sure? I answer, It makes better sense in the text because there are these little problems in the text that we've known about for a long time, but we haven't known what to do with them, so we've done what the scholars say, we've anesthetized them. We've passed over the top of them and pretended they're not there.

JMF: Let's look at an example or two.

DC: There's a stack of them, but let me run you through a couple of them. The first problem is that when Paul starts off his tirade, Romans 1:18-32, it's a very dense aggressive bit of prose. When you read it in the Greek, what you hear is a texture that isn't quite Paul. It's a little bit like you're reading through a Stephen King book (should you read a Stephen King book), and you hit a paragraph that's written by Jane Austen and you go, something funny is going on here. Somebody is talking in another voice. It's an aggressive voice.

Then, chapter 2, we hit somebody who's talking in this way. Who is that person? Tradition has usually said this guy is a Jew. He's not only a Jew, he's *the* Jew — Paul is attacking Judaism here. So the way we get to be a Christian is we learn first what it means to be a Jew, which is to be justified by works, and we fail, and then we sort of flip out of that into Christianity.

But when we read what Paul does with this Jew in this text, we build up a picture that isn't quite right. It's not fair. He accuses the Jew from verse 17 and onwards of being somebody who robs temples, who commits adultery, who is a thief, who is a terrible hypocrite. How many Jews do you know that rob banks, sleep with the wrong people on the wrong occasions, this sort of thing? It's a hostile exaggeration. Not all Jews do this; *most* Jews don't. So the person that Paul's going after here probably isn't your everyday Jew. It's somebody else.

If I told you the Jews were very upset about the time Paul was writing this letter because 20 years previously the Roman emperor kicked them out of Rome...imagine a decree coming down from the Governor of California saying all Christians must leave Los Angeles. This would cause quite a trauma, right? In 19 C.E. the Jews were kicked out of Rome because three Jews had seduced a Roman noblewoman and taken money that she had promised to the Jerusalem temple...and absconded with it themselves. So they were thieving, temple-robbing, adulterous Jews. I think that explains what's going on in this text. Paul's not targeting everybody who is a Jew, he's targeting people who come to Rome who pretend to be Jewish teachers and really aren't.

This fits into the argument that he's developed here, that he's going after somebody else. Then if we read on a little bit further, we suddenly have a little to-and-fro between Paul and this other person. The first guy is going, "I believe in desert, I believe in judgment." The other guy is going, "I believe in the faithfulness and the compassion and the graciousness of God." The first guy goes, "No, even if you sin, God is not going to rescue

you on the day of judgment, what you deserve must hold good.” Then the guy comes back and goes, “But surely if we’re sinful and we get rescued, that shows that God is a compassionate God.” It goes back and forth like this.

The usual reading thinks that Paul is the guy that’s insisting on judgment and desert. How can that guy, Paul, turn around in chapters 9-11 and say God loves Israel, and even though Israel is disobedient, and will rescue Israel? He will not lose faith with Israel. How can the guy saying the opposite in chapter 3 turn around and suddenly say something else in Romans 11?

My reading, it’s the *other* guy who is insisting on judgment and desert. Paul is the guy who is saying, “What about the faithfulness of God? What about the compassion of God? What about the love of God for people who sin?” These little clues add up to a new understanding of this text, where Paul is attacking someone who is fundamentally religious, fundamentally conditional and contractual. I’m summarizing an awful lot of information, and you might just have to buy the book and read it and you’ll find out all about it.

JMF: It’s a very long book.

DC: Yeah, it is very long. I’m sorry about that. I did my best.

JMF: You must have felt that the entire argument needed to be in one volume rather than breaking it into, say, three volumes or two volumes.

DC: Right. I thought hard about breaking it into two books, but what’s going on when you read Paul, even though we’re often not aware of it, is we’re bringing what we’ve been taught to the text. It’s structuring the way that we read the text, even when we’re not aware of it. We’ve been raised and taught that Paul teaches a certain sort of the gospel. And the way that we’ve often been taught Paul (and I’m referring to the wrong way) is a way that often also resonates with our culture and even with our politics. So the slightly harsh understanding of Paul resonates with the slightly harsh side to American culture, to American politics, to Western politics.

JMF: How would you describe this harsh side of Paul? What’s a summary of that way of viewing it?

DC: It’s all about compassion being directed to a limited group, who has done certain things to earn that compassion and benevolence, and everybody else on the outside being exposed to what they deserve and, if necessary, to punishment. So if you contract into the privileged group by doing certain things, then you’ll be okay, but everybody else basically just has to sink or swim by themselves. If they sink, that usually means in social

or cultural terms that they're going to be punished. This is how we run our politics, and it is how we run a lot of our culture, and this how we've been taught Paul.

So part of the length of the book was to show this is how we're thinking, but it's not necessarily the way that God is acting toward us in Christ. There's another way of doing things that we're getting from Christ. We're getting a God who doesn't want to leave anybody out. We're getting a God who has acted very inclusively first to reach out to everybody. It's almost the opposite way of doing things. Everybody's been included and there are people who push away and pull out of it.

So a lot of the book and its length is trying to deprogram people from their wrong way of thinking and reprogram them with this healthier way of understanding God, so that when we get to Paul, we can see that this is what he's talking about as well. He's on the same page as we are.

JMF: How do you find it being received? What kind of feedback are you getting?

DC: There's been a full spectrum of responses, from "this is absurd rubbish" to "this has changed my life forever," and pretty much everything all the way through in the middle. Quite a lot more enthusiasm than I thought I would get, and a lot more tension than I thought I would get.

When you're writing a book like this, you worry that when you finish, it will drop in a black hole and no one will talk about it. Well, a lot of people are talking about it. I get a little frustrated with what they say at times. I don't feel I'm being understood all the time. I don't feel like my arguments are being presented accurately at all times, but people are trying to break through, and I appreciate that.

There's a bit of a generational thing going on as well. There are a lot of scholars who have written equally large books on Paul and Romans, and I'm challenging what they're doing, threatening them. It's very hard for them to turn around and say, "I've been wrong about this all this time," if they have been wrong. The younger generation, the doctoral student, post-doctoral type of student, seems to be very excited about it.

JMF: What do you attribute that to?

DC: They're putting the pieces in place for the remaining creative research on Paul, so they're at a much more malleable stage of life. I remember when I was like that. There aren't too many costs involved with them saying, "What I was taught was wrong, let's run with this new paradigm." There are a lot of costs involved with the older generation turning around and seeing the paradigm that they're working with is no

longer functioning. This is typical if it's a paradigm shift. This is how they always work. It just means that I have to be patient and a bit lucky.

JMF: You're not the only one who takes this perspective, though.

DC: I hope not. Certainly not on Paul as a whole. There are a lot of scholars who agree with me about the main thrust of his gospel. That is right. I'm standing in a long tradition in terms of reading Paul this way. I would hope that what I'm saying about Paul's gospel is in complete continuity with the way the Patristics have read him, the Cappadocians, the best parts of the Catholic tradition, Orthodoxy, the best parts of the Reformation, right through the modern period. I think I'm in touch with the best theology of the church. It's true, though, that there are a lot of non-scholars reading Paul who aren't quite so thrilled with what I'm up to... I don't always hear good reasons from them why that's the case.

JMF: You wouldn't attribute it entirely to their history of research and study and teaching, would you? Because there are examples of major theologians who come across a new perspective and who go with it. What is the attraction to holding on to a view of Paul that is more judgmental than grace-filled?

DC: I think you've hit the nail on the head. Whether you acknowledge it or not, theology is always in play when we're reading Paul, and it's almost being scrutinized by that, so we're very defensive about it. If we're not crystal clear on certain theological positions, we will lapse into a conditionality and a sort of a contractualism. If we're not vigilant that we don't do that, if we're not 100 percent committed to a gospel that is unconditional, a gospel of grace.

JMF: When you say conditionality and contractual, you're driving at what?

DC: Certain people present our relationship with God in a way that basically is a contract. They talk about it as a covenant, but it's a contract. A contract is something where I will do something for you if you fulfill certain conditions first. It's always an if/then structure. This is how we run our society. This is how we run our families half the time, unfortunately. This is how we run our politics, and this is how we run our theology. But it's a fundamental *misunderstanding* of the way God deals with us.

JMF: "I'll give you salvation if you do something for me."

DC: Exactly. It seems very natural to us, it's an easy way, it slips off the tongue, doesn't it? But it's a fundamental corruption of the gospel. Once you put that little word "if" in, you have destroyed the gospel of grace. It's as simple as that.

JMF: And a covenant, by contrast ...

DC: Unfortunately, people have debased the use of the word because they've talked about the covenant, but then they've talked about it contractually, which is what it really *isn't*. We learn about what a covenant is, *the* covenant in fact, from looking at how God has related to us in Christ. It's as simple as that. It's utterly unconditional. It's benevolent, it's loving, it's his choice for us from the foundation of the world to be in fellowship with him and to be transformed by him. That's what a covenant is. There are no conditions, no strings attached. There's no "if," there's no "but."

JMF: In the Old Testament, it's full of that, isn't it?

DC: It is and it isn't. Depends how you read it.

JMF: The idea that "I will be faithful to my covenant regardless of what you do."

DC: Right. Very much so.

JMF: "I change not in my covenant faithfulness, therefore you are not destroyed."

DC: Exactly. What tends to happen is a little mistake. People shift from what God is expecting of us in the covenant relationship, and they turn those things into a condition. God lays out that which is expected of us and appropriate of us — the way we should respond to God in this relationship — and they like to turn that into a contract. We like to introduce these other conditions for all sorts of ultimately pretty sad reasons.

This is the great battle going on in the interpretation of Paul. This is the struggle that's going on his understanding at the moment. The stakes are so high, this is where the conflict is, at times, so strong, and people are so rooted to the conditional or contractual gospel. This is why they fight back so hard. It's a tragedy that so many good folk in the church have been taught that God is a God of conditions. They're defending "the true gospel" when they push back on a reading that I'm offering, which is a reading based in grace.

JMF: If you take grace unconditionally, doesn't that level the playing field, as it were? There's no room for me to say, "I've been faithful in this way and that way, and you haven't, so I deserve *more* than you. You need to be condemned, and I need to be, I'm going to be..." You automatically think that way.

DC: I am superior here in some sense. So we need to find some way of setting that up. We have to introduce conditions...

JMF: Yeah. It seems a rather base way of looking at it, but...

DC: It's sinful.

JMF: It's religious, as opposed to gospel.

DC: Yeah. It's religion at its heart, as opposed to gospel. That's right.

THEOLOGY IN THE EVERYDAY

J. Michael Feazell: Cathy, thanks for being with us today.

Cathy Deddo: Thank you very much, Mike. I'm glad to be here.

JMF: When we talk about Trinitarian theology, it sounds academic to many people. What does it mean for just plain day-to-day relationships?



CD: That's a big question, but what I'm going to try to do with it is talk about my own life as a Christian minister over the years. I primarily thought that my relationships were what I did for God, and I would go out and try to minister to people and take care of what I

thought they needed in the name of God and then come back and let God know how I had succeeded or failed in doing those things. When I began to understand Trinitarian theology, I began to understand that I was not taking seriously the reality, the presence, and the activity of the Triune God in the immediate circumstances of my life – that I was thinking of him as distanced. So when I began to take that more seriously – that I don't just work for Christ but he is in me, and his Spirit is always working and

the Father is always already leading, then I began to realize the best way I could understand it was, do I believe that God is really here in my conversation with you and my conversation with other people? Is he working already in your life? Am I participating in what he is doing? Too often when people are working in relationships, they do a disconnect. They can even believe God is triune, he loves me as the whole God, but as soon as they walk out of a service and they go into a situation where they're talking with family or with friends, they pretty much think of themselves as being on their own.

What I have tried to help other people with, what I have tried to do for myself, is live as if God, the God I've come to know in Jesus, is more real than I am. He already is mediating in Christ between me and somebody else. His spirit is already at work, so when I am with somebody else, I try to listen to what God is saying. I attempt to live in his presence, abide in him, and not speak until I have a sense of what he has for me to say. It makes relationships more dynamic and it helps me remember that my role in being with people is to remain in the peace of God, not try to fix anything, not try to answer all the questions right away, but to see what God has for me to say.

JMF: So what is it about God that helps you feel that way and to have that kind of a sense of being in relationship with other people?

CD: Primarily, God always comes to me with grace and light. God is the one who includes me in his loving circle of Father, Son, and Spirit. God's grace in Christ teaches me that God loved me and loves me before I am even interested in him. So when I start my day, that God has already been at work all night and he welcomes me to be a part of what he's doing. It allows me to have confidence that it is not up to me to know what the right thing is to say to somebody else, how to complete something.

Let me give you an example with my family. I was visiting my family recently and I had a certain idea of what I wanted to happen, and some of my conversations, I think we're all like that. We can go into something with an agenda of what we want to see happen, and it will be successful if I have been able to accomplish my agenda.

JMF: So we're focused on the agenda, not on the person.

CD: That's right...and not on God either. I'm focusing on my agenda, but I think I'm focusing on you because I have an agenda for how I want you to go, and I'm hoping that you hear what I have to say. Or think about

times when you want to confront people. You feel like you need to have this moment of confrontation. But what we often forget is that God is living and present. He knows you better than I know you. He knows my mother better than I know her. When I go into that conversation, if I'm living, as much as possible, in the reality of the Trinitarian life, then I'm trusting that God was there before me, that he already is at work in my mother, and he has his own agenda for that time...but that his main agenda for me is to trust that he has an agenda, to listen for him, to be aware of him rather than rushing in, even with my good intentions – our agendas are oftentimes for something good for somebody else. But we stop living in his peace, we stop abiding as soon as we try to make what we want to have happen be first.

JMF: So you can actually be in the relationship, enjoy the person for who they are...

CD: Right.

JMF: ...knowing that God has an agenda before, during, and after. He'll be there with that person just as he is with you and me.

CD: Right. It makes things a lot more free, a lot more peaceful. I'm going to use an example. I have adult kids and there are times when I feel that my wisdom is exactly what they need to hear right now. I will be able to straighten this out if they will just listen to what I say. But if I believe that God is real, that his grace isn't just a packet I was given but that he's pushing into this situation right now with his reality, he is pushing into their lives by the Spirit in Christ all the time, then if I attempt to just listen more to what he's saying and I don't have a sense that he's leading me to say anything, he's not opening a door for me (unless I try to cram something in and obviously he's not leading me). Sometimes he's leading me to be quiet and to make a nice meal for my son instead of trying to offer anything more. When we live as if God is real, then we can be at peace. We can know his rest. We can be confident that he will always be more faithful than we are. It is never up to us. It has had a radical effect on my relationships with others, on my relationships with people in the church, in my family, with my friends. If I attempt to be with them by letting God lead first.

Another example: I was talking to a friend who was on a church committee. She said, "I don't know what I'm supposed to say when I go into this. I'm not sure how to deal with it. There's going to be some conflict." I said, "Well, try to picture Jesus being with you. Try to have an image of him ...he's in the meeting with you and he's calling you to enjoy

his presence while you're there. How will that change how you're in that meeting?"

JMF: When we realize he loves that other person, is involved with that other person just as much as he is with us...it makes it a lot easier to be with the person, enjoy the person for who they are, and not have to feel like, I've got to get my two-cents worth in.

CD: Right.

JMF: You can lead a horse to water, you can't make them drink. We know that about horses. But we still try to do it with each other all the time.

CD: What it comes down to is, do I really trust him enough? I think the answer ends up being no. "I'm not sure you're going to show up. I'm not sure you're going to be active. I'm not sure you're going to be present, so I'll cover those last ten yards for you. Besides, I'm a wise person. I know a lot. Trust me, God, I'm sure I can take care of this for you."

It's humbling but yes, it's also a lot easier to live as if God is the greatest reality in their life, and he's currently active. He didn't just give you a list to take care of, but he's breaking in, always ahead of you and behind you and around you. There's never a time when he's leaving you alone.

JMF: The relationship with a person is more important than some agenda you might have for that person.

CD: Right. The funny thing is, what are you trying to invite people into? You're trying to invite them into the peace that you're living in. But if you're frantically trying to get them into that, you have nothing to offer.

JMF: You don't have any peace.

CD: Right. You left the peace back here in hopes of being able to still have a message. That's the thing we're always afraid isn't going to be true. How much am I going to love somebody unless I get to say everything I think I need to say, unless they come to appreciate me the way I want them to appreciate me? But if God is holding onto that, one of the phrases I've been using recently in my Bible study is, we live suspended in the grace of God. If we are living suspended in the grace of God and the person I'm talking to, whoever they are, also does...they may be resisting that, but that's really where they live.

JMF: There's no other place to live.

CD: Exactly. Then I can trust that God is going to allow me to participate in his work as I let go of having to have things go whatever way I think they do.

JMF: And amazingly, he may be working with *you* in that setting more

than he is with the other person...

CD: That's what I often find to be true. I'm sure you have found that to be true as a parent. As God allows us by his grace more and more to let go of all the ideas that we may have had when they were younger about what we were going to be able to accomplish for them, I can say that he has blessed me tremendously through them. I hope they will learn as much as I have from being their parent.

Another way to think about this in terms of Trinitarian theology has been to take more seriously his grace and his never allowing anything that he won't and can't redeem in your life and in your children's life. Taking seriously that he knows your sins, your problems, the unwise choices that you may have made, and he's going to redeem that. We participate even in our parenting with God. He is the ultimate parent and we're not. I've had to go through some things in my life where I've had to realize he never called me to be our children's parent because I was perfect, but he called me knowing that he could redeem everything, he could bring it all to his glory and he's not ashamed to call me his sister, as it says in Hebrews.

JMF: That frees our relationships up so much because we can let go. We can respect the other person in a way that we might not because we often go into conversations thinking we're superior...

CD: Yes, that brings up another good point.

JMF: Or intimidated, one or the other.

CD: We can give what we have to give in God's hands, and we can receive what the other person has to give, which we oftentimes, as you were just saying, we don't do. I won't receive something from somebody if I'm hoping for something else from them. When I live in the peace of God it helps me to be more actually present to the other person. I can see and hear what they're saying instead of thinking ahead to okay, what's the next thing I'm going to say? What's my move in this? More like a chess game instead of an actual conversation. It's enabled me to rejoice over the little things sometimes that somebody else can give me because that may be all that they can give me right now. But in God's grace, that's enough. Too often I have worked past people instead of being present with them. So I would agree. That's what it does.

JMF: Even in interviewing, you can get into a frame of mind that you know where you want it to come out, let's say. So you want to guide it in that direction and get to that point. You see it on TV all the time, especially with pundits. They've got an angle, and so they often don't even let the other person talk. I find myself doing the same thing. I think, this is the

point I want the viewers to learn from this, and so I'm going to guide it in that direction instead of letting it go the direction it needs to go and is going to go because it's the person that you're interviewing.

CD: That's right.

JMF: The reason that they're there is because you figured they must have something worthwhile to say. But aren't our kids the same way? We [should be] about the relationship and them, more than molding them into some image that we think they ought to have.

CD: Yes, and being willing to let go of that image allows us to take seriously the Triune God. A lot of times we don't take him that seriously. We take a lot of other things about our lives and what we think we should be able to do and what it means to be successful a lot more seriously than we do the presence and activity of the Triune God in our lives. It's led to a lot of surprises in my life being able to let go. It's also enabled me to be more joyful with people because my joy isn't coming from the immediate situation or the immediate relationship.

God is always there. He's always with us. He's already at work. What will that mean? It's quite an adventure. I have no idea where this might go. That enables me to be not just more peaceful but more enthusiastic about seeing where he wants to take me next. His plans will always be good and for my good even though, as you were saying, it's a little hard to let go of some of those things we thought made us who we are, and they didn't really.

JMF: Sometimes a person that we care about is doing something we think is harmful or destructive; we don't like that kind of behavior. We think we need to tell them and make it clear to them where we stand on this. It's as though we forget that God knows this too. That usually doesn't work.

CD: No.

JMF: It harms the relationship, instead of maintaining it so that a person can hear us.

CD: Right. I've had two of my children go through some difficult times. My oldest daughter went through anorexia many years ago. This was probably when I first started working through a lot of this in terms of my family and relationships. I was watching her disappear before my eyes. What can I do? What do you want me to do? We tried forcing her to eat, all kinds of things. I remember sitting in the kitchen one time and saying, "God, I don't know what... I'm feeling desperate, please. I can't do anything. What do you want me to do? I'm ready to listen. What do you

want me to do?”

He said, “Make her a cup of tea and just take it back to her and say, ‘I love you. You are terrific’ because that’s what I have to say to her, so that’s the one thing I want you to say.” It was amazing to me that he freed me in that moment to experience his grace in my own life and to extend his grace to her and to realize that’s what she needed to hear – not all of my wisdom, not all of my fears. Because a lot of times when we’re busy trying to fix things, the one thing we’re forgetting to tell people is God’s grace has already broken in. If that is true, what would we be saying to each other? If we were living as that were true, how would that change every comment that we make and every interaction that we have?

JMF: Isn’t that scary for people, when we know somebody’s doing something that we know is harmful for them and then...and then all we’re going to do is say to ourselves, “I know that God loves this person and is working for their redemption, and he can do that a lot better than I can.” It’s hard to give them grace because we feel like we’re compromising with sin or something, instead of giving them what we need. We’re afraid of grace.

CD: That’s right. Yet, that’s where God starts and that’s where he continues to go with us every day. I do not get up in the morning because *I* decided that I would go ahead living for another day. I just made that decision. Rather, I wake up and discover “God has given me another day. He continues to love me. He delights in me.”

That is a scary thing to say to somebody else. It’s a scary thing to hear because we’re afraid that it means that nothing’s going to change. But the gospel is God by giving us grace makes a possibility of something changing. If I want my daughter to change, I want her to change out of the sense that “this is not who you are. This is not the last word on you. I love you, and, more importantly, God loves you. The whole God is here, and he has so much more for you than this.” Unfortunately, a lot of times when we’re trying to correct something, we start fearing.

My son went through something far worse. I won’t go into it, but the last couple years of my life have been some of the hardest I’ve ever had to go through as a mother and as a person. There would be times when I would get up in the morning and I would have to say, “God, help me remember...” Even my prayers could become, “Oh God, please, please, please.” But that’s not living in the Trinitarian reality. The reality is, I’m so glad that even now you haven’t left us.

JMF: We’re in your hands.

CD: Yeah. I'm grateful. Not just me but my son, my family, and that you were there all the way through all of this and you will redeem it because of who you are, not just because of some whim. This is who you are. Having said that, I could go into my day with grace. I could say, when he came out, "Oh, I love you so much. I am so glad that you're here." And I'd leave it at that. It was radical.

JMF: Even with what you just said, don't we like to try to talk them into that? In other words, we can't, like you just said, leave it at that. We have to try to talk them into, you know, God does love you, and we want to make sure they know that, and we want them to agree with us about that. We don't know how to trust God to be who he is with them and for them.

CD: Right. It's a far more radical trust. But this is the dynamic living in God that we're talking about and trusting that Jesus actually mediates our relationships. He never says, "Okay, this one's on your own. Go out there. I hope it works out okay for you." But that is the problem. We'll trust him up to a certain point, but if it meant having to give up everything in my life to be a Christian, well, I don't know about this. Does that mean that I have to give up what I think my reputation should be in terms of my mothering, in terms of other things that I do? Do I have to trust in you in all of these ways? That's what it would mean to take him at his word.

JMF: But when we do that, it actually is easier, isn't it?

CD: A lot easier.

JMF: It leaves a place, a room for the child to come to their own conclusions instead of having to circle the wagons against us all the time.

CD: And it's a lot more fun, too. My son has come home sometimes and found I'm dancing to some music with my daughter. I've danced a lot more in the last two years than I thought I would because I trust that God is at work. He's at work with me, and I don't have to justify myself. I don't have to be able to say, none of these things that have happened had to do with me. Some of them did, I'm sure. I was not a perfect mother. To be able to let go of each one of those places, I try to find my identity and know at the bottom, his hands are holding onto me. I think they like being around me more. As wise as I was before, I think I was somewhat of a battle axe because I had to make sure my wisdom got out to everybody.

JMF: Absolutely. I think that you're far from alone. Not just mothers. Fathers often make it worse because there's the authority thing involved as well.

CD: And we can do that in church, as we come in with our agenda for

a meeting. It's not bad to have an agenda, but I've noticed a lot of times, God rubber stamps our agenda instead of no, why don't we pray together and see what God wants to do. We are not in charge. If he wants to end a program in the church, let's be ready for that instead of having to keep things going because we've decided we know what should happen.

JMF: People are more important than programs, and being together is more important than getting something done.

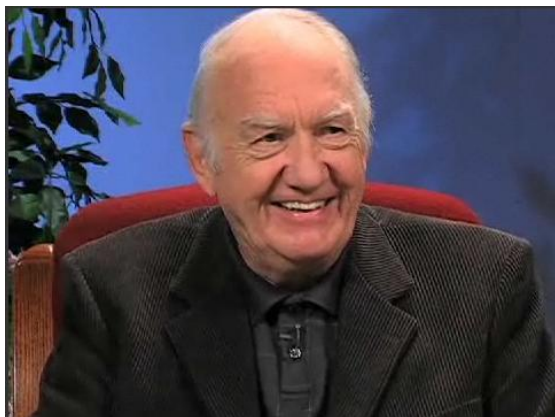
CD: Right.

JMF: Because that's what we're trying to get done, is being together.

CD: That's the weird thing about it. That's what I was trying to say about noticing in my evangelism that I had become so uptight about trying to help people become Christians. If I could sit on the other side and see what I was looking like, I wouldn't want to become a Christian either.

HOW SHOULD WE READ THE BIBLE?

J. Michael Feazell: Christians the world over look to the Bible as their guide to faith and practice. Yet from the inception of the church, there has been much disagreement over how to interpret what the Scriptures say. Our guest today, Dr. Gordon Fee, has done much work in helping Christians with basic principles of rightly understanding the Bible. Dr. Fee is a New Testament scholar and recently retired Professor Emeritus of Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia. He's considered a leading expert in the field of biblical interpretation and is author of many books, including *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors* and *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, which he co-authored with Douglas Stuart. Dr. Fee's latest book is *Revelation*, part of the New Covenant Commentary Series. Dr. Fee, thanks for joining us.



Gordon Fee: Glad to be here.

JMF: It will help all of us to hear a little of the background of how you came to write *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*.

GF: I'm a little old now, in terms of all the details, okay? But it

basically came about because I used to do this in various kinds of adult Sunday school settings, churches, just trying to help people read the Gospels as Gospels, the epistles as the epistles, et cetera. I was invited to be one of the teachers during the era of the Greater Pittsburgh Charismatic Conferences in the 1970s. They had teaching sessions—morning and afternoon—and they had invited me to come. Since I did this regularly in churches and especially in my New Testament survey class, I chose to take four sessions and walk them through the Gospels, Acts, the epistles, and the Revelation.

At the end of this series, there must have been a group of about 35 people, adults who had been in the sessions, and the common denominator of their question was, Why have we never heard this before? How come we don't know this? Why do I have to be 50 years old and never knew that I should think this way in reading the Bible?

So on the way home, I dashed out the outline for the book—13 chapters, because I was raised in Sunday school, and all the lessons are in 13 chapters for the 13 Sundays of a quarter of the year. So I thought 13 chapters, and outlined the whole thing, and then realized that I *could* do the Old Testament chapters, but Doug could do them better. So I told him what the program was...

JMF: And you had known Doug for...

GF: We were colleagues. I taught at Gordon-Conwell, and so we were good friends. That's why I went to him, because he thinks the way I do about teaching Scripture. Unfortunately, it took two years for him to get a sabbatical so he could write his chapters, but once he did, then it was sent off—and it was bad timing, because it was between the big push before the beginning of school year, and somewhere in that lull period for Zondervan.

I had chosen Zondervan as a publisher, and we had a former student who was working as an editor at Zondervan. He saw that the book was going to fall between the cracks, and he took the manuscript, got it after it was published, and sent it to everybody who teaches Bible everywhere in North America. I don't know how many hundreds of copies he sent, but within a year the sales went off the charts. The reason was: it was trying to help people to get at reading Scripture sensibly instead of "every verse a paragraph" that is so destroying. Over a million of these are now in print. This is the third edition, and there's over a half million of this edition.

JMF: This was the one I remember reading.

GF: Yeah. That's the first edition.

JMF: Now we're already in the third edition.

GF: So they went over a million. It met a need because people would like to know how to read the Bible well. Doug is responsible for the title. He's clever in these ways. I always had some dumb title — "On Understanding the Bible" or something dull like that. He sat down and wrote out a whole page in two columns of proposed titles. The third one down was this one—*How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. I knew I didn't have to read any further—it was obviously the title that was going to make the book work. That's how it came about.

JMF: You mentioned paragraphs. People read the Bible—the verses appear to be paragraphs. What's wrong with that?

GF: What's wrong is they wouldn't read anything else on earth that way. The Bible wasn't written in single-verse paragraphs. The Bible was written in poetry—which is four lines, usually two, two, and in the Proverbs the same way—two or four. The narratives are narratives. You break up the narratives the way you would break up any narrative. The epistles are letters. When the subject makes a slight change, you paragraph it there.

It's common sense to read the Bible the way you would read any other piece of literature. Yet for some reason, people think that every verse a paragraph is sacred—it came down from heaven that way or something, when in fact, it happened because Robert Estienne was riding a horse across Europe and put the numbers in, half of them in the wrong places. We get stuck with that. Notice that the title is how to *How to Read the Bible*. Studying is a different thing. My problem is that most people do not read their Bibles well. That's what this book is for.

JMF: Let's take, just case in point, you mentioned epistles and Gospels. What is different about an epistle from a Gospel, and how would you read Gospels differently from the way you would read an epistle?

GF: What's the difference between a short story and a poem? You don't read a poem the way you read a short story, or a short story the way you read a poem. That's the difference between the Psalms and a narrative. Between an epistle and a Gospel: one is a narrative about Jesus and his mighty deeds; an epistle is a letter. The epistles (letters) and Gospels aren't even in the same league in terms of kind of literature. Why anyone would ever want to level that out as if it didn't make any difference.... It makes all the difference in the world. *God* chose to do it this way. This isn't

Gordon's discovery. God did this. We need to get in touch with what God did.

JMF: So if I'm going to read the Bible...let's say when I was 10 years old and I see all these chapters and verses, and I go to a Gospel—let's say Luke (I'm opening at random) chapter 7, verse 5, "For he loveth our nation and he hath built us a synagogue." Then I might look at 1 Corinthians, which is a letter, chapter 8, verse 2, "If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know."

This one sounds like it has the same...because it's got a chapter and a verse and a number by it, it has the same power and merit if I put it up on the wall as this one does, if I set it up next to it, and I could use those two without anything else around them, to come to some conclusions about what I think they mean.

GF: You would have to do that thoughtlessly – carelessly, I mean...

JMF: Any way you slice it, if there's a verse on the wall, [someone could say], "oh, that's God's word."

GF: Yes, it is God's word.

JMF: Am I going to understand it just by looking at that verse all by itself like that?

GF: Let's let God have the say, and he didn't give us a verse, he gave us the Gospel. He gave us the epistle, not a verse.

JMF: If I pick up the newspaper, would I find a couple of lines in the middle of the article, pull them out and understand what the article's about?

GF: No, but I think people tend to do that all the time. (laughing)

JMF: You're right – I guess we do that with everything to some degree. (laughing)

GF: If it's a person you disagree with, you read the whole article and you take out two sentences you disagree with and post that somewhere.

JMF: With the Bible we'll take out two verses against people we disagree with and then use it as a weapon against them. But you're pointing out the importance of reading things the way they're written, and the way they're intended for the people that they're written to.

We don't get a letter from somebody we care about... let's say an email, and we don't divide it up and just take out two lines and pretend like that has the same merit and meaning and power as the two lines earlier. We read the whole thing together...the message of the whole thing.

GF: Exactly. That's the great problem.... I tell students over the years

that the first thing you have to do is get rid of the numbers. You don't go through your Bible and scratch out the numbers – just get rid of them in your head. Get rid of them because they're not there. Then get rid of the paragraphs—that is, every verse a paragraph. Get a Bible that's got it right in terms of paragraphing. There will be some differences, mostly for the sake of the readership. If the Bible is being prepared for 10th graders or below, you put more paragraphs in. If it's for older folk, you can put fewer paragraphs in. The paragraphing is not sacred – it's a way of helping the people read well. None of that is divinely given – it's a translator's or an editor's choice.

JMF: The reason for verses is just to help us find a spot so we know what we're talking about.

GF: On the ancient manuscripts (which was my first specialty in New Testament studies), they didn't have any of that. They had little indications of where you were in the text, the Gospel or the epistle. In this inner column, they'd have a little Roman numeral III or an VIII or something like that, and those numbers represented where they were in the document. It goes way back to the 2nd, 3rd century, but this is a convenience for people to find things.

JMF: But it tends to break up our understanding.

GF: It intrudes. It intrudes all the time.

JMF: We typically memorize verses and spout them, and sometimes the point is clear from the verse, just one verse, but often without the rest of the context, you can easily misunderstand what the verse is really about in the middle of the context where it belongs.

GF: There's a famous story about the person who was doing this—"Judas hanged himself" [Matthew 27:5] and then, "Go thou and do likewise" [Luke 10:37]. That's the story that is associated with that kind of reading of the text, which is not reading. It's nonsense.

JMF: Let's go to *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour*—you also worked with Douglas Stuart on that one.

GF: I wrote that book, and Doug edited the Old Testament portions. The publishers wanted us to do it. They asked us to do a combined Old Testament and New Testament survey. Neither Doug nor myself could get interested in it. We just couldn't do it.

So he sat down one day and did what is very much like the Genesis chapter in this book. It was much too long and therefore the book would have been much too long, and it was a little heavy. But the moment I saw

it, I said yes! So I did a couple of New Testament books.

The sections are a slight overview of what the whole thing's about, and then a little more of what you need to know in order to read this well, and then we take the reader by the hand and say, "Look, now look, now look," and guide them through it without trying to interpret anything, just let them know what they're reading and when they need to pause... I ended up writing the whole book with Doug making sure that the Old Testament was up to speed, because this turned out to be an extremely useful book for an awful lot of Christians.

JMF: It's a wonderful follow-up to *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. It's longer because you deal with every book.

GF: Again, we're trying to help people be good readers of the Bible. I'm amazed at how few people read their Bibles well. It's the same reason a lot of people don't read their Bibles. Because they don't know how to read them well – they get bogged down and weary of it. These books are attempts to say the Bible is good, readable, material. Do it this way and see if it doesn't help.

I had surgery that put me on the shelf for several months when we were doing the second book. My wife Maudine and I read every bit of that book aloud to one another, and then all of the biblical text over a two-month period when I was recuperating from surgery. We had all day to sit around, as it were.

JMF: You would have never done that if you hadn't had the surgery.

GF: Exactly. In part, the book *reads* well because we did that. Because we're listening to one another read aloud, and when you stumble over a sentence when it goes four lines, you've got to stop and do something else. I don't want to go through the surgery again, but it was a gift, so we took it.

JMF: [In the first book] you mentioned the 13 chapters, and you have the epistles, the Old Testament narratives, Acts, the Gospels, and one chapter on parables, and one on the law. I'd like to talk about parables first. How is a parable different from a narrative?

GF: They're not terribly different, because a narrative and a parable, excuse me, there is more than one kind of parable—that's the first thing people have to hear. Often, when people hear the word *parable*, they'll think of the Good Samaritan. That's good. That's right. It's a story. The story tells the story. But the parables get listed under brief sayings, the very brief kind—the kingdom of God is like....

JMF: ...the treasure hidden in the field.

GF: Yes. So you've got that kind, and then you've got the story parable. People need to know they're both parables, but they're different kinds. One is something is like something else; the other one is also sort of like something else, but the parables are intended to "catch" a person. At the end, the people have egg in their face or whatever the parable is intended to do, particularly the one with the Good Samaritan, where the guy who asks the question gets blown away because the good guy turns out to be the people they hate, the Samaritans. That's purposeful, in your face, listen to what God is doing in the world thing.

A parable can do that in ways that straight prose can't do. Jesus could have said, love your enemies. He did say that, but he also told the story. Oh, you mean Samaritans? The story does it far better. People who can tell stories well always get their point across better than people that, like myself, would just do plain prose. I admire them, but I'm not one of them.

JMF: I've heard people say that all parables that Jesus told are true stories, but a parable doesn't have to be a so-called true story...

GF: What you mean is an actual event.

JMF: Yes, an actual event.

GF: I don't know why people feel that way—that somehow to tell a story to make a point..., an illustration, ...you tell a story to make a point. That's not lying, that's not being false. The *point* is what you're after. But there are some people who just think that that's deception or something. My wonderful in-laws, now deceased, couldn't handle me at this point because for them, if it wasn't true (meaning it didn't actually happen), then it's not true. I had no categories for that view of what Scripture is about, so I just didn't get into those conversations.

JMF: When I was younger, there were people who felt that fiction was wrong for kids to read because it's not of true, actual events.

GF: It's not *true* (laughing). Good fiction is the best way to find truth.

JMF: Yeah, to get across a point. The stories have always been a way...

GF: They've always been useful that way. Even in the Old Testament, some of the best moments in the narratives are when somebody tells a story and a person gets zapped by the story. That's just the way it is.

JMF: Yeah. David, when Nathan the prophet came and told about the man with the sheep and [2 Sam. 12:1-10].

GF: Yes.

JMF: One of the books is this one, *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth*. Many people don't think in terms of the variety of translations—they either have a King James or ...the New International Version is popular and widespread...

GF: Most common...

JMF: ...best selling. There isn't much thought as to the differences between translations and what makes one translation superior for whatever the particular purpose may be over another one, and this book gets into that.

GF: You'll notice it's a different co-author in this case.

JMF: Yes. Mark Strauss.

GF: I had been asked to write this book by Zondervan, and it became very clear to me early on that we didn't need Old and New at this point, we needed old and young. I'm old, and Mark is a New Testament scholar who teaches at Bethel Seminary in San Diego, and we're on the TNIV, the NIV committee together.

JMF: The TNIV being...

GF: Today's New International Version. We're on this committee together, we're good friends, and when I was asked to write this book, I realized I didn't need an Old Testament person, I needed a *younger* person. I needed somebody who knew what was going on in the world of language, and he's a marvelous linguist. So I am totally indebted to him for this book. When we go to conferences and we present the book, he's the one who does it. He's got it all on PowerPoint and the whole bit, and he's a marvelous communicator.

We had a lot of fun writing that book. The chapters are pretty evenly divided as to our specialties, but just trying to help people to recognize that if you can't read the Greek or the Hebrew, you're dependent on the people who can, and who try to put it into English.

There's a whole group of people out there who think loyalty to the biblical language means to be as close to that language as you can possibly be, both in form and in words. No good translator would ever think that. They would never translate a German book into something that looked more like German than English. You wouldn't do that. I cannot understand why people think that so-called literal is better when, in fact, literal is not good English.

What we're after is an English version of what the Greek and Hebrew say. But we've not taken sides on translations. At one point we have a

chart showing from literal to the freest of the free and indicate that the middling area is the place that people ought to be for their Bible of choice.

But for some reason, people think that some of these more so-called literal translation have better translations. Actually, they're poorer translations. They are, my term for it, Greek-lish. They're neither English nor Greek. You can understand it in English, but nobody would ever *speak* that English. So why not take the Greek and put it into English, which is what most good translations do. We have them all listed there in terms of various usefulness, and audiences for whom they're useful.

JMF: For your own reading, which translation do you like to use?

GF: We use what is currently the TNIV, but in 2011 will become revised to become the NIV altogether. The present NIV is going to be taken up into all of the changes that have been made over the years and will be the NIV.

JMF: How will it be designated?

GF: NIV updated, whatever. This happens regularly with translations. What a lot of people don't know is that the NIV they're reading is a 1978 version of something that happened much earlier and has scores of changes from the earlier expression of it. This is not a new thing for this particular tradition of translation.

Some people use just the NASB and NASU now. That's fine, but nobody would ever speak that English. You would never speak it in the pulpit. It's Greek-lish, not English. It does very nicely put the Greek into the English language, but you're reading what the Greek looks like, not what English looks like.

This is a universal view of translation. This is not one scholar's view. If you're going to translate Luther into English, you just can't keep the German sentences. It can't be done. In the old story, the American on tour in Germany and he kept asking the translator, "What's he saying? What's he saying?" He said, "I don't know, he hasn't come to the verb yet." Because the verb is the very end of [German sentences]. (laughing). You have to translate the whole sentence.

JMF: We've come to the end of our time. We appreciate very much you being here, and thanks so much on behalf of everybody who has used these books and benefited from them, as they have been such a tremendous help—*How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, and *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth*. Thanks for your good work and thanks for sharing your time with us.

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

J. Michael Feazell: You've been preaching and writing for most of your life. What is it that you want people to know about God?

Gordon Fee: I can get at that best by telling a story. I was a freshman at Seattle Pacific College and had a remarkable encounter with God. I was there on a basketball scholarship, and it was an idolatry to me. Douglas Stuart led me to give that up to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus. That happened in early December, 1952.

Later that year we had a chapel series we called Spiritual Emphasis Week — a special speaker for each chapel in that week. Her name was Eugenia Price. She was a well-known figure in Hollywood — a writer and that kind of thing — who five years earlier had been converted in Billy Graham's first crusade in Los Angeles. She was a marvelous person and a gifted speaker.

Somewhere at the beginning she said, "You will never find a more relieved person in all the world than I, when I discovered that God is just like Jesus Christ." She admitted that wasn't theologically well-said, but her point was well-said. That's pretty much where any true believer in Jesus, any true Christian must come to terms with theology, with how one understands God.

In John's Gospel this is put on display in every imaginable way, the Son is revealing the Father. It isn't that the Son is separate from the Father; the Father and the Son and Spirit are the one God. But in the incarnation, God became present among us. My way of putting it is: He came among

us, took the wraps off, and said, “Here’s what I am like. Here’s what God is and what God is like.”

Every false theology in history has been a failure to take that seriously — that the only true understanding of God is that which comes through revelation of the Son, who is the full, perfect, absolute representation (it’s hard to find language when we talk theologically, but understand...), representation of who God is and what God is like. Every false theology is steered away from what we learn about God through the revelation in the Son, because that is where the full revelation of God takes place.

The ultimate expression of that revelation is in the crucifixion. God on a cross with his creatures trying to get rid of him. And instead of getting rid of him, they got him forever. You can’t get rid of him. Death followed by resurrection followed by the Holy Spirit with a total complete passion on God’s part to do what was intended in the Garden of Eden, and that’s to create human beings in his image.

What God has done in Christ and by the Spirit is to recreate fallen human beings back into the image of God so that we live on this planet as the image-bearers of God, which should constantly point people to God, because we bear that image. I have a great relief that God is just like Jesus Christ.

JMF: Many Christians think of the Father being a scary God of the Old Testament.

GF: A mean old man in heaven, yes.

JMF: Jesus is the nice guy who shields us from the anger of this scary God of the Old Testament.

GF: Everybody who does this has not read the Gospel of John. “Have I been with you for so long,” Jesus asks, “and you don’t know who I am? The one who has seen me has seen the Father.” The Gospel of John takes all of that story, that Gospel, that incarnation, and raises it to the next level so that we hear the Gospel story in its theological setting of who this is.

It’s in the Synoptic Gospels as well, but John just makes it so stark that you can’t miss the point that this is not just another human being, this is God incarnate — taking off the wraps and saying, “Look, this is who God is. This is what God is like.”

JMF: John also records Jesus talking about his oneness with the Father. But he also prays that the disciples “may be one as we are one.” What is he driving at there?

GF: That’s one of the more difficult texts to spell out in detail. The

concern throughout that section of the Gospel has to do with, in this case, two believers, two followers of Jesus — that they both together reflect the likeness of God that's found in Christ in their relationship with one another. All of that had to do with how we become the bearers of the image. We do that not because we pray a lot, we do that because we love our neighbor, and our neighbor is often our enemy.

As God loved his enemies, namely you and me, and redeemed us by that love, he wants us to be his image-bearers and to be redemptive agents in a world where people not only don't believe in him but would prefer to curse. They don't believe in him, but they'll use his name and curse. It's how terribly fallen the human race has become.

JMF: When he's saying that about the disciples, they have been at each other's throats over who's going to be the greatest, and he's having to interrupt their disputes over all that, and yet he's talking about a oneness that will transcend all of that.

GF: He does scold them a little bit here, but he's constantly bringing them back. "Look, watch... the works that I do are the works of the Father. I am doing the Father's work. Pay attention, this is what God is like." People ask me what God is like. This is not theologically well-put, but it says it. God is just like Jesus Christ.

JMF: We're not afraid of Jesus. We read about Jesus and we think, I could trust him to not surprise me with condemnation. But we are a little afraid of the Father. We're worried about what he might do next.

GF: That is understandable, because many of us have broken fathers who aren't people we would necessarily emulate. My case is different. My father was a true representation of my heavenly Father. So I never had to overcome the frailties and the difficulties and the weaknesses of my own father because I regularly saw the revelation of God and the way he treated my mother and the way that he was a pastor and the way that he created a congregation, became a professor in a Bible college, the way he treated students. He was an image-bearer, so that was never a difficulty for me.

But I wasn't long as a pastor or a teacher when I realized, that image didn't work for some people because their fathers were so bad, so brutal, that they didn't want God to be a father. In those cases they had to rethink what they would like a father to be and then come to terms with the fact that God is infinitely more than that. It's an image that in our culture does have drawbacks, but I won't leave the image, because not only is it the biblical one, but correctly expressed, it's the best one.

JMF: The Holy Spirit comes into the picture as well in John. Jesus is talking about his oneness with the Father, he's talking about "if you've seen me, you've seen the Father," he's talking about how they may be one...or how the disciples may be one as he and the Father are one. Then he starts to talk about the Comforter: "I'm going to send you a comforter. It's necessary I go away." How does the Holy Spirit fit into the relationship with Father and Son?

GF: That isn't spelled out in the text. That's where theology comes in. It's clear in John's Gospel that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit both of the Father *and* of his Son, and therefore the one Holy Spirit is the full image-bearer of the Godhead. The reason, the point, of the Holy Spirit throughout the New Testament is that the Spirit is to continue the work of the incarnation by incarnating us with God's likeness. As the Spirit, there's the fruit of the God likeness in our relationships with one another.

This is the great problem I had – in history, the solitary monk, the one who went out into the desert to get Christian perfection. That's impossible. You can't find out whether a person is a true Christian until they rub elbows with another Christian. That's when you find out whether the work of the Spirit is really taking place. The solitary hermetic monk was so unbiblical that it doesn't have a leg to stand on, because the real test is how one responds *to another* when the other is doing things that are either distasteful, wrong, deliberately evil...how we respond to that is going to be the ultimate evidence of the Spirit's outworking, the life of Christ in us.

JMF: Christ forgives, he loves his enemies. It's good for us, but we don't like it when he's forgiving our enemies.

GF: Exactly. We don't like that part of it. We like to be Christians, but we also like to be fallen at points. Our fallen-ness can still find expression.

JMF: I'm glad he forgives his enemies, which often includes us...

GF: Yes, on the cross.

JMF: ...and our enemies. Here he is telling us that we can be one with each other, and the Holy Spirit then is continuing that incarnation...and that includes loving our enemies. It isn't just telling us something that we need to do, because we can't. We don't do that. We never have. His ministry is the doing of that which we fail in.

GF: One of the difficulties with this is the enormity of the population, and that these are spoken in basically rural contexts, where people live in small villages and they have to get along, or the village won't make it. We now live in a global village where almost no one can live in isolation

anymore. The context for us is so huge that we have a hard time imagining what it's like to love our enemies, because we don't even know who our enemies are. I was a kid growing up in grammar school during World War II. How would one love Hitler? I'm sorry, Hitler was the incarnation of evil. So I quit thinking in those categories. The question is, how do I love the neighbor next door?

JMF: Our neighbor is the one we're having the problem with.

GF: Yes, so this is the person that we must love, but it's easy to overlook that person in thinking in broader people terms. I love the people in my church... I still want to have dinner with some of them. It's the one-on-one thing that Jesus is about — not that global or larger communal. How do I love somebody out of their evil? I would assume that's the basic reason for loving them.

JMF: But Jesus does that, and he's in us, therefore we can rest in his doing of that, without us having to take the burden.

GF: Here's where the Holy Spirit must come in.

JMF: It's a rest, isn't it? He does what we're unable to. He heals us.

GF: Yes. Good thing, too.

JMF: You've done a lot of work with reading the Scriptures in the context in which they were written. As you just mentioned, this is written in the context of a village kind of thinking. It doesn't address details and specifics of our kind of world in which we live on a block where we don't even know most of the people who drive by the front of our house.

GF: Yes, exactly.

JMF: We have a different kind of relationship from any of the relationships people would have known then. They talk about a stranger... When a stranger comes to town, everybody knows that a stranger has come to town, and it's one, or one little group. Pretty soon everybody knows a whole lot about them, because they make it their business. We can't do that.

GF: Yes. How that translates for us is very difficult. I don't pretend that I would not answer that in our context. I think the greater question is, how do I love those neighbors that are closest?

JMF: The neighbors I know.

GF: Yeah, those who are around me. Maudine and I live in a ten-unit complex of individual units. We think in terms of how do we love? We are in a very good community. We're the only believers, but we get along well with everybody. They get along well with one another. There's very little

of the kind of fighting that I know happens in a lot of these communities. That would be the next step for us. How do we love? How do we care for somebody if they're ill? How do we get food to them or something like that as a way of demonstrating that we're part of this community...not trying to convert them by the four spiritual laws, but trying to love them as they are and then perhaps at some point they might ask what we're all about.

JMF: Being ready to give an answer, but not cramming ...

GF: Pushing it down their throat, yes.

JMF: Isn't there some trust in the Spirit's power to work with somebody instead of taking it all on ourselves?

GF: Altogether. On the other hand, sometimes the door sits wide open and we get hesitant and don't step through the door. Part of that is a personality matter, too. Neither my wife or I are extroverts on one-on-one relationships, so...

JMF: Most people aren't.

GF: ...we have to push ourselves to move in that direction.

JMF: We tend to assume that everybody should be the same when it comes to evangelism, and yet there are so many different aspects of how we are with other people according to the way God has made us as individuals. We're not all the same.

GF: True evangelism has to stem out of good relationships. The only other evangelism is the kind that happens in church when there's a sermon and a visitor is there and they hear it and the Spirit speaks. True evangelism is a relational thing where the relationship is secure and you hope they might ask you, "Why are you so weird?"

JMF: So it's a good idea for Christians to make friends with unbelievers.

GF: Oh yes.

JMF: For the sake of friendship.

GF: Neither Maudine or I are good at that. But if they make the first step, we're good at it. It has to do with our personalities.

JMF: Studies have shown that people would rather live next door to almost anybody than an evangelical Christian because of the stereotypes of evangelical Christians being so pushy and judgmental...

GF: ...and aggressive.

JMF: Yeah.

GF: The New Testament makes it clear that you love your neighbor by

doing good for your neighbor. Evangelism will come out of that, and no other way.

JMF: The St. Francis quote is always interesting, “Always preach the gospel. If necessary, use words.”

GF: This comes from my wife: many years ago she was struck by how many times in Scripture it talks about doing good. Not doing works, but doing what is good. Somehow evangelicals have never caught on, it seems to me, that’s the primary biblical text on how we live in the world.

JMF: When you hear a discussion about what we’re going to do in the church, “And here are some good things we can do in the community as a church.” There’s always the “But then how do we set it up so that the good thing we’re doing gives us an opportunity to hit them with the gospel?” In other words, it’s like we don’t know how to do good without also having to say something, or else we haven’t done what we are supposed to do. The “saying something” is the most important, and the “doing good” is only a means to the end, rather than doing good being the end.

GF: Taking a casserole over to the young couple that just had a new baby. That’s what you do.

JMF: Not so that you can give them a spiel.

GF: No, just because you’re doing good! It’s the good thing to do. Many people who don’t make any profession of faith understand that better than Christians do — that we should do good. Too many evangelical Christians are more interested in evangelizing as the first matter of business rather than loving their neighbor as the first matter of business.

JMF: That’s a good point. I was listening to Jack Hayford once talking about that some people tend to see evangelism as scalps on your belt...

GF: Oh dear me, yes.

JMF: ...rather than living with people as Christ would.

GF: Loving them for their own sake.

JMF: For their own sake because they are people.

GF: Yes, made in God’s image. We need to be recreated into Christ’s image.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

JMF: Dr. Fee's latest book, *Revelation*, is part of the New Covenant Commentary Series published by Wipf & Stock [a.k.a. Cascade] in 2010.

Before we begin, I should mention that we had several wonderful interviews with your daughter, Cherith.

GF: She will have done better than her dad would have done.

JMF: We'd like to begin by talking about your new book, *Revelation*, which is based, as you explained to me, on your notes for your class at Regent, the last class before your retirement.

GF: Actually, it was my last class *after* retirement.

JMF: We were talking about this earlier, and you mentioned that people either tend to approach Revelation by ignoring it altogether, or by obsessing over it. What causes those two reactions?

GF: It has to do with the kind of literature (the technical word is *genre*) that it is. Most people, especially those raised in the King James Version, where every verse is a paragraph, so that every sentence, every verse, is equal to all of the rest, they don't think of it in terms of continuity or in terms of narrative or letter or parable, they just think in terms of little things called verses. The net result is, they are not understanding the *kind* of thing that Revelation is. They level it out – the whole New Testament is leveled out ... all read at the same level.

JMF: That's an interesting thought because it makes so much sense, that we look at the Bible and it's divided into chapters and verses, and as you just said, each verse is a paragraph, and so it does come across as

though verse 9 has equal weight of the authority of the word of God and should be taken as important as verse 12 or verse 16, and we skip around like that... [**GF:** On its own and out of context.] but we don't read anything else like that.

GF: Nothing else. Nobody reads anything else the way we read the Bible. So the passion of my teaching life has been to get people not just to study the Bible, but to learn to read the Bible well. To do that, they have to have some sense of the differences of the materials that make up the biblical text, and the Revelation is unique in the New Testament.

The only thing else like it in the canon is several chapters at the end of Daniel. But, the Revelation is not like Daniel – it's a different kind of apocalyptic material – that is very much in keeping with other intertestamental documents of this kind, of which this is but one – but the best and the greatest, ten leagues ahead of and over all those intertestamental documents.

JMF: And intertestamental is referring to...

GF: ... between the Old and the New Testament, between Malachi and Matthew, a 200-year period where a lot of these books were written.

JMF: But Revelation is the only one that appears in the...

GF: In the New Testament. Yeah, and there is nothing quite like it in the New Testament. But it was a common kind of literature for the people who received it, so they didn't come to it with great mystery and tried to dig out all the things. John knew his readers and they knew him.

It's subversive literature. It's telling the Roman empire that their days are numbered – at the height of their glory, when Rome had reached the peak of its power and domain, here is John, exiled on a lonely island, facing Rome and saying, "God's got your number — your days are coming to an end." It took 200 years for it to happen, but time wasn't John's big thing. It was the certainty of it. That's what the Revelation is basically about. It's about God in charge of the universe, not the Roman Empire.

JMF: So for us to try to take Revelation's symbols and act as though they're really about Mussolini, or they're really about Adolf Hitler, is to misunderstand what's going on in Revelation itself.

GF: Yeah, we wouldn't do that with one of Jesus' parables. Nor we do that with one of the letters of Paul. So why would we do that to this – which is first of all, a letter. It's to the seven churches. He writes to them individually, and everybody else is reading everybody else's mail. They're all in this together, but the document has to do with the fact that they are

headed for a terrible holocaust. John recognizes that the martyrdom of Antipas of Pergamum [2:13] is the signal, the harbinger that it's going to get worse before it gets better. That martyrdom is what tipped this off... he's trying to tell the people that the days to come are going to be far worse than you imagine. The catacombs are the clear example that John was right.

JMF: Let's talk about the catacombs. How do they demonstrate...

GF: Besides being places where Christians met, the catacombs were their tombs. The burials of Christians underground in huge numbers for those days was evidence that they were an underground movement. Every time they came up above ground and lived well above ground for one emperor, another emperor comes along and wants to wipe them out so, underground they go again – literally underground. I'm curious as to if the language “underground” comes from the fact that the early Christians literally went underground. Anyway, the Revelation is subversive literature, and the people who received it understood that.

JMF: At the time John wrote, his readers would have understood apocalyptic literature and what the symbols are about and so on, but when we read it today, what are the lessons we can learn from it, understanding that it's not written about our day in particular, but what do we draw from reading the book?

GF: The same thing that we would draw from reading the other New Testament books. What do we draw from reading Acts? Something about our history, something about what God was doing in the first century. What do we learn from Revelation? What God is about, how God is at work even in times of great distress, and that God is the victor. The book ends on the glorious note of triumph.

JMF: So we draw the same lessons they drew, but we don't have to be misreading Revelation as some kind of a book that's written *really* for us in our time as opposed to written to them, and looking for who is this beast going to be... [**GF:** Exactly. We know who the beast *was*.], who are the horns going to be and all that sort of thing. It seems that in every age, every generation of Christians, there's a big contingent that thinks that their day is the last days – that Christ is going to return in their day. They go to Revelation and find ways to manipulate the book to fit it with world events to be able to determine that their day is the end time. That's been going on from the beginning of the church. Why do we feel the need to do that?

GF: I can't answer that question because I can't get into the heads of

the people who think this way. On the other hand, we are to be ready constantly – the gospel song, “We cannot see what lies before and so we cling to him the more. Trust and obey.” This is how we are to live. But “trust and obey” is how we are to live, not try to figure out all the details as to how it’s all going to work out. So it’s true, generation after generation went to the Revelation and claims some powerful figure like Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, as the Anti-Christ. This is not about them, this is not about our days, it’s about *that* day, and where we can draw our parallels out of it like we do with everything else in Scripture. Romans wasn’t written to us, but we hear it as a word for us. Revelation wasn’t written to us, but we hear it as a word for us, once we understand it as a word for them, and what it was saying to them. That’s a way of saying that God is in control and not the powerful empires of the world.

JMF: The tyrants are always around, and we’re always safe in Christ’s hands even if we die at the hands of tyrants [**GF:** right... especially if we die.] Going to the Bible in general then, probably the most well-known book in any seminary is the one that you authored with Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. You get into some of these principles of reading the Bible, in the way that it was written, in the way that it was intended, and then looking at what sort of lessons we might draw from that. When a person sits down to read the Bible, what are the common, typical mistakes they make?

GF: There are two firsts in this, ok? First, get rid of the numbers. The numbers intrude, there are no numbers in the original text, just get rid of the numbers – [**JMF:** the verse and chapter designations], the verse designations, yes. The Bible Society [Biblica] is putting out a translation, TNIV, without the numbers. It’s got paragraphs that are meaningful, but the numbers are out in the margin so you know where you are... The numbers intrude and there were no numbers in the original, I can assure you, nor in any copy for 1,500 years. The numbers were inserted by Robert Estienne. He was doing it on a horse, I think, when he was traveling across Europe. The numbers are simply ways of finding things. They have nothing to do with the text. So the first thing one has to do to learn to read well is to get rid of the numbers, in one’s head – not necessarily go through and scratch them out in your Bible. Once one does that, then you start thinking and reading in paragraphs, the way you read anything.

But even before that, and this is the really important thing – what kind of thing am I reading? You don’t read a love letter the same way you read

a court document. People *know* that, by instinct. They come to Scripture and they have all of this marvelous variety of inspired stuff, in this variety, and level it all. [JMF: So we read everything the same way.] So it's like reading a love letter and reading a court document the same way, with no sense that these are different kinds of things. [JMF: Or of reading a poem as though it's a headline news story in the newspaper.] Instinctively people do understand that the Psalter is poetry and that the doublets are doublets – most people do catch that. Others don't have a clue that the doublets are doublets ...

JMF: What's a doublet?

GF: In poetry, a doublet is saying the same thing twice in marvelously different language. Sometimes parallel and sometimes in antithesis... and there are some triplets as well. The Psalter is made up of these marvelous doublets. People who read a modern translation, in which the poetry is set out as poetry, instinctively recognize, "This is poetry. This is not prose." But when you read every verse a paragraph, poetry and prose are lost. So every verse a paragraph and ... my verse for the day... I don't mean to be unkind the way I'm speaking about people's habits. But they would never read anything else that way! If they were to get a love poem from their lover, they would not read it as prose. But we take the Scripture and level it out and then put numbers in, and in that have a verse for the day.

JMF: I hear people talk about, "I read the Bible literally. I'm a Bible literalist." By that, they mean to say, "I take it seriously, I believe what it says." But yet they *do* take it literally. What are some problems with reading the Bible literally?

GF: I don't have trouble with people reading the Bible literally, because most of it is to be understood literally. But they don't read the Psalms that way, and they shouldn't read the Revelation that way. Yes, take it literally in terms of what it is. But please, let it be its thing — don't make it something different from what it is.

JMF: Jesus speaks of a camel going through the eye of a needle. He speaks of many things as parables, and yet these are not truths, news stories of things that actually happen. There was no prodigal son who actually... he's telling a story, a tale, to make a point. We don't read those things literally.

GF: Actually there are some people who do. They think if there wasn't a true prodigal son and a father and another son, then Jesus was not telling the truth. They wouldn't say lie... but he wouldn't tell something if it

wasn't true. [JMF: So therefore there was one.] Their view of *story* is "it's not true." A story means "not true." That's not the way you read anything. That's a mixed-up view of how to read Scripture, and I find myself not able to help people like that.

JMF: Isn't the Bible full of metaphors as well, like any other form of language? If I say, it's raining cats and dogs, people know what I mean. They don't go outside and expect to find a puppy.

GF: Yeah, and there are a lot of those kinds of things (not that particular one) throughout Scripture, and especially in the teaching of Jesus. He was rich with metaphors and using ideas of all kinds of things around him to help people catch the fact that the kingdom of God was at hand.

JMF: In getting back to the book of Revelation, the chapter divisions... you've talked about how there are a couple of places toward the end and also chapter 14 where the chapter divisions really kind of...

GF: Yeah... To give credit where credit is due, the chapters in Revelation are basically well done. Nonetheless, the numbers have a way of separating things that should be held together. When you get to chapter 14, it's the only place in the book where you have a series of small units, and you have to come to terms with how these work. It begins with a lamb and 144,000 on Mount Zion whom they'll meet again. Later on, there are the three angels who fly in and make a pronouncement. Then there are these two marvelous images of the grain harvest and the trampling out of the grapes. My instincts are that if our chapter 15 began there (as it should), everybody would read those two correctly. But at the end of chapter 14, they just hang there.

These two parables of the harvest of grain and the trampling of the grapes introduce the rest of the book — the gathering of God's people, the gathering of the saints and the judgment on Rome and its minions. That's sort of the intro, and then you have the final set of seven, the seven bowls of God's wrath. "Wrath" is the right term here – "wrath" having to do with God's final judgment, of which the final one is the overthrow and collapse of Babylon the Great, which is his language for the Roman Empire. That's followed then by the marvelous picture of Rome as a very high-priced prostitute. (Prostitute is really the wrong word. This is a call lady of the highest order.) She is seductive, and she seduced the whole world. Rome has done that. So the very next thing is lament over Rome's fall.

Then there are the warnings to escape, and then that's followed by the

three sets of woes, which is then followed in chapter 11:1-9 by three sets of hallelujahs... three woes, three hallelujahs, this is hardly accidental. This is carefully constructed literature. Then the final thing there is the heavenly warrior defeats the Beast.

Right after that, if we didn't have numbers, one would see that the so-called millennium is *an insert* that is assuring the martyrs that they have a place in God's program. The only people mentioned in this are those who, for their testimony of Jesus, have been killed by the Empire. They're given a special role. He says, the rest of the dead, those who aren't martyred, they're going to have their time at the end. I don't think you should take this literally. This means God has secured them, this is a special people, martyred because they believed in Jesus.

That's followed by the final judgment of Satan and the dead and you end up the book finishing with the new heaven and new earth and a new Eden. He didn't know it's going to be the last book in the Bible. The book begins with Eden; it concludes with Eden. This is just a marvelous thing that God, by his providence, saw as our canon, so that you have a restored heaven, a restored earth, and then in this restored earth, a restored Eden.

Then the book ends. It ends with a lot of little things that are all important, but its basic story ends in 22:5. It's a marvelous book, and I cringe whenever I see and hear people make it have to do primarily with something in our future, when the only stuff that's in our future is chapters 21 and 22. Everything else belongs back in the near future of these seven churches and all other Christians at the beginning of the second century – wonderful re-assurance.

JMF: It reminds me of the statement where Jesus talks about you're a little flock; in this world you will have...**[GF: tribulation!]** but... **[GF: but I've overcome!]** – the same message as in Revelation in a nutshell.

GF: Yeah, exactly! I'm prejudiced, I love this book. This is marvelous stuff. Don't screw it up by making it mean something different from what John intended, and the Holy Spirit intended by inspiring John to write it. It has to do basically with them and with us as we follow in their train. Just as the Gospels had to do with them and with us as we follow in their train. Once one sees that, then the glory of this book comes alive on the pages.

JMF: The dispensationalists' viewpoint tends to take the millennium and make it into the focal point of everything...

GF: Yeah, that's strange, because it's actually parenthetical. This is one place I really don't like the numbers, because if this began where it

should, in 19:11, if [chapter] 20 began there... one would see that what is our 20:1-6 fits squarely as a parenthetical middle point between the heavenly warrior defeating the Beast and the judgment of Satan and the judgment of the dead. Then you have the whole new heaven and new earth.

JMF: That's a reassurance to those who will be martyred...

GF: They are reassurance to the martyrs mostly because... If it weren't the end of chapter 19, people would see this better. But the heavenly warrior defeats the Beast. So the martyrs are given a special moment, and then the final judgments. This is so marvelously done and for the most part the numbers don't intrude, but at the end of the book they intrude a bit, here in particular. I know I sound very confident, positive, but I lived with this book for years, and I experience enormous pain when I hear it used in a dispensationalist way... because, frankly, they know almost nothing about the book as John intended.

JMF: It's a shame to miss the reassurance, the peace, the joy, the comfort that can come... We read the Psalms all the time that way, in times of trial, we go to the Psalms and we find reassurance in those.

GF: Even though they were written for those people in Israel, they're reassurance to us.

JMF: All the symbols have to do with Israel in that day and age. God is not a high tower, and yet we understand what is meant by that when we are being set upon by our enemies, as it were... You brought out how this same reassurance and joy and peace, comfort, can be ours from Revelation. But instead we look at Revelation, we think, "When is the end of the world going to come?" And how do we measure the horns...

GF: A lot of our difficulties is that we're English-speaking North Americans. Mexican Christians could understand this a little better than we. When you think of how many places on the earth, how many martyrdoms are taking place, *now*, on this planet, this book is for them. This book is telling them that your martyrdom counts for something. You're being brought into God's kingdom...

JMF: And the martyrdom of those you love.

GF: Yes, exactly. I think of the Christians in various Asian settings where this book tells them that they can still rejoice and sing hallelujah and praise our God because God is in control even though they may die. That's what Revelation is about – God is ultimately in charge. The problem of North Americans (and I speak as a dual citizen of Canada and the United States) is we think we have a special privilege with God, and

that we should get all the breaks and none of the pain.

JMF: We tend to think of everything as though we're the center of ... not just of the universe but of the Christian universe as well. If there are missionaries, the mission should be going from us to these other places that don't have the great insight and wisdom. *We* should be the teachers. It's been such been an interesting phenomenon to see Asian missionaries come to the United States as though we need to hear the gospel here. We're shocked by that.

GF: As my Australian colleague would say, "Good on ya, mate."

JMF: So if there is one thing that you would like people to know about the book of Revelation, what would that be?

GF: One thing? It's about the first-century church that is headed for a terrible two-century holocaust. Read it with that in view, and then ask yourself "Where do I fit in?" God is in control — there is absolute reassurance — there's a three-fold woe over Rome, over Babylon, but there's a three-fold hallelujah to those who are God's people.

God's in control, not ourselves — our task is to bear witness to Christ. The Greek word for *bear witness* is the word that we have transliterated into the word *martyr*. It is the Greek word for *witness*. The ultimate witness was martyrdom, so the Greek word *martyr* — witness — became *martyr* — being slain for one's witness, and now we think of martyrs as those kinds of people only. But that's the word for *witness*. We bear witness to Christ and we may not live long after we do that, if we're in certain parts of the world. I happen to be among the privileged. I say that with tears, because I know that I'm among the privileged. What pains me is for the privileged to not take seriously the brothers and sisters in the world that are not as privileged as we are.

FAITH AND ITS CRITICS

Gary Deddo: I'd like to focus our time together on the issues that you addressed in your Gifford Lectures and published as *Faith and Its Critics*. The Gifford lectures have a certain purpose and parameters, but why did you chose that topic?

David Fergusson: The Gifford lectures are public lectures on the theme of natural theology, although that theme has been interpreted in a very latitudinarian way over the years. I was originally intending to lecture on the subject of providence. As I worked on that project, it seem to me more like a work within Christian doctrine than a study that could belong within natural theology.

I was also conscious of the onslaught upon religion taking place in the works of the so-called new atheists, and I was receiving a number of



invitations from church groups to engage with this literature, and to offer an informed Christian response. The more I thought about it, the more it seemed to me that that was an appropriate, and topical theme for the Gifford lectures in 2008 (more

than this other project on providence, which I'm continuing to work on), so it came about that I did six lectures in response to the new atheists in the 2008 Gifford.

GD: It certainly is a current topic. One thing that came up in the book and carried throughout is that addressing critics of religion in general, and Christianity in particular, you suggest benefits of all parties involved, rather than being a problem. You note along the way that dismissing criticism (and even sometimes attacks), or passing over them too quickly, is not a good way to go. What benefits do you see coming from this more serious engagement with critics by believing Christians?

DF: We can reach a deeper and more informed understanding of our faith; we should not be afraid of criticism. We have to respond robustly to some of it. But there are other criticisms of faith that are not altogether invalid, and I think we can learn and move on from these. So I'm interested in promoting a conversation between people of faith and their critics, rather than continuing what has, to some extent, been a shouting match involving people of very different positions who get involved in these sort of gladiatorial, winner-takes-all contests. I'm not interested in participating in that, so I'm looking for a more dialogical approach. There are ways in which faith can be chastened and deepened and enriched by engaging in a conversation with its critics in the contemporary world.

GD: In various debates I've witnessed, the idea is often to win the debate. But you state that your goal was not to necessarily win the debate or convince the critics of the truth or superiority of the Christian faith (either over other religions or even over atheism). You're concerned that certain approaches to apologetics are misguided and even ineffective, and I think you're trying to correct for that in how you go about it.

DF: Yes. My task was initially the more modest one of showing that Christian faith remains credible and an intellectually defensible option within the modern world. I was not attempting to, as it were, "clear the field" of all rival positions. I don't think that is possible; I'm not sure that it's the province of theological reason to do that. My intention was to defend Christian faith in the face of the attacks – but without seeking to provide a conclusive refutation of all other possibilities. I think that that's an unrealistic strategy in our pluralistic context.

GD: Would you go on to say, though, that there are times and places in which it would be appropriate for Christians to attempt to make a very strong and positive case of the truth of the Christian gospel?

DF: Yes; it is always incumbent upon us to make the best case possible

for the gospel. We're enjoined by the New Testament to offer a reasoned defense for the hope that is within us. So if in the course of defending the faith, we are successful in persuading people of its credibility, then so much the better. I'm pleased about that, but on the whole, people do not come to faith as the result of a philosophical or other argument. Part of my defense of faith was to point out that faith is much more than a commitment to a set of beliefs that one can itemize in propositional form.

GD: Right. So, you were clearing the ground...

DF: Yes, it was, at least at first. Towards the end of the final lecture, I try to say that that this had been a ground-clearing exercise, and that if I were advocating or promoting the Christian form of faith, then I would be speaking more confessionally – for example, about the transforming power of Jesus and the gospel and so on – but this project was of a different sort.

GD: In your lectures and the book that resulted from that, you spend a good deal of time addressing the critiques of the new atheists, especially Dawkins, Dennett and Hitchens. They see religion of any sort as dangerous, wrong and misleading. They claim they're harmful to humanity, and they bring in science to bolster their case. Is there a common line of argument that runs through them that we need to understand?

DF: There's a family resemblance of arguments. Dawkins is more inclined than the others to enlist science in the criticism of religion. You will find more philosophical arguments in Dennett against the reasonableness of faith, whereas Hitchens is particularly preoccupied with showing the pernicious forms that religion tends to take in the modern world. He has this mantra, "religion poisons everything" that runs throughout the book *God Is Not Great*. Hitchens is more focused on the practical effects of religion than perhaps the others are, although there are elements of that in Dawkins, too.

GD: Why do you think they latch onto that? It seems to me that over the last 20, 30 years, that's a bit of shift, that the critiques of Christianity didn't use to come from that angle, they weren't quite as vehement. Do you have any insights about that shifting? Am I right about that?

DF: I think you're right. It is in some ways a post-9/11 phenomenon. When I was a student in the 1970s I was taught by many secular intellectuals. They tended to regard religion as quaint and harmless. It was to wither on the vine. It was completely unappealing – but it was not dangerous, and they weren't angry about it. They were skeptical and dismissive, but not aggressive in the way in they dismissed it. There was

a degree of condescension at times, but not the anger that we have in the new atheism.

Partly, it's borne of the realization that religion, when considered globally, is not withering on the vine – it's resurgent throughout much of the world. We see some secularization here in Western Europe. But religion is a potent force in other parts of the world. This is particularly evident in militant Islam, which is a target within the writings of the new atheists. So I see them as working in something of a post-9/11 context.

Some of them have written specifically about 9/11 and have seen this as a watershed in our life as a society. It calls for a much more radical attack on religion. They're concerned about the soft-centered pluralist nature of our Western democracies. It's time to come out and to take on religion, to subject it to rational inspection and criticism – hence the title of Dennett's book: *Breaking the Spell* – a spell over the criticism of religion that we have to break. I sense (and you know more about this than I do) that there is perhaps some greater difficulty in coming out as an atheist in the United States than there is in Europe. Part of the campaigning tenor of the literature is with a view to persuading people to come out and to self-identify as atheist or agnostic. There are some signs from the recent opinion polls that they have been successful in doing that.

GD: It's interesting how much 9/11 has affected our lives in many ways.

DF: Some writers have suggested that the new atheism is Islamophobic in particular. Its most extreme invective is directed towards Islam (that's certainly true of some of Harris' writings). There is a case to be made for Islam as perhaps the primary target.

GD: Professor Fergusson, I think you made a very interesting and important observation in your lectures about the nature of religion, including Christianity, in which you distinguish between religion, and beliefs or belief systems. Sometimes that's all mushed together. Would you explain to us about that distinction between religion and beliefs, and why that's important?

DF: Much of the new atheist literature suggests that religion involves a set of beliefs in supernatural objects. It's about that and only that. If you are to read Richard Dawkins or some of the recent literature in the cognitive psychology of religion, you might get that impression, that that is the sum total of religion.

My argument in this book is that, while faith does involve some cognitive elements, it's not possible to strip belief from out of faith. That

is only one element or set of elements within faith. It involves a wide-ranging set of practical commitments, emotional commitments, dispositions to behave in particular ways, belonging to a faith community and embracing its traditions and practices of worship and typical habits. In faith, we often find a commitment to particular diets or forms of clothing or observance of holidays and rituals, and these are important in shaping the self and in facilitating faith.

These more practical affective and communal dimensions of religion are seriously neglected in the literature, to the extent of distorting what is involved in coming to faith and then practicing faith. Part of what I had to say was to stress this more contextual communal, existential dimension of faith and its commitment. It's not like Bertrand Russell's "celestial teapot" – believing in one more object up there in the skies to add to our cognitive stock. That is seriously to misrepresent what is involved in faith.

GD: What has that done to rearrange the argument, or address the critique?

DF: It re-situates the critique insofar as it directs it towards practice (although belief is not irrelevant; there are belief commitments involved in faith); it directs the discussion more towards the significance of belonging to a faith community, of participating in its rituals and ethical practices, of getting an insider's perspective on what it is like to be a person of faith, rather than this more externalist approach that is adopted by the critics.

GD: So, to attack the rationality of a belief, or to charge an irrationality, is too narrow a view of what religion is. If they're going to evaluate what a religion is, they have to account for much more of what's going on...

DF: Yes, they have to look at what people do, how they behave, how they experience the world, the lives they lead, in a much more holistic context, rather than just asking them what they believe before breakfast each day. That is to distort the nature of faith.

GD: As you defend religion and the Christian faith, it seems to me that you have two major elements involved. First, you want to demonstrate that empirical or scientific descriptions of reality that come from neo-Darwinism (or out of a naturalistic framework) don't negate or rule out the need for a religion or theological understanding. Second, you show how such scientific views can't adequately account for human endeavors such as morality, art and religion. Could you say more about those two angles on your argument to defend the Christian faith?

DF: A central part of my thesis is this idea of the complementarity of

discourses. I see science and religion as not in competition with each other, as not inhabiting the same terrain – but as offering different descriptions and forms of understanding. Once we establish the essentially complementary nature of that relationship, then we can, as people of faith, stop worrying about the incursion of science upon the domain occupied by religion. They occupy different types of terrain, and they offer different descriptions, and therefore this isn't a zero-sum game where the more that science explains, the less there is for religion to explain. The forms of understanding represented are layered rather than clashing on the same level. That was my fundamental take on the relationship between science and religion.

That's not to say there aren't, historically, points of tension or conflict, or that there isn't a possibility of creative dialogue between science and religion. But they are attempting to address different types of questions and to offer different forms of understanding. Added to that is a farther view that science and religion don't exhaust all the possibilities. In addition to religion, we have social-scientific, historical, ethical and aesthetic ways of describing the world and our experience, and these, too, are useful, and they complement what we have in science and religion.

I reject the kind of scientistic reductionism that we find in Dawkins and others by making common cause with other disciplines and forms of understanding and arguing that we need all of these. It is a mistake to see only one form of discourse as having a total explanation of everything. Science can't explain everything – that's basically my take on this. I find that many scientists share that view. Scientism is not an ideology that one finds amongst very many scientists, in my experience.

GD: Some of these critics seem to inhabit that orientation – scientism...

DF: Right, and there's a danger: a popular perception of the power of science is that it excludes religion. As science has advanced, so religion has had to retreat in what it can seek to explain and understand. That is a category mistake. We are dealing with different forms of understanding, responses to different types of questions.

GD: So that religion has just as much to do with the natural world, with morality and art especially. You bring those out.

DF: Religion does relate closely to the types of explanation that we find in ethics, on the arts. I'm arguing in the book for a kind of a realist explanation of ethics and the arts – they point towards truths that are not of our own making, truths that we discover in our ethical activity and our

artistic appreciation. These seem to be similar to what is happening in religion. It's not simply a matter of self-expression or self-projection. We are encountering truths, dimensions of reality that are not of our making. These are disclosing themselves to us in our activity, in our apprehension of whatever the object of study is.

GD: Can you give an example of that in the arts?

DF: In the arts, we often have awakened within us a sense of beauty that points towards the transcendent. We find it difficult to explain that. We have recourse to symbolic language, but it's a form of appreciation that constrains our understanding. As Iris Murdoch says, in going round the art gallery, the experience we have is not that of shopping in a supermarket, where we select whatever gives us pleasure. We are taken out of ourselves and drawn into another dimension. That's slippery language, of course.

For many people today, it's in the experience of beauty or some other disclosure that comes through a poem or painting, or piece of music, that takes them out of themselves and evokes a sense of the transcendent. To that extent, the world of the arts is close to that of religion, although it's not the same.

GD: A strictly materialistic or scientific description would not have much to say about why this is or how this is...

DF: Right. A neo-Darwinian account might explain how it is that our brains are wired in such a way that we are capable of artistic appreciation, and how we have evolved as creatures with aesthetic sensibilities. But that does not explain what it is we experience in that domain.

GD: Near the end of the book, you argue for at least maintaining or even increasing education on religion and theology in our schools and universities. What's at stake here? Why do you think that's crucial?

DF: Religion is fundamental to human culture. A study of the world today would suggest that. It's important therefore that our children have an informed understanding of religion – what it is and what it is not. We need to contest the notion that religion is somehow under attack from science. That doesn't serve science very well, either. The kind of attack that Dawkins launches upon religion is likely to dissuade many young people of faith from pursuing a career in science. It is in the interest both of science and faith that we have an informed understanding of these and of their relationship. That's a challenge for our schools and universities.

GD: We have tended to marginalize the study of religion.

DF: In our educational system here, we do well at primary school. But

then it tends to get left behind as students are more absorbed with other subjects in the curriculum – although we're now seeing students taking certificate studies in religion, theology and philosophy, which is producing much better work, I would say, in science and religion.

The flip side of the Dawkins attack on religion is creation science, where we have a religious attack on certain scientific nostrums. I think that is equally misguided, for the kind of reasons that I have been advancing earlier. I would like to see more attention given to that, and to the reasons why it's misguided, in our educational curriculum.

GD: Thank you so much. I appreciate your time.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN JESUS' INCARNATION AND HIS SAVING WORK

Gary Deddo: Welcome. I'm glad you could be here. You have been teaching theology for quite a number of years, at more than one school. Not a lot of people teach theology. And in churches I'd been in or other situations, sometimes people wonder, what's theology? Do we need it? What's it important for? It seems abstract to people. But you did your doctoral work in theology with James Torrance in Aberdeen and you've been teaching for many years. Could you tell us a little about why you pursued that trajectory and what you found of value of in Christian theology?

Jeannine Graham:

Being a teacher was never on my radar screen. Even in elementary school, I thought I could never be a teacher because what if I'd stand before the class and say everything I knew in the first five



minutes— what would I do with rest of the hour? That's never been my problem. It's been the opposite. Too much to jam into an hour. So it's been a bit of a surprise that God has led me there.

I went to Scotland not to earn a PhD, not to teach – just I heard [James Torrance] speak at an extension course (Fuller extension course) and I was so enthralled, I was mesmerized by what he was saying. After the second class, I was walking to my car and I just couldn't get to my car, because I had the strong compulsion to go back and ask him something. I said no, no, no. Time to go. He needs to go.

I was stopped dead in my tracks and I finally went back and said: Professor Torrance, where would you recommend somebody like me go to study the line of thinking that you're talking about? Because you have brought together the philosophy that I studied in college and the theology in college and seminary. You've opened up the concept of grace in a way that is so life-giving to me. I can't NOT study it. So, where would you recommend?

I had no idea that he would say: Come to Aberdeen. And I thought, well, I happened to be in between jobs, I happened to have a little money that would enable me to do it. I happened to have an adventurous spirit. So, why not? So, I went there, again, not for the degree. Not for the end goal — that probably would have scared me, the very thought of teaching or being a professor – but I just had to learn and glean from him when I could before he retired the next year.

GD: What's teaching been like for you?

JG: Exciting, although not every aspect of teaching is riveting, but it's exciting when you see light bulbs go on for any students. And especially when I get to share things that are on my heart. They're my passion. A lot of it I learned from Professor Torrance. And a lot of it is not what many of my students have heard from the pulpit or growing up. It's easy for them to fall by default back into thinking of Jesus in a certain way and the Christian life in certain way. And it's kind of ho-hum, yeah, we believe that sort of stuff. But it's not gripping our heart. So, I want to share with them the kind of heart-gripping experience that I got from Professor Torrance. Not everybody gets it, because you have to shift paradigms a little and get out of the default mode of the way they've always heard it packaged. But it's really exciting.

GD: Right. The light bulb coming on and I can identify...

JG: Theology itself is important. Jesus told us that we are to love God

with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Our mind matters, and when our mind and our thinking is shaped by distorted thoughts of God that owe more to Greek philosophy than the Bible, for instance, or we import things from our culture onto the Scriptures, then it has a deadening effect and that affects how we live, whether we are living a Christian life that's liberating, that's exciting, or just ho-hum, dutiful... It matters how we think about God and how we understand what God has done for us in Christ.

GD: I've heard pastors say, well, we don't want to get theological about it... or others would say, theory has its place, and they're thinking theology is theory and after so much theory, you've got to get on to practice. There's kind of a divide there, but I think that divide is artificial. What would you say?

JG: I cringe every time I hear a pastor say that (and I've heard a lot of pastors say this) because they don't want to "turn off the audience." They assume that if you get theological, people are going to get a glazed look over their eyes.

I had an experience once. I had graduated with a PhD and I was looking for a place to land, so I was doing some teaching for my church at the time. It was an adult education class. I was teaching on some aspect of the Bible and I happened to let the word theology leave my lips. I thought they would get all excited, like I do, because theology is an exciting thing. As soon as that word left my lips, I saw that predictable glaze come over their eyes. One person said, "We don't want to hear about theology. We just want to know what the Bible says."

I thought to myself, "Do you realize every time you're asking questions from the Bible – what does he mean here, how does what Paul says here compare to that, what does it mean in terms of how we understand God – you're doing theology?" The question is not "no theology" or "theology is boring." It's bad theology versus good theology — and good theology has a very eminently practical impact.

GD: Yes. I could see them thinking that, why you'd be interested and invested in it, and spend so many years teaching students. In your years of teaching students, have there been pointed questions they really wanted to wrestle with, have there been themes that have come up in the classroom that caught the students' attention?

JG: There is the predictable one: we all agree if we're Christians that Jesus died for our sins and "Okay. Next issue, we've nailed that one. Nothing more to be said." And I say, oh there's a lot to be said – that's what

sent me to Scotland.... I realized that Jesus died for our sins. But how does what happened 2000 years ago actually alter my human nature so that I'm transformed? Is it just a theoretical thing I say, that I agree theoretically to some proposition? Or is there something more dynamic going on?

When I was in high school, I was a new believer and I went to my first Bible study. They handed out 3x5 cards and they asked us to write down what is a Christian. And so I wrote (probably 10 seconds flat) I nailed it – believing that Jesus died for your sin. Okay. I saw other people take a little more time. My friend that came to the Bible study with me was writing copiously on this side and kept writing and then flipped it over and wrote and filled the other side. She told me what she wrote: “It's a moment-by-moment life relationship...” and she went on and on. My thought was, “Well, that's complicating things. Jesus died for your sins. You're in.”

I hope my understanding has been matured since then. But here are people who were raised in the church and basically, that's not too far off from what they understand Jesus did. And why did he become human? It's because you have to have a body to die, so he had to take upon himself a human body so that he would die on the cross, and it had to be a sinless, spotless lamb, so he had to live a sinless life in order to be the spotless lamb that was acceptable. But it's all aimed at Jesus' death on the cross. And what I want to open their eyes up to is: Is that the sole significance of Jesus' life? Is having a body that can die, and it's the death that we want to emphasize?

GD: Your doctoral thesis (which turned into a book) focused on the cross of Christ, an account of the doctrine of atonement (**JG:** cross and resurrection and ascension.) Tell about that, because there is a focus on the cross and the death of Christ, but there's more to it. So, what kind of things did you explore in your doctoral thesis and in the book that fills that out more?

JG: Any time you study with Professor Torrance you're plunged into reading the early church fathers, so I was introduced to the theology of Athanasius. Athanasius says what the human dilemma is: sin is not just breaking the law. In our century we're so steeped in the legal metaphors so we think of it as breaking the law, so God pays the penalty, or we owe a debt and so Christ pays the debt – that kind of terminology. But for Athanasius, sin was more like a corrosion of our deep nature, a corrosion of our humanness. We become less human as we dabble in sin, as we traffic in sin.

So, what's the remedy? He rejects the idea of God simply forgiving us. That doesn't get to the root – the ontological root of our dilemma. We need a new heart. We need a new nature. We need a renovation, we need a re-creation of our nature. Hmm... I hadn't thought of atonement as involving God reaching into the depths of our being to change us there and to transform us. How does the incarnation flesh that out?

And then reading Barth, you realize atonement doesn't just start with Calvary. It starts with Bethlehem. Jesus takes upon himself our flesh... not just pristine flesh, but the very flesh we live in, the flesh that's fallen. He takes it. In taking it to himself, he's sanctifying it at the same time. But he takes the very thing that needed fixing so that he can fix our human nature at the ontological depths of our being – from within humanity himself. Nobody had ever explained that to me – in college (maybe in seminary, but I didn't hear it), in church. That started me looking at more of the significance of the incarnation for atonement.

GD: That's very important. A similar thing happened to me, in realizing that Jesus didn't just come down to say hello and say, “do you see me? Here I am. I'm going to do this thing on the cross.”

JG: And do a few ethical teachings and heal a few people, too.

GD: Yeah. We have to throw that in, although I didn't know exactly where that fit. But you're connecting the incarnation with the crucifixion. You mentioned the resurrection as well. How does Christ's dying on the cross connect with resurrection?

JG: Well, Jesus takes our fallen, broken humanity (I want to steer clear of the idea of a penal substitution, of pummeling Jesus, punishing Jesus, to let us off the hook. Those ideas are out there. But that seems more foreign to me as I read the Scriptures...) and you could say that Jesus absorbs the judgment of God. God wants to judge that which is dehumanizing us. Sin dehumanizes us – depersonalizes us. Jesus embraces that in order to get rid of it, to divest us of that. That gets taken to the grave, judged, put away.

And then, this new creation, this new nature that Jesus is forging through living in our flesh, taking our flesh through every stage of human existence – that is raised though his resurrection. That is enlivened for us and we get to experience that. The Holy Spirit gets to unite us with him so that we participate. We participate in this new life through the Holy Spirit.

If it just ended with death, a lot of things would happen. Take what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15: We're still in our sins, we're still enslaved.

Our preaching that's mentioning that Jesus rose and is victorious over sin – that's gone. We're liars, because we said we saw the risen Christ, so there's whole sorts of reasons why the resurrection is essential. But also the transformation of our very being is realized through this new humanity, through the resurrection, that becomes accessible to us through the union with Christ that the Holy Spirit enables.

GD: The Christ who dies is the Christ who's raised. I was taught early on that (at least what I recall is) the resurrection was just to prove that he was the Son of God. I didn't really see the connection, that what he accomplished on the cross was completed in the resurrection. And that's not the end of the story, either, because the ascension has to come in here, too, right?

JG: Yes. He's sitting at the right hand of the Father. He ever lives to intercede for us, Hebrews [7:25] says something like that. We have a representative before the Father pleading our case, representing us, on our side – along with the Holy Spirit, who prays for us when we're weak. So we've got the ally of the Holy Spirit and the ally of the risen Christ with us and present with us through the Spirit, to guide the church and to empower the church.

GD: So, Jesus isn't on vacation or retired. That's what I used to.... (I don't think they taught me that, but that is what I had been assuming.) I didn't really appreciate the significance of the ascended Christ and his continuing ministry. So, that left a gap in my thinking.

JG: Even in the Christian life, I think somewhere in my teaching, I used a football analogy... There are a lot of atonement metaphors and theories. One of the more popular ones in the 20th century and 21st century is Jesus as moral exemplar. Why did Jesus come? To show us how to do it. To show us who God is. To show us what the problem is. And if we just imitate Jesus, we too can have that same quality of life. We just imitate, we just try hard to sail over this high bar that we see Jesus [sailed over]. And so the football analogy is: Jesus runs down the field and then he comes back and he hands us the football and he sits on the sidelines... “Okay, your turn. I did my part. Now, I'll watch you.”

That doesn't work with atonement, that doesn't work with the resurrection, that doesn't even work with the basic Christian life. Jesus is never on the sidelines. We're never done with our need for the mediator. The whole Christian life is Christ in us, the hope of glory. “I live, yet not I, but Christ in me. The life I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God

who loved me and gave himself for me” [Gal. 2:20]. Jesus has never taken a snooze, retiring.

GD: That's a good thing. The longer I live in the Christian life, the more important that becomes, not less important. And it's not theory, it's a daily thing. Even in our prayers, in our worship and all that... to call on Jesus. He's not off the scene, off somewhere else. It's a great joy and privilege.

Is there anything else you'd like to say about what you learned about the atonement that sometimes gets missed?

JG: Embedded in my book title is “representation and substitution.” That became the focal point of my doctoral dissertation, suggested to me by Professor Torrance (although my readings in the theology of Barth and all had been leading me in those directions). Substitution and representation would come up, so I was trying to figure out how those work together to make me right with God – for God to reconcile the world to himself. So that became my focus. Jesus is our substitute.

Today, as I might have mentioned, substitution often gets construed as penal substitution: God punishing Jesus, who stands in our stead. God is angry with us. God would normally punish us because we're the sinners, we're the perpetrators. But Jesus says, will you let them off if I stand in their place? And so the vengeful God takes it out on Jesus and we are the beneficiaries. That's one way of understanding substitution. That's not the only way.

Jesus does something for us that we can't do for ourselves. Jesus says the summary of the law is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. I don't know about you, but I never do that perfectly everyday. Love God with everything you've got. I'm always loving myself in bad ways and not loving my neighbors as I should and falling short of that.

This is the concept that I learned from Torrance, I had never heard it before, but he talks about the double movement of grace. Double movement of grace? Why did no seminary professor introduced that? He said it all goes back to the all-important “who” question. Professor Torrance says, you can't understand the “what” of what Jesus did on the cross before you've answered the “who” question. If you think, well, Jesus died on the cross to take our sins away, you've already presupposed your answer to the “who” question: He was just a man. But then how does that do the job? He was just a man who inspired me to be self-sacrificial and benevolent towards people – that doesn't change my heart. If he's just God, that thing that he did on the cross doesn't really reach me. He's not in

solidarity with me. It's sort of coming somewhere above, and how do I relate to that? How does that fix me?

The answer I hear from classic creeds and the Scripture is Jesus is fully God – “in him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form” (Colossians 1:19, 2:9). And at the same time, mysteriously, this wondrous reality, he is also fully human. Not partially, not half and half, not 80/20, 70/30. One hundred and 100% both, in the same person. Torrance says when we look at what Jesus did in his life, we have to realize that he is acting as God and he is also acting as a human being.

The covenant says that when God established the covenant with Israel – “I will be your God, you'll be my people.” That shorthand gets laced throughout Scripture. God is faithful to be their faithful provider, covenant partner. And Israel is not all that good at being faithful back as a faithful covenant partner. So, eventually God says, in Jeremiah, I'm going to make a new covenant, not because the previous iterations of the covenant are bad, but because people's hearts are broken and they can't do it. So, I'm going to change their hearts, I'm going to change their minds [Jer. 31:33].

That promise is set out there, and Jesus comes along as the true Israelite, the one who is going to do the job on both sides of that relationship. He is fully God, so he could represent the things of God to us. We know who God is. We don't have to guess, we don't have to fill in the blanks for ourselves. “Well, I like to think of God as this way.” No. When you see Jesus, you see the heart of the Father. He shows us the Father. He forgives sins. He does the progress (?) of the Father. At the same time, he is in our position, in solidarity with us, as the faithful covenant human partner, being faithful, living a life of utter faithfulness, of loving and trusting and unbroken communion with the Father. He's doing both things at the same time. He's fulfilling the covenant from both sides.

I had never heard that before. It made so much sense and it's almost like the picture I get is looking at Jesus through binoculars and sometimes when I look through the binoculars, I close one eye or the other. And Torrance's teaching is saying, no, look through both lenses. Look at him as truly human and truly God at the same time he's doing this. That is at the heart of his representation. He represents God to us; he represents us to God. He is rendering our faithful response to the Father on our hand, on our behalf, and in our place.

That's the difficult part for my students. They get the fact that he is God

with us. This is moving into Christmas. “You shall call his name Immanuel, God with us” [Matt. 1:23]. They get that, and they get that Jesus was a man. But they think of him that he showed us how to live ethically and all. They don't get Jesus as the faithful human covenant partner of God who offers, on our behalf, the perfect response to the Father that we failed to offer.

GD: Thanks for sharing with us. That gives us a picture as to why you invested so much of your life in studying Scripture and the theological synthesis of all that, and why you want others to know and appreciate and enter in and do that through your teaching. Thanks so much.

JG: You're welcome.

JESUS' EXCLUSIVE CONNECTION TO HUMAN NATURE

Gary Deddo: Welcome once again. (Jeannine Graham: Thank you.) It's great to have you here. I know another area of interest that you've written about is what's called “the one and the many.” You wrote a journal article on this, especially James Torrance's understanding of the one and the many. But I never heard much about that when I was growing up. Tell us what your interest was. Why talk about Jesus as the one for the many?

Jeannine Graham: Well, in my upbringing I never heard that either. It wasn't until I studied with Torrance that that novel concept came. But it was related to the representation-substitution thing that I talked about earlier. He gave me a category, I guess, a lens by which to look at the Scriptures. You can see that running through numerous places. One place is when God establishes a covenant with Abraham.

When I've taught Bible survey, I usually ask my students a question after we talk about the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2. And then things get wrecked up in Genesis 3 and all hell breaks loose and alienation abounds. And I say, “Okay. For 30 seconds, this is your chance to be God: how would you fix the situation? Go.” So they talk to their neighbor and come up with all sorts of solutions. Most of them have these mega instantaneous, by fiat, God changes things just like that. But then somehow that sacrifice is freewill, and so we've got to work that in, and they never come up with a biblical solution. I said, “Those are interesting, that's not

the choice that God made.”

God begins to fix the solution one person at a time. One person. He identifies Abraham. He gives these promises to Abraham: “I’m going to bless you. I’m going to bless those who bless you. I’m going to make your name great. I’m going to give you many descendants.” Abraham has all these promises and then God says, “I want you to pack up go to this place I’ll give you.” He doesn’t have an itinerary. He doesn’t know where God is going to lead him. It would have been an interesting conversation with Sarai. “Where are we going?” “I don’t know.” “Why are we going?” “I don’t know, but God told us so.”

That becomes the beginning of the covenant relationship. Through this one person, he’s going to begin to build a people, who become the people of Israel. God chooses this people, insignificant people. He could have chosen any group, but chooses this people to be the vehicle, the vessel, through whom God is going to work his covenant purposes out – to eventually gather all nations to himself. He’s not going to opt for the fiat solution. He’s going to sidle up to these people, to enter into a relationship with these people, and through their history, the world will see something at the heart of who God is, and something of the desperate need of human nature – the human condition. What a great privilege for Israel to be that vessel—but it’s also a great responsibility to try to live up to that covenant partnership, to be that faithful covenant partner.

Meanwhile then, in their history, there are “one and the many” instances – the Levites are one of the 12 tribes. The 11 tribes are given land. But the Levites are not given lands because they’re to be interspersed with all of the tribes to be kind of the worship coordinators of the tribe. They have a special mission as the one to bless and benefit the many.

After God delivers Israel from Egypt, there’s a sacrifice that God institutes – by which God is going to redeem the firstborn sons of Israel. The last plague that forced the hand of Pharaoh to “let my people go” and let the Exodus happen was the killing of the firstborn – except that the children of Israel were protected. The Angel of Death passed over their houses, protecting their firstborn. But the sacrifice was to redeem the firstborn, on whom God had a claim. And the firstborn are representing the many people of Israel.

Probably the one that stands out the best, the most vivid to me, was one that Torrance mentions constantly in his writings and teachings. On the Day of Atonement, on one day of the year (around October or so), the Old

Testament high priest is going to act on behalf of the many – the people of Israel. He washes himself, a special cleansing, to cleanse himself from his own sin, because he's a human sinner as well. He puts on certain special vestments. He sets himself apart. He sanctifies himself to do this act on behalf of the people.

Then the people come symbolically with their collective, year-long collection of sins and there's two sacrificial animals. He lays his hands on one and banishes it, with the weight of the sins of the people laid on that animal. He's identifying with the righteousness of God. We are guilty; God is right to judge us. We lay our sins symbolically on this animal and he is led into the wilderness to take the sins of the people away. The other animal is slain, and the blood is collected and taken into the Holy of Holies.

Up to this point, the high priest is acting on behalf of all the people. He is the one representative, acting on behalf of the many. He goes in with this blood sacrifice before the Holy of Holies pleading with God to remember his covenant relationship, to forgive the people, to restore them to right relationship. When he comes out of the Holy of Holies, now he's representing God to the people. Before, he was representing the people to God. Now, he's representing God to the people with a blessing of peace, the assurance of restoration. That covenant relationship has been renewed. They don't have to drag their accumulated guilt from year to year. It's like that ball and chain is cut and they have a new start. It says (I think in Hebrews 6), all Israel entered into the Holy of Holies... (well, not literally, or there wouldn't be a place for them). They enter, in the person of their representative. And the people of God got that. This double representative relationship was patently obvious. That was at the heart of their sacrificial life, their worship life.

What Torrance did for me, besides highlighting that for me, was to say, Jesus is talked about as the High Priest, especially in the book of Hebrews, but also in John 17. In the high priestly prayer before he's arrested, Jesus prays to his Father. He says, I sanctify myself. I set myself apart, just like the high priest of old set himself apart, he sanctifies himself. He has no need to atone for his own sins because he's lived a sinless life. The high priest in the Old Testament would wear a vestment that had 12 stones representing the 12 tribes of Israel, signifying his solidarity with Israel. Jesus is representing humanity. He is going to be led to the cross. At that time he is both the high priest and the sacrificial victim all in one, fulfilling the covenant promises and taking the penalty, the judgment of sin upon

himself. All of that is happening in the cross.

Then, before he leaves to ascend to heaven, he gives the blessing of peace to his disciples – the relationship is restored, and he breathed on them the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit becomes the empowerment for them to carry on his ministry. He will continue his ministry, his continuing priesthood. He doesn't hang up his priestly vestments when he goes to heaven. He doesn't even divest himself of his humanity. He continues his humanity in its glorified state after resurrection. He's still in heaven representing us and his priesthood still continues. But now he's present to us in a different sort of way through the Holy Spirit.

GD: So the idea of one for the many, which I don't think many hear about, is biblical. It's represented at many different places throughout and it finds its fulfillment in Christ, so he ends up being the one for the many...

JG: And in the New Testament: Romans 6, when he died, we died. That's one for the many. When he was baptized, we were baptized. We share in the one baptism of Jesus – that started in the waters of Jordan and culminates on the cross. He took our place, identifying with us and in solidarity with us. And when he died, Paul says, we're included in that.

GD: Other interesting things that I think are related to this: maybe you could talk a little about Jesus being, sometimes the terminology is the “federal head of humanity” and also – Pauline language – Jesus being the new Adam. How does that fit in?

JG: Well, in my book, which you could get for the low, low price of \$90, I play around with four different terminologies, and the second one speaks to that. But the first one I'd say, and it has to do with the one and the many – I used the word exclusive. He is THE one for the many. He's not just one among many prophets. He's not just one guru who had a little more clear God-consciousness than the rest of us; he was a man ahead of his time. He was not just our moral exemplar and great moral teacher we try to emulate. He is THE prophet, THE teacher, THE priest, exclusively.

Because of his exclusive identity as fully God and fully human, that exclusivity enables him to be the all-inclusive one. It's because of his unique identity he is able to do the second point – exclusivity, the one for the many inclusivity. The many in the one. He is able to do that uniquely. No other person... I can't climb inside your humanity, you know, there are barriers.

Two things tip me off in this direction: One is the language I find in Romans 5:12-21. Paul uses an Adam/Christ parallelism and he says, just

as Adam, through his act of disobedience, brought condemnation and judgment and death, so another man (and we hear that referred to as second Adam in various ways; clearly a second Adam would jive with that).... Another man through his (not only one act) whole life of obedience and faithfulness brought justification and life.

You constantly see this: just as Adam started the ball rolling in a disastrous legacy (where the bottom line is that we're imprisoned in sin and can't help ourselves – as the descendants of that legacy), Jesus, in a way, reboots humanity. He takes upon himself our flesh and takes it through every stage of human existence doing right where the first Adam did wrong, obeying where the first Adam and Eve personally did wrong. Trusting with all his heart where Adam and Eve were trusting themselves and deviating from God's plan.

In a way (to use T.F. Torrance's language), God's been bending our rebellious wills back to himself. Not just in a fiat – snap of the finger sort of way – but by living through our humanity from day to day, moment to moment, responding to the Father with faithfulness, that's the faithful human covenant response that I talked about previously. And in so doing he is re-wiring, he is re-creating our humanity. That process culminates on the cross. It doesn't begin with the cross. Again, highlighting the significance of Jesus' whole life. That's the Adam/Christ parallelism in Romans 5.

The other part takes us back to who is Jesus. When I read John 1, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning... and through him all things came into being.” Through this Word... (We don't know yet – it seems like maybe it's a verbal word, until we get to verse 14 and we realize the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Oh, that's the Son of God who becomes incarnate as Jesus. So, we're not just talking about a verbal word.) This is the Word through whom all things came into being. That same idea is in Colossians 1, it's in Hebrews 1, it's replete.

The Creator Word, when he takes upon himself our flesh, he can connect with us, he has a connection with our being because it's through him our being came into existence. Our ontological existence (the fancy terminology) is linked to our Creator. (You can't do that for me; I can't do that for you.) The Creator/Word becomes flesh and so he already has this capability of affecting, transforming, impacting your humanity, my humanity. The Creator/Word alone can re-create.

That's the hard part that my students struggle with, because they're not used to thinking of Jesus... (They're used to thinking of Jesus as an individual. He's an individual, you're an individual and a great individual. He does great things.) But to think that he is the head of humanity, the Creator/Word that is connected, that my humanity is included in him, he bound himself to my humanity, that's a challenge. But that's what I hear in Scripture.

GD: That's a unique and surprising connection of Christ, the one for the many... it's surprising.

JG: And the many in the one. That's the second inclusive, in the one. Maybe this is a chance to talk about the "in Christ"?

GD: Sure.

JG: Indulge me. I get excited about this because this whole thing is not theoretical to me. This makes all the difference in how I look at the Christian life and I used to try to live a Christian life through my own efforts. I wouldn't confess to that at that time. That would be works righteousness, how dare I. But when I look back I think, yeah, I was stuck in that route. That's what sent me to Scotland, because I always had the feeling that God was disappointed in me. Somehow I wasn't measuring up. I wasn't doing enough. I wasn't jumping high enough, I wasn't running fast enough. I wasn't fill-in-the-blank enough to measure up to God's acceptable standards, so I tried harder. If you buy into that recipe, that's what you're left with – it's just trying, trying harder, which will be exhausting after a while.

When I went to Scotland I thought "I hope there's better news that he has to tell me, that would get me off of that treadmill." Christ is representative substitution, the one from the many, was liberating me, severing me from that tie. But also it put me on a new trajectory. And I read Ephesians 1. This is where it just jumped into stark focus. I won't read the whole chapter but...

3Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realm with every spiritual blessing in Christ. [in Christ] 4For he chose us in him before the creation of the world, to be holy and acceptable in his sight. 5In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons and daughters through Jesus Christ 6to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8which he lavished on us. With all wisdom and

understanding, 9he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10to be put into effect when the times had reached their fulfillment—to bring unity of all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. 11In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13And you also were included in him when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

Lights went on. Where is this salvation? Is not just something Jesus kind of accomplished and then he retires and here's this accomplishment that he did, that we tap into. This is so plain to me. The salvation is in him. It's nowhere else than in him. It's God doing surgery on the human life by taking humanity to himself and fixing it from within. As Calvin says, if we're not united to Jesus, we can't benefit from salvation. We have to be united with him. So, it's been wrought, this new nature, this recreated nature for us, has been wrought in the person of Jesus. You can't separate the person and the work.

We need to be united with Jesus, which happens by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit awakens us to faith. This is for you and unites us with Jesus. So now, we participate in this new life in Christ. That's how I hear Paul saying in Galatians 2:20: "I've been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me." Sounds like we're kicked to the curb. "No longer I who live but Christ." And then he goes, "and the life that I live..." oops, we're still in the picture. The life I now live is lived on a totally different basis. "I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." Jesus becomes the source of our new life.

Paul says it elsewhere: "Christ in us, the hope of glory" [Col. 1:27]. I never quite saw that. Because so much of the teaching that abounds, that I partook of was, Jesus did something. And it's not integrally related to him... he was the doer of it. But now it's done, it's like this package over here and we somehow need to unpack it and make it ours and apply it to ourselves and all that kind of stuff. No. The Christian life is day-to-day participating in union with him by faith. It's the joy of participating in his life, his accomplishments. So, inclusive.

Preclusive: the many are displaced by the one; we are divested of our illusion that we operate according to an independent source apart from our true source. No. God created us and, like it or not, we can't cut ourselves

off from that source. That is our source. What Jesus wants to do is divest us of our pseudo-self, the illusion that we can pull it off, that we are our own source, that we can sever ourselves from our Creator.

And then on the last, to finish the last four... exclusive, the one for the many. Inclusive, the many in the one. Preclusive, the many displaced by the one. Conclusive, the one for the many. We are re-humanized. We are re-energized, re-personalized. Jesus' response for us doesn't mean that we don't respond. It means he enables us, he frees us from our imprisonment to sin. Paul talks about (Galatians 3:22 says), we're imprisoned in sin. Ephesians 2 even gets more stark: We are dead. If we are dead in sin, we can't enliven ourselves. Jesus comes to enliven us and enable us to offer our response to God in joyful gratitude, because it all doesn't hinge on us. That's the participation part, the enablement of the Holy Spirit to let Jesus' life be lived in us.

GD: Wonderful. You gave us a big picture, a rich and deep picture of Jesus as the one for the many. It's no wonder you wanted to write about that and teach about it. Thanks for sharing about it with us now.

JG: Thank you.

JESUS THE ANOINTED SON

The interviews with Dr. Habets were originally done for the video series *You're Included*. The technical quality was not sufficient for them to be included in that series, but we were able to transcribe the interviews.

Michael Morrison: We're talking today with Myk Habets, head of Carey Graduate School, part of Carey Baptist College in New Zealand. Myk, it's a pleasure to have you with us [**Myk Habets:** Thank you] – or for me to be with you, since we are in New Zealand on your turf.

MH: Welcome!

MM: Thanks. You've done a number of interesting studies and research. I was particularly interested in what you wrote in your book *The Anointed Son: A Trinitarian Spirit Christology*. You had some interesting



things to say about how we understand who Jesus is. Jesus is very important to Christians. How do we go about learning who this person is?

MH: Good question. I wrote the book partly to present to the academic community, in the hope that that will filter down into classrooms, pulpits,

proclamation, that when we start, we start with Jesus himself (that's a no-brainer) Jesus is risen, ascended to the right hand of the Father. So if we return to Scripture, the Gospels, the epistles, again and again, and what we see there is a number of perspectives on who Jesus is that are utterly complementary, but if we don't see them in their different perspectives (if you like, stereoscopically), then we just see them myopically, then we get a distorted view of Christ. So I wrote this book from one perspective, which I think has been eclipsed, and we need to hear that message again. Christ's relationship to the Spirit, a Christology that starts from below, these sorts of approaches.

MM: What you mean by "from below"?

MH: When we go to the Gospels, we see in John that he starts with this wonderful prologue – John 1:1-8 – "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." So it starts, if you like, up in the heavenlies. It's this insider's view. Here's the Logos, the second person, who condescends and becomes – verse 14 – takes to himself human flesh. Brilliant – wonderful – orthodox.

But the rest of that Gospel and the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark and Luke) don't start above at all – they start with "here is a person, Jesus of Nazareth." Here is someone born to Mary (in a particular way, nonetheless). He's walking along and he calls people to "Follow me. Leave your nets and come follow me." They're not following God – that's not their self-consciousness – they're following a rabbi. They'd been passed over or they hadn't wanted to go into the priesthood. They were fishermen and tax collectors and various disciplines, and this Jewish rabbi, this Jewish man who they see, who they sense, they hear something (I don't know) authoritative, attractive, compelling. In some sense he's what they're looking for before they knew what they were looking for, I think that's the sense we get.

As they journey with Christ, as he teaches them, as they watch him, and they hear, as they see the conflict and the fray, both the positive and the negative, they come to realizations. So in the middle of that ministry, Peter confesses, You are the Lord. And he almost is rebuked for it. You're right, says Jesus, but you don't really know that – that was revealed to you by the Spirit. Give him at least a pass, you know! It's not until after the cross and resurrection where they fully understand, this Jesus is the Messiah.

So we think of the two disciples walking home on the road to Emmaus. Jesus has died. He's been buried, he's in the ground. They don't know of

the resurrection. For them, it's finished. They had invested three years in following a rabbi who turns out to be a hoax, who turns out to say things like, Worship me. Pray to me. I and the Father are one. I share the divine identity. And they start to believe him. Jews.

MM: They said, We had *hoped* he would be the Messiah.

MH: That's right – and now he's dead. God doesn't die. Messiah's don't die. "That's it. Sorry." I think they're walking home embarrassed, they're walking home ashamed, going back to their old communities, their old jobs, their old life, and they're looking back to a community that's going to say, "You got it wrong." More than that, "You've probably betrayed your entire Jewish heritage. You're idolaters." This is probably where they're starting, and they're walking back depressed, and this one journeys with them: "Why are you so sad?" I love God's irony. There is humor there. "Have you not heard? Are you the only one in Israel who doesn't know?"

Then he explains to them who he is from the Old Testament, and they come to know as they meet in the house, sort of a (many would say; I think it's right) a Communion meal, and he is revealed to them, and they come to an understanding.

That would be a Christology from below, that works its way to above. An understanding of the humanity of Jesus, and who he is as a historical person; then it quickly moves to an expression, "You are the Son of God. You are that Word that John talks about." A Christology from below, to above, has to complement a Christology from above (John's stuff), to below. That's the plan.

MM: Some modern theologians also struggle with this – Christology from below and above. Scripture has both – why don't they have both?

MH: What's happened in modern theology from the Enlightenment, the historical-critical method kicks in, and there's a hermeneutic, a reading that's suspicious, so that the miracles go out the window, the supernatural is out, Rudolf Bultmann's demythologization, trying to take the myth out. So what's happened is a Christology that starts below never got anywhere but below. So we end up with a holy man, a great prophet, an inspired Jew, but he's just a man.

For that reason, evangelicals, conservative Christians, orthodox Christians – Protestant, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox alike – said, "well, that's not Christianity. That's not the God-man." In reaction, but an over-reaction, to throw the baby out with the bathwater, now Jesus is almost *only* divine for many people in our churches. The humanity becomes

affirmed doctrinally (I'll pass my exam – tick – he was fully human) but we don't actually believe it in our practical day-to-day life. I think we doubt that Jesus is as human as you and I are.

MM: So we imagine a Jesus who's going throughout life in kind of an unreal way.

MH: Not human-like, yeah. In the early church (this is just repeating early church problems), I think for a number of Western Christians (maybe in the East as well) conservative, orthodox, well-meaning (I'm not saying that they did it deliberately), but the way they preach and proclaim and read Scripture, all we are seeing is God with a meat suit on – eyebrows and legs and arms – the flesh is instrumental.

At its worst, it's Monty Python's *Life of Brian*. When Jesus is on the cross, he starts whistling. "It's OK – don't worry. I'm God. This is easy-peasy stuff." When that happens, we go back to the Scriptures and we see Jesus is tempted in every way as we are, but [in the thinking of many people] he's not. He's Superman. He's Clark Kent, he pulls his shirt back, and he's Superman – he's the Logos. So we have instrumentalized the human flesh.

The early church has names for that. It's Apollinarianism, where the human mind of Christ, the human will of Christ, is gone, and in its place is the Logos, so God directly acts on the flesh of Jesus. It's purely mechanical, instrumental. We don't teach that directly, but we teach that indirectly in many of our churches.

MM: Because we are too interested in worshipping Jesus?

MH: We get to the divinity too quickly, if I can put it that way. We should get to the divinity, but we're not holding the full humanity of Christ at the same time. The rub is: when things don't go well for me, when I'm tempted, when people around me are sinners (as I am), when stuff happens in life, and I come to God, where is my sympathetic high priest, as Hebrews talks about? "Yes, Jesus, I know you became human, but not really. It was easy for you. Yes, you were tempted, but not internally – only externally. It was easy for you."

When that starts to happen, we have a cleavage between Jesus and me, between his humanity and my humanity, and when that happens, the Father is so far behind the back of Jesus that we lose sight of him. I think that's what people are saying when they say, I lost my faith. (Not all of them, but many of them.) I would say, I'm not sure you had faith to begin with. I'm not sure it was ultimately there – I think something was missing. That could be turned into an evangelistic tool.

MM: It's like, What kind of God don't you believe in, if you lack faith?

MH: What kind of God are they believing in? They are believing in a God who is different from Jesus, a God who is so far behind the back of Jesus, as Tom Torrance might say, that they can't actually see the real God. He's a monad, he's a thing, he's – to be blunt – he's an idea [**MM:** an abstraction], an idol. And when you're tempted, when you're struggling, when you're in situations where you need God, that sort of a God cannot help.

Whereas Jesus shows, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father." If we follow that logic, "if you have heard my pronouncement of forgiveness, you have been forgiven by God. If I love you, the Father loves you. If you are united to me, you are united to the Father – you've become his children. Our Father, our God."

MM: You're weaving themes from John in there. Earlier you said that Matthew, Mark and Luke started with a Christology from below, with an ordinary human, but John has helped in completing...

MH: Absolutely. John starts from above, but after the prologue, after verse 18, he comes back below. Because how do you speak of a real, genuine, historical Jesus unless you do the below?

MM: John is the one who tells us that, even after the resurrection, Jesus ate fish.

MH: Barbeque on the beach. Wonderful. "I'm not a ghost. I'm real." Wonderful stuff. It's utterly complementary; there's no sense that from below and from above are different Christologies – they are different methodologies to get at the same thing. You can look at any thing from a multiple perspective, and it's the same thing you're looking at. I think that's why we have four Gospels: multiple perspectives which are utterly complementary. I think what we've done in part of our wisdom tradition is that we have muted part of that discussion – the humanity part. "Yes, we'll affirm it, we'll affirm it."

In the early church, Athanasius – one of the heroes of theology – who says that Jesus is *homoousios* – the same stuff, substance, essence as the Father and the Spirit, of the same stuff *homoousios* with you and I in our humanity. The great Athanasius – you read in [his book] *The Incarnation* and he comes to those texts where Jesus hungers and thirsts (and I don't know that God eternal, the Father does), and he begins to equivocate: "This is Jesus' humanity, it's not Jesus' divinity talking." That's Nestorian!

MM: It's like splitting...

MH: Yeah. He wasn't a Nestorian – he fought against them – but on a practical level, he was struggling with “Jesus is too human. It feels like we are dragging him down.” Whereas I would go to the Scriptures. We're not dragging him down – he's giving himself to us. The great Colossians, Philippians stuff. “Have this attitude in yourselves that was in Christ, who humbled himself, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped.” We're not dragging him – God is – to the point of a servant, a slave, a dead slave.

MM: We're not doing that to him – he initiated it himself.

MH: The Father in Christ was doing it, the Spirit with Christ – it's genuinely Trinitarian. If we know Jesus we know the Father and the Son, but we only know Jesus as this God-man – not just God, not just man, but the great God-man. And having divinity and humanity together, as the Scriptures do, gives us a holistic Christianity. I think it's utterly practical, even though you start off abstract, highly theological, some would say esoteric, John 1:1, “in the beginning was the Word” – how does he know? Well, he does know, because that's what Jesus reveals.

MM: Jesus' death on the cross is very important as part of Christianity. What he did for us is very important. Is that the best focus for us to have, in thinking of what Jesus did for our salvation?

MH: In a world of sin and the fall, the cross was necessary – otherwise why did God do it? So yes it is, but the cross is not what saves us. The blood of Christ is not what saves us. It's Christ of the cross, it's *Christ* who has blood, it's Christ who is the point. The cross makes very little sense without the incarnation, without a holy life, without a life lived up to and beyond that point. We're not diminishing the role of the cross, but as Paul said, “If Christ hasn't been resurrected, your faith is in vain.”

So even though Christ says on the cross “It is finished,” it is a reference to the whole work. It's not trying to atomize it, itemize it. (“It's now finished, so I don't have to die” – since he said that before he died – I've heard that from some students, who are asking good questions.) It's the whole package: the life, the death, the resurrection. The death is important, the cross is important, the payment of sins, the substitution, but if we return to our Scriptures, it's the life of this Jesus Christ – the whole life, so the incarnation itself is atoning – that's where I think we need to be.

MM: By incarnation, you don't just mean the birth?

MH: No – the whole life as a man. So if the Logos, the eternal Son, takes to himself a human nature, as Chalcedon and the other creeds affirm and as Scripture tells us, if he takes to himself a complete humanity, a

humanity like yours and mine, he has human will, human mind, human emotions. He also has divine will, mind and emotions, because he is divine, but in one person. Technically we call that a hypostatic union: divine and human natures “glued” together (crudely speaking – that’s not right, but it will do) existing together, but one person.

Now, if we follow that logic, from the moment of Jesus’ conception, he lives the human predicament, the human life. He himself is sinless, and never sins, but he inhabits a humanity that *can* sin, that can feel sin, that can feel temptation. He inhabits a humanity can we say, post Genesis 3 – your humanity, my humanity. And step by step (in the early church the term was *prokopē* – to beat one’s way against the wind, like a boat going into the wind has to tack, tack, tack, or a woodchopper chopping) – to tack, *prokopē*, to cut one’s way forward – this is Jesus’ incarnation. Every temptation common to man, he’s felt. And what’s he done? He’s resisted.

I like the image that many writers will talk about in the early church where he inhabits a sin nature that has (we would say) a bias, a compulsion away from God. Genesis 3. But this is the perfect Son of God as a man. So each decision, each temptation, every moment of his existence from his conception, he’s turning that will back to the Father. Right up till Gethsemane: “Not my will but yours be done.”

Sweating as if drops of blood [Luke 22:44]. Is he play-acting? They wouldn’t say he is, but I think many people think he is. “He’s doing that for our benefit. He’s doing that to show us, This is what a human looks like, but it’s not real.” That’s not just what we read in that narrative. For all the faults of Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*, it does get that right, the genuine anguish of Jesus in the Garden. But he does not give in to Satan, he does not give in to temptation. He overcomes as a human.

That’s what I mean by saying that the entire life of Christ is as important as the death of Christ, because it’s not Christ’s death which is important – it’s *Christ* that dies. So it’s a matter of emphasis.

MM: Other people died on crosses, too.

MH: If there was another person, for argument’s sake, who lived a holy life, but they had maybe told a lie, sinned once, their death is for themselves. At the very best, they could exchange their life for another. Our courts wouldn’t allow that, but you could say, yeah, one life for another.

What makes Jesus’ life and death, his sacrifice, his substitution, infinite? Something else is going on. It’s not just a perfect life – here is a humanity now completely conformed to God, and then on the cross,

substituting himself for us (you know, those haunting words of Paul, Christ became sin [2 Cor. 5:21] – whatever the depths of that meaning), he exchanges his righteousness for our fallenness. We get his righteousness; he gets our fallenness, and he comes and defeats it.

MM: You commented that our courts of law don't allow substitution. Why does God's "court of law" allow it?

MH: Thank goodness it does! If we take a long view, we need to approach the Old Testament: What's the role of Israel? I think this stumps many people, particularly Protestants who either never teach from the Old Testament because "it's done away with" (I think you can understand that) – we're not under the law but under grace. I think if we read the Old Testament, it's all figuring and types prefiguring the coming of Jesus Christ.

This is how Paul talks about the law is a wonderful schoolmistress to bring us to Christ. So in that sense, through Israel God has formed a community (not taken a pre-existing one and "you'll be mine"); he creates a community of people through individuals, gives them a blessing, enters into a covenant with them: "I'll be your God, you'll be my people; I'll give you blessings if you do these things, curses if you do these things."

He's forming them through giving them the law, funny handwashing, don't eat this animal, do eat that, the most religious elaborate cult the world has ever known. God is forming a people to know what it means to come into the presence of someone who is not an idol – someone who is not human – someone who is "our greatest aspirations": God. "I'm holy – take off your shoes. I'm holy – prepare yourself. I'm holy – think different ways, act differently."

All of that is in preparation for Jesus Christ, so that he comes, he is the fulfillment of Israel. He is all Israel. So he represents, he substitutes for all Israel. Time and time again, the Gospels are alluding to this, where Jesus re-enacts the story of Israel. Then we get the climax – not only is this for Israel, Israel (Jesus now) is the porthole through which all humanity will be saved. All humanity will have the Spirit, all humanity can have the promise, the ingrafting that Paul and others talk about.

So if we read the Old Testament, particularly Israel, as this long preparation for the coming of Christ, it makes a whole lot more sense of it.

MM: That gives us a context in which to understand this rabbi.

MH: That's right, from page 1.

MM: We see that Jesus' death was effective because of who he was.

How else do we know it is effective, if we don't already start by knowing who he was.

MH: In some ways you can't. It's in some ways circular. If we return to the Gospels, the Gospels were written last, and they were written after the events, after the resurrection, they were written after, when they had full understanding. The Gospel writers come back and they write Gospels – they write the story of Christ. Not biography, but a bit of that; not history, but a bit of that – this unique genre: Gospel.

They're doing what I call a retroactive reading. It's retro – it's looking back – but it's active, because it's dynamic. They take this understanding of who Jesus is and they come back and write, theologically, his life. It's real – it's historical – it's true, but nonetheless it's a theological reading.

MM: All histories are written after the fact. We understand how the war turned out, so we can see what developed.

MH: So history is, in part, interpretation. So there is this circularity. The early church, and the medieval, would say this is faith seeking understanding. "I believe; help my unbelief." [Mark 9:24] I understand I'm united to Christ; now I want more knowledge, more content, so I believe; now I want to understand. (It's not "I won't believe until I understand.") It's the mode of a disciple.

MM: Or they understand a little bit, they believe that much, and now they want to understand more.

MH: Absolutely. To increase their faith.

MM: You talked about how Jesus dealt with temptation, and how his experience is somewhat similar to ours. Could you elaborate a little more on that. We're not God. How does this work?

MH: If we follow the Scriptures and then the tradition, if we look at the early councils – Nicea and Chalcedon and Constantinople and Ephesus, etc. – they're ruling out options, largely. They're very clever, in the sense that they're not trying to say too much (it's always good to try not to say too much). They are ruling out false options: Don't think of Christ like this, like this. Through that they are building up a broad central conviction that this is how we should think about who Jesus is.

Some of the key elements of that: Jesus is one person; he's the Logos. He doesn't cease to be the Logos, doesn't cease to be God, doesn't even leave the presence of God in some sense, because he is God. So as the Trinity continues. In some sense the second person assumes to himself a human nature and is still one person, with a divine and a human nature. They say that the human nature remains intact, with all of its attributes,

and so also the divine nature remains intact with all of its attributes. That's hard to get our minds around, because there's nothing else, no one else that we can say "that's like him" or "her," or "it." It's utterly unique.

To quote Athanasius, who kept saying this phrase: It's God as a man, not God *in* a man. It's God as a man who is tender, it's God as a man who forgives sins, it's God as a man who eats fish by the sea after his resurrection. It's not God in a man – it's not alien possession. So if it is generally God as a man as we read in the Scriptures, then when he's tempted, the Logos is tempted through his humanity, and that's the key, I think.

Through *what* humanity? We need to make a decision. It's either a pristine humanity out here, like nothing we've seen anywhere before (and a big part of the tradition would say that – I don't), or it's a humanity like yours and mine – my condition, with this (Paul would say) sinful nature. Now, *he's* not sinful, because he's the Logos, but he takes a human nature which is (can we say) defective – faulty – and he redeems it. He perfects it.

MM: Physically, it was faulty: he was mortal.

MH: Absolutely. We can't say a lot more about it, because it becomes rather abstract, but the fact that he was tempted, that he was like us, the fact that he is our redeemer, our substitute, that he lives the human life and he perfects it. It gives a lot of coherence to that.

The Spirit needs to come into that, which is a big theme in my work. What's the role of the Spirit alongside Christ that is in some sense similar to the role of the Spirit in the Trinity? That needs to be articulated to get a fuller sense as well.

MM: I'm glad you mentioned the Spirit. In your book, your subtitle is *A Spirit Christology*. You're looking at the relationship between the Spirit and Christ. You commented that we often overlook the role of the Spirit. How does that happen?

MH: This is one of the exciting things if we go back to the Gospels, and we re-read them and ask this question. Let's look at each of the episodes, each of the chapters, each of the movements, the scenes. Let's ask, Where's the Holy Spirit? Whether he is expressly mentioned, or we know that the Spirit does this sort of stuff and so we can assume it rightly that he's there. So where do we see the Spirit in the life of Christ? Why don't we ask that question more often? You could say the same, Where is the Father? Let's just deal with the Son and the Spirit.

How does Jesus come into the world? The miraculous conception of

Mary. The Holy Spirit overshadows Mary and she is with child. Curious fact? Not *just* curious fact – this is an indicator to a Jewish audience steeped in what we call the Old Testament, that this One has the Spirit from conception. This one was conceived by the Spirit (whatever that means), and there’s a deliberate contrast in the Gospels with his cousin John the Baptist. John was unique. In utero, he is in sense baptized in the Spirit. He leaps for joy by the Spirit. That is utterly unique. Jesus calls him the greatest prophet in Israel – the greatest, and yet he’s not worthy to stoop down and untie the sandals of his cousin Jesus. John, in utero, filled with the Spirit; Jesus conceived with the Spirit.

What does a Jew hear? A Jew hears, here is one that’s anointed. Here’s one who is saturated (smeared, literal translation of “anointed”) with the Spirit. But in the Old Testament, who has Spirit? Prophets, priests, judges, kings (and not even all of them). King David is sort of a paradigm. He is anointed with oil, a symbol of the Spirit; the Spirit of the Lord rushes upon him. And the Spirit comes upon even panelbeaters – Bezalel, early on, he’s the guy that beats these big bronze shields for the tabernacle [Exodus 31]. The Spirit comes upon him. The Spirit rushes upon these people and sets them apart for ministry, for service, for something which they maybe could have done but not to the degree and not to the extent, not with the quality that God wants. A panelbeater can panelbeat, and not even be a Christian, but to produce stuff which is worthy to be in the tabernacle, you need God’s Spirit upon you.

The Jews read the conception narrative of Jesus (or they should, and so should Christians) and ask: “Here is one conceived... What is this saying?” It’s saying he is unlike any individual you have ever seen in history before, but we know about him. These allusions, these echoes in the Old Testament: I will give you Spirit-filled people, I will pour my Spirit out upon all flesh... There is one coming, there is the coming one, there is one greater than Moses, there is the greatest prophet, the greatest priest, the greatest king.

We’ve got all these things. What are we seeing in Jesus? Is he a great prophet? Could be. Will he be a great priest? Could be. Will he be a king? Could be. That’s the imagination as we go through the narrative. He’s actually all three.

So there’s the conception. We move to the baptism of Jesus, at the age of 30. At the age of 30, a Jewish man, if he is so trained and prepared to accept it, enters the priesthood. Here’s Jesus, at the age of 30, entering public ministry. He goes to John, who says, “Behold the Lamb of God who

takes away the sin of the world.” He baptizes Jesus and three things happen: the heavens open. Again, this is not a weather report (you know, it was 30 degrees, it was a mild wind that blew that day and the heavens opened). In the Old Testament, the heavens opened, you have one of two choices: run for the hills – God is judging, or you fall flat on your face in worship because he is about to bless. The heavens opened, [second] the divine voice says, “This is my beloved Son,” and [third] the descent of the Holy Spirit.

He already had the Spirit – he was conceived in the Spirit – so why a second pouring out? Here he’s being set apart as a prophet-priest-king – all three offices in one. He’s being set apart for the ministry of the Messiah, of the Anointed One. In Mark’s Gospel (fantastic – short, punchy, immediate – everything’s “immediately”), immediate the Spirit *ekballō*, threw Jesus into the desert to be tempted by Satan 40 days. Desert, wilderness, 40 days. This is, to a Jew, highly symbolic. This is the Exodus rule. This is the 40 years in the desert. What did God’s son Israel do in the desert? Disobeyed. A two-big journey – 40 years? They disobeyed.

What’s Jesus going to do? That’s the tension, that’s the narrative. The Spirit pushes him after the baptism into ministry and for 40 days without eating, he defeats Satan. He resists temptation. How? The narrative sets it up. By the Spirit. Not because he’s the Logos, not because he’s God, not because there was a default option, [as if] he’s a robot with a default setting. He is a man, a God-man, who is so filled of the Spirit of God that he resists the ultimate temptation of the devil.

Mark says he comes back and in the power of the Spirit he does his ministry. His ministry is specific: he gives sight to the blind, he heals lepers, he heals paralytics. He’s doing all the things which if we read when we turn to the Old Testament, they say, this is what God will do in the last days. This is what God will do in the last days through an individual person – a prophet, a priest, a king – through someone special who has the Spirit. They begin to talk of him as the Messiah. And here Jesus does those ministries. The Gospels are telling us, by the Spirit, in the power of the Spirit, in the power of the Spirit. We are supposed to be getting the message. I think he’s this person the Old Testament talks about. I think he’s God’s fulfillment, God’s promise.

JESUS AND THE SPIRIT

Michael Morrison: You mentioned that Jesus was the Messiah, which means “The Anointed One.” That made me think – anointed with what? The name “Messiah” is reminding us of the role of the Spirit, the importance of the Spirit and who this person is. How does this help us in our Christian walk?

Myk Habets: It makes Jesus more real – certainly for me. I go back and read any Gospel (it doesn’t matter which one) – and I read it with this understanding that Jesus is fulfilling prophecy, fulfilling all of Israel’s promises – that there is a coming one. They couldn’t conceive of how that all jelled together until the coming of Christ – as we read, the prophets wrote, but they didn’t fully understand even what they were writing about [1 Peter 1:10]. Jesus comes, and Paul talks about the *mysterion*, the mystery. It’s not a whodunit – it’s a mystery that we now understand more than we did – it unlocks that. So in terms of practicalities – it makes Jesus more real, more human.

That makes him no less divine – in fact it makes him more divine. A God who will go to such great lengths to redeem me, when I’m not worth it. Arguably, humanity isn’t worth it. Why would God do it? That’s the question you always get: why does God love us? Why does God want to save us? There’s no answer. Why? Because that’s who he is. That’s what Jesus reveals. That’s the magnificence of it. The more human Jesus becomes, the more magnificent he becomes as the God/man. God, who knows no sin, became sin for me. God, who knows our limitations, would

choose to live as a human – through human eyes, through human mind, through human will and temptations.

I can identify with that. I can relate to that – because he has first identified with me. He's first related to me. So when I pray, we read in Hebrews [7:25] that we have one before the Father who's interceding for us. Someone I read recently suggested that Jesus' very presence as a human in the presence of the Father is his intercession. It's not a pleading, "Wrathful Father, be merciful on Myk – he's not so bad." No, that splits God from Jesus. His very presence as a human before the Father shows that humanity is acceptable to the Father. My humanity is now found in that Jesus Christ. Now, in the already-not yet before the resurrection, I can pray and there is a listening, there is a responsiveness, there is a sympathy, an empathetic person – the second person in the Trinity – as a human.

MM: Because Jesus knows what's it like to be human.

MH: Yeah, he's lived it, he's felt it, he has conquered it.

MM: And he is able to communicate that perfectly to the Father.

MH: He says: I will not leave you orphans in the world, I won't leave you alone [John 14:18]. I'll be with you till the end of the age [Matthew 28:20], by my Spirit. In the great Pentecost event, he doesn't just seem spirit to us. We read so much "spirit" story everywhere, it seems to be one of those plastic words, a hair spray word, you spray it everywhere, but it loses any sense of meaning. We have seen in this narrative the Spirit of the risen Christ, the Holy Spirit, the third person in the Trinity.

We receive the Spirit of his journey with the Son to the far country, to his humanity – he has accompanied him on that journey – has been the one who, with him, has been the power of his resisting temptation, the power of his obedience to the Father. Just as he is for you and for me. That's the Spirit that Christ gives us – his Spirit – the Spirit enfolded and imprinted with an obedient human life. So I now have resources within me because I'm in Christ to live this life. So when I'm tempted, I can't say, "Ah, if I stumble, the devil made me do it." That is not an option anymore. So again, I think the practical response to your question is: Jesus becomes more real, we become closer. God becomes more holy and more loving and more attractive. He's not just a fuzzy power. He's not just an energy, not just some force – he's Christ in us.

MM: He's the Spirit who has done this, and done that.

MH: Then he commits through Christ, because the first act of Christ's exaltation was to send the Spirit – to pour the Spirit on the church and on

every believer to unite us to Christ, to himself by the Spirit so that we can participate in God. So by giving us his Spirit, by giving us his presence, he's giving us himself. Wherever we go, Christ is there first by the Spirit, throwing us into the situation, into this conversation, into this event, into this murky fallen existence.

So it transcends a hobby-horse of mine, "What-Would-Jesus-Do." That's okay for five minutes. But it's all external. As if I would know what Jesus would do. What would Jesus do if someone cuts in front of him on the motorway? Well, Jesus didn't drive cars, did he? So unless I could think of a donkey coming in front of them... Then it gets bizarre... So if you're a woman in certain situations... It becomes really bizarre. There's something good about it – an imitation of Christ, but the imitation is external and effectively, what happens is that Christ becomes me to the nth degree. I'm imitating myself. I'm justifying my actions.

MM: You're creating Christ in your image...

MH: Yeah, and justifying actions on that basis. Is that not what we see in much of the "What would Jesus do" movement? It's a good movement, with good intention, but a lot of it is simply human justification. They say, this is what Jesus would do. I'm looking it like, "You don't even know the Scriptures – so how would you know what Jesus would do, if you don't even know that story?"

So this is moving beyond that to participation in Christ. I think of more of Hebrews' idea, the biblical idea, where Christ is at the right hand of the Father. He sends us his Spirit in order that we may participate in what he did and what he is also currently doing.

MM: So it's not us imitating an external, but the external coming into us...

MH: Yep, so that we could participate with Christ by the Spirit. It's active, it's dynamic, it's internal – it's not me controlling the situation in an external way.

MM: You seem to use Christ and God and the Spirit sometimes interchangeably. I've often thought of God being Christ-like, but as you were talking there, it seems that you think that the Spirit is Christ-like. Is that accurate?

MH: Yeah, I think so. Over 200 times in the Pauline epistles we find "in Christ" and "in the Spirit." Two hundred times – that is pervasive, and they seem to be utterly synonymous. If you're in the Spirit, you're in Christ, or if in Christ, then in the Spirit. The same dynamic, the same power – the Spirit and the risen Christ are identified. They're not collapsed

into each other (so it's not what we would say ontological, that now Christ ceases to be and he's just Spirit), and yet their functions now overlap. "I will not leave you as orphans, I'll send my Spirit" [John 14:18] so it's how you define form, conform, sanctification, etc.

MM: The Spirit represents Jesus and his ongoing presence with us.

MH: Yes, without collapsing Jesus as also being a person of the Trinity. So the Spirit is like Jesus and Jesus is like the Spirit.

MM: Jesus called him "another comforter" [John 14:16].

MH: Yea, another of the same kind, the same quality. We could add the Father into that discussion as well, and do it three ways. If you've seen me, you've seen the Father [John 14:9]. The idea is that "if you're in me, you're in the Father." The great John 17 prayer, that you will be one with me, as I am with the Father [John 17:21]. Really? Now, if that's the Logos, you'll be one with the Father as the Logos is – that means I become God. I'm the fourth member of the Holy Trinity – so now it's a Quadtrinity, you know. But Jesus is speaking to God as man: as I'm accepted by the Father, as I'm a beloved Son, now that you are in me, you are also accepted – it's a relational oneness, and that's profound.

MM: Just as Jesus is in the throne room – to use that metaphor – with God, all humanity is brought there...

MH: Yeah, you remind me of Paul: we are seated in Christ Jesus in the heavenly realm [Ephesians 2:6].

MM: Already.

MH: So this is the sense in which we are found in Christ – we come into him, we live and breathe and have our being – while at the same time there is this other reality.

MM: But then that is done by the Spirit.

MH: Absolutely: Church, communion, baptism, mission, worship, witness...

MM: The three persons of the Trinity are all together in that somehow... We can't separate, but we can distinguish...

MH: Augustine says (and theology has largely followed) that everything God does, he does as one – because he's one being: Father, Son, and Spirit. But it's appropriate to talk about the Father doing stuff, the Son doing stuff and the Spirit... As long as we're not thinking three Gods. We need to constantly remind ourselves of one and three – divine and human – all the tensions in Scripture.

MM: Jesus is our Savior, but the Spirit is also involved in our salvation.

MH: Yea, and the Father in Christ is reconciling, the Father equally. It's not the Father saying, "Look, I'll have none of these primordial pests – that's your job." And Jesus, the Logos: "What if I don't want to go," you know. "Well, too bad. I'm the Father, you're off." That would deny the one being. Thomas Torrance has the phrase, "There is no God behind the back of Jesus." I think it's a useful phrase. If Jesus loves us, the Trinity loves us. If Jesus accepts us, the Trinity accepts us. If we know Jesus, we know the Trinity.

MM: So what we see is what we get?

MH: Yeah, there's far more, but what we will get is not other than what we see in Jesus. So I will stand before the judgment seat of Christ I have an assurance that I will hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant" because that's what Jesus says now and that's what the Trinity will say then.

MM: If Jesus was of such a mind as to becoming human, to condescend to our level, then that means the Father has that kind of humility as well?

MH: Yes, because they're one being. Homoousios, of the same stuff – the Father, the Son, the Spirit equally work together in all things – for creation, for salvation, for redemption, for renewal.

MM: So the judge comes down to us.

MH: Yeah, the judge is judged our place...

There is this temptation to think of the Father as a bit of a tyrant, the Old Testament God versus the New Testament Jesus, the Law versus Sermon on the Mount. That's a false dichotomy that Christians intuitively know is false. God loves us in Christ Jesus.

MM: You say intuitively and yet some people still fear...

MH: Sure... Sunday-school child-like faith gets swamped as we get older – we start listening to voices we should not, some of the people from within the church. Doubts creep in, and we need to do good theology, good Bible reading to correct us. "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so," is good enough for me. Now I'm adding to that understanding — what does that mean? How do you unpack that? That's not to base my salvation on. I have salvation, I have faith as a gift, it's grace; now I'm adding to that knowledge. Theology is worship, worship is theology – at least that's how it should be. When it's turned into a philosophy, well...

MM: Seeking more understanding is worship.

MH: Yeah – having the mind of Christ, following after with our entire mind, body, and soul, spirit.

MM: Whereas some even in the church, as you said, would turn that, “Jesus loves me, this I know, but the Father, I’m not so sure about...”

MH: Yeah. Christ would be horrified. “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father. You’re not getting it.” The disciples come sort of mid ministry, they’re following Jesus, they’re seeing what he’s doing, but they’re Jews. “We worship Yahweh.” The Shema says, “Behold, the Lord your God the Lord is one.” They say it repeatedly, they say it every day, but here’s this Jesus who’s doing God stuff, Yahweh stuff. He can’t be Yahweh, it’s incomprehensible. Yahweh’s Yahweh. You’re you... So they come to him, they have that wonderful narrative of Jesus...

You can just see, you know, they’re discussing who’s gonna ask: “no, you ask”; “no, you ask”; “you’re the one – ok, you’re gonna ask.” “Ok, I’ll go.” “Ah, sorry, Jesus, now look, we know we’re Jewish, we know for several millennia that Yahweh’s taught us how to pray, how to approach him, how to think of him, how to ready and prepare ourselves and how to worship. Uh, how do we pray?” They’re asking “who can we address?” “We pray to Yahweh, is that ignoring you? Do we pray to you? Is that ignoring Yahweh? We don’t want to be idolaters.” And Jesus says, “this is how you should pray.”

MM: Kind of odd, why Jews who have been praying all their life would ask how to pray.

MH: Staggering. And he says, even more staggering, “This is how you pray: Our Father...”

MM: They realize that Jesus has completely transformed (or at least that’s the potential) their understanding of God and their relationship with him.

MH: So it is not other than the God of the Jews. It is the same. Richard Bauckham talks about Jesus sharing the divine identity. Jesus shows us what that identity really means. When he says, Our Father – they’re thinking, “Our Father? I know with whom you [Jesus] talk about him as your Father, even at the baptism, ‘This is my beloved Son’ [Matthew 3:17]. Therefore he’s his beloved Father. I know there’s this unique and utter relationship between you two.” He said you should pray, Our Father.

MM: But they have the potential to have the same kind of relationship.

MH: And so it’s working that out. “Our Father” because he’s your Father because I’m related to you. You’re saying you are God. You’re saying you are equal to the Father. You’re saying, in the later language, a homousios, a one, a perichoretic, all these terms, this is the language of prayer: Our Father, Abba. What Jesus prays, what Jesus reveals, the unique

relationship Jesus has with his Father, he's saying yes you have that too. Only because of me and only in me. And you just see them with more questions, after mid ministry, and still, after that, "we really don't know who you are." After the resurrection – ah, "you were who you say you were."

MM: Several aha moments.

MH: Whether you're a Thomas, or whoever... "Ah, you are who you said you were." So we can take you at face value, we can take your word as gospel, literally. You are the way the truth and the life. Ah, you meant it.

MM: And then at Pentecost there was a deepening of their understanding.

MH: The internalization that talks about this new covenant. The Spirit of John 2:28, Ezekiel and Isaiah and all these prophecies, that in those last days you will have this Spirit, too. Well, Jesus was conceived, baptized, lived, empowered and now he gives – he's Lord of the Spirit.

MM: The same Spirit in them.

MH: But under now his lordship. So we're not messiahs, we're not individuals doing the work of Christ. We are now under his lordship, a church, a body of which he is the head corporately and collectively. We often miss that collective – in a lone-ranger Christianity. Or someone says, "I'm the Lord's anointed; you come to me for stuff." No. Jesus Christ is the Lord's anointed. We go to him for stuff and then he gives it to his church. He doesn't give it to individuals or geographical locales or holy fountains of grace. That can be translated into church hierarchies or pseudo-prophets or any other current manifestation. There's this collective church that we have to really wrestle with.

THE CREEDS AND THE TRINITY

MM: One of the distinctives of the Christian faith is a belief in the Trinity. The word is not found in the Bible, but it has nevertheless been an important part of Christian theology: three Persons, but only one God. The math doesn't work, but this has been an important formulation that people have been trying to wrap their heads around, trying to understand, what does this mean? Why does Christianity have such a puzzling teaching?

MH: Augustine famously wrote at the end of his big, long treatise on the Trinity something to the effect that "It would be better to say nothing, but we have to say something, so here's my something," because God is more than a human mind can ever conceive. If we could fully understand God, we would get bored with God. That's the original sin. We would turn from God to something else that is more interesting, which is the definition of idolatry.

We are all wrestling with what we rightly term a mystery, but some wrestle more than others and penetrate that mystery more. We believe that God's a Trinity because that's what God has revealed himself to be, is the blunt language. When Jesus came and identified himself with the Father as one and sends the Spirit, another Paraclete, another of exactly the same type [John 14:16] – and hundreds of other verses – we have this divine identity is shared by three... What? What's the human language? We've settled on three "Persons" – not three individuals, but three Persons who co-exist in such a unique way that they are one God.

That's difficult! It's difficult in any language, any time, and yet it's a

difficulty that is a marvelous difficulty. It's an enticing difficulty. This is why we pray and worship and sing and write poetry and do theology, because we are striving after that which we already know.

I've got children, a 5-year-old and a 3-year-old, and I talk to them about God. I'm talking about the Father, I'm talking about the Son, I'm talking about the Spirit – you get the odd metaphysical question, you know: Is God one or three? But they don't have too many issues with God as one and three – they're not dealing with mathematics. They know far more than they could articulate. (Well, I'm hoping so, anyway.) They intuitively and they relationally know, because of what their parents, my wife and I, are telling them, that God – Father, Son, Spirit (we repeat these phrases – not always talking about “God,” not always talking about “Father,” not always talking about Son or Spirit – always talking about all of them) loves you, cares for you, has created you, has a plan for you.

My hope is that they will grow up by default knowing that this Tri-Personal God (however the metaphysics works) loves them. I hope for the rest of their life they will tease out, What does that actually mean? Who is God? How can he be one and three? What is the philosophical-theological language for that? That philosophical-theological language isn't confirming their faith – it's merely trying to articulate what I hope as a 5 or 3-year old they already know, what me as a 6 or 7-year old (when I came to faith) implicitly knew – I'm just unpacking that in theology.

That's what the early church did. The earliest confession in Scripture is “Jesus is Lord – Yahweh.” They believed in Yahweh, what we call the Father, and they also believed that Jesus is the same, but different. They were already doing it. For centuries the early church were worshipping, they're breaking bread, they're baptizing, they're doing works of ministry, alms for the poor, they're following the way, Jesus, and it's all worship of a Tri-Personal God, but they don't have that language. So they come together successively through various councils – Nicea in 325 and again in Constantinople in 381, where they devised what we call today the Nicene Creed.

There were three clauses: “We believe in God the Father, Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, very God of very God, very light of very light” – these wonderful things. The first version had “and the Holy Spirit” – a little muted. By 381 it had, “and we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord.” Significant – same as Father, same as Son – “the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life.” They unpack that. Their worship is primary; the theology is catching up with language about

what they are doing in worship.

Same for my kids, same for me, same for (I think) every Christian who comes to faith. It's by grace, through faith – it's gift, and now we're unpacking that. We should do it in the context of worship, not philosophy. That has a place, but it's not philosophy. This is discipleship. This is sanctification. It's fun, as well.

MM: Sometimes it's difficult for us to even describe human persons, a personality. When someone calls me on the telephone, I recognize their voice. But how would I describe that voice? I cannot put it into words. There are aspects of personality even on a human level, people we know very well, and I can see that raised to a much greater level when we're dealing with divine Persons. How do I describe this? Words... [**MH:** fail.]

MM: yeah.

MH: They do. The Holy Spirit intercedes in his own speech and language (whatever that means); the Holy Spirit picks up where we leave off. How do we describe that? I think it's a lot like a relationship of a man and wife, a marriage relationship, where analytical description is okay if you've lost your spouse and you're trying to get a policeman to find him or her – how tall, what color eyes, what color are they wearing – it really doesn't tell anything about them. I think a lot of Christianity is analytical description of God: God is omnipresent, omniscient and omnibenevolent (if that's a word). God is these things. It's all utterly abstract.

It would be true, but it's almost meaningless, unless it becomes internalized: God is Abba, my Father. He is my Abba, Father, because I am in relationship with Jesus Christ, which he has initiated through his Holy Spirit. The tradition I have come from would be happy to talk about irresistible grace, where the Spirit irresistibly draws me to God, but it's not an irresistible force like the Star Trek tractor beam, where regardless of what you want to do, you're caught. This is the irresistible force of love.

If someone asks me, Why do you love your wife? I love her because she's kind, she's Christ-like, she's loves me, etc. But why, why, behind that? I don't know why I love her – I just do. It's inexplicable. At that level, I will turn to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, or poetry (or the odd limerick, if you like), but analytics aren't any good. It's the language of love, the language of poetry, and then beyond that, I'll just give her gifts. Not necessarily bought stuff, but gifts of service, attention, quality time, because language is a bit useless. It's necessary, but a bit useless. So I'll just give myself.

Let's put that on its head: How does God love us? He loves us through

the word, but not just through giving us a Bible. Most people who read it don't get anything out of it. God doesn't just give us words – he gives us himself, through the Son incarnate, ultimately and finally, and then, through Christ, the Spirit.

So from the inside out, we know God. We know God and think of God from a center in himself, the Trinity, rather than from a center in ourselves, idolatry. Those are big terms, and those are big concepts, but I think everyone who comes to faith, that's how they come to faith. Then they look back and try to unpack: How do we know God? How do we speak of God? Well, the way God speaks to us, the way God relates to us: by self-giving.

MM: They may not have the terminology, but as long as they have the basic “God loves you.” They have a relationship even if they cannot articulate it.

MH: This is where I think the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper (Eucharist, Communion, whatever terminology you want), that's why these rhythms of church life that Christ in his wisdom has given us. “You don't have the words – I know you don't.” Even the best theologians (that doesn't make them the best Christians) have a lot of words, but at the end of the day, here's these rituals. “I want you to come under the preached word, I want you to keep reciting it, keep repeating it, keep praying it. I want you to have this initiation of baptism.” Entering water, getting wet – especially as an adult, if you're an adult convert – it's very humbling, very humiliating. Yet this is signifying, this is symbolic, this is participating, re-enacting what Christ has done for us.

Then we gather around this table of mundane elements – simple bread and wine. We eat, we drink, we participate. This is what these rhythms are, what these sacraments are, why church becomes the focus through Scripture, from the church to the world. God is saying, “Words are good, but participation is ultimately what relationships are about.”

MM: Old Testament worship had a lot of rituals, but they were done away. The church, the New Testament has few.

MH: Two – well, maybe more than two. There's alms-giving, good works and stuff, but yeah.

MM: There's some puzzle there: why these? What are they conveying? You were saying they were conveying, re-enacting what Jesus has done for us...

MH: Someone said that they are acted-out parables. I like that – it works.

MM: It's obvious how the Lord's Supper is a re-enactment. Jesus tells us, "This is my body, this is my blood." How would baptism be a re-enactment? Of course, Jesus was baptized...

MH: Different traditions would have different ways of articulating the details of which, that's fine, but it's this identification with Christ. "Believe and be baptized for the remission of your sins" [Acts 2:38]. Baptism doesn't regenerate us. Baptism in Scripture, I would argue, is part of the one activity of coming to faith. You believe and you are baptized; they should be done close together, if at all possible. It's two parts of one whole.

I confess with my mouth and believe in my heart that I shall be saved [cf. Romans 10:9]. It doesn't say anything about baptism... They're using shorthand expressions for the whole thing. I believe, and I'm baptized, and my baptism re-enacts my faith. I'm in union with Christ as I enter the water, into his death as I go down into the water, his assumption of the human flesh, his incarnation and atonement, his taking of my sins on the cross, his complete and utter identification, substitution, reconciliation, the whole dealing to the whole deal. Then coming up the other side a new creation, a new life, resurrection.

It's this funny wet parable of the cross, of the life, the death, the resurrection of Christ. It's saying to our community (if the world wants to watch, that's fine), the church, the body of Christ, "I'm entering this body through Christ – no, that's not good enough – *in* Christ. What he's done can only be done once, and so I'm acting that out to show that I, while I wasn't there 2000 years ago, I was as good as there in Christ. I'm participating in that. My sins are now his sins, on the cross. My guilt is taken by him." It's that utter identification. Then it's coming out of the water, it is resurrection as well. I think that's often overlooked.

MM: Most people, when they are baptized, have very little clue on all this symbolism, and yet it becomes a point in their lives which they can be pointed back to and say, this was done to you.

MH: We have to be careful there, and some traditions will baptize infants (Presbyterian, Anglican, Roman Catholic); that has a whole theology. A Baptist like myself has a believer's baptism, a credo-baptism. Regardless of those dynamics (we can have those debates, and they are worth having), there is a sense in which we never know fully – we're always catching up. That's where the symbolic acts are important.

I was saved, but not because I was baptized. I was baptized at age 16 (1986, I think it was). I know who did it and where I was. I was baptized

by my father, so it was a special occasion. It is a marker, as you were saying, but it's a marker only if we can see through it to what it represents. It represents Christ's unfailing love for me. As long as we don't substitute baptism for what it symbolizes (and I think that's what a lot of Christians are doing – "Are you saved?" "Oh, let me think..." "Did you go to Sunday School?" "Yes, I did." "Did you hear the gospel?" "I did hear the gospel." "And did you get baptized?" "I did." "Then you're OK." I don't know if Paul would say that.

It is a strength, it is a nourishing of our faith, but only if it points through to Christ. What have you done since baptism? What is this newness of life that baptism represents? Are you living in that baptism reality? Those are the questions we should be asking.

MM: It comes back to Christ...

MH: Always. The Spirit brings us to him. If the Spirit's bringing us anywhere or anyone other than Christ, then it isn't the Spirit of Christ we're talking about.

MM: You were talking earlier about how the early church developed, began to put words into the doctrine of the Trinity – trying to phrase what they can say and what they can't say. How was Jesus' humanity involved in that? Jesus is not just God, one of the members of the Trinity.

MH: After Nicea in 325, Constantinople in 381, after they got to the word *homoousios* – Jesus is of the same stuff, substance, essence, identity as the Father and as human. Jesus is divine; Jesus is to be worshipped; Jesus is equal to God, and equal to human. Then they work out, What does that mean? We've got Trinity; that's who God is, that's what he has revealed himself to be. I've got a handle (only a handle) on that.

Then, what are we talking about, one person with two natures? What is that? So in 451, the Council of Chalcedon is where they knocked out what they can't say about Jesus. What we can't say is that he's two people, because that would be some sort of schizophrenia. (You see that in preaching today: When Jesus is forgiving sins, it's his divinity that's doing it. When Jesus is eating or going to the toilet, that's his humanity.) That's ruled out. No, that is not an appropriate way to speak of the one God-man, Jesus Christ. That's Nestorian. That's two persons. Or he looks like a human, but he's not really. His flesh is so different that he's actually not human at all. It's a weird Docetism, as they call it at times, and there are a lot of other heresies.

So the church is saying, that's not true. That leaves a big middle ground for how to say what is true. That's the beauty of the creeds, of early

confessional theology, there is a big middle ground. You can have differences in your tradition, and that's not necessarily wrong, as long as they're not contradictory differences – you can have, for example, Arminianism and Calvinism. We can get along fine; we can have our arguments (and we should), but arguments as brothers and sisters, because there is a significant middle ground. The early church is ruling out other options: not that, not that, and it leaves this orthodox space. It's not so constricting.

The filioque controversy

MM: You mentioned several councils – Nicea, Constantinople, Chalcedon – where they were trying to create these creeds. In each of these councils the church from east and west got together and developed what they could say, what they could not say – in Greek and in Latin. But eventually, the two halves split. [**MH:** sadly] They went different ways. How did that happen? What was the issue there?

MH: The doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love, the bond of love, as we've often called the Holy Spirit, has been the occasion of some of the most bitter divisions in the church. So in 1054, east and west go separate ways over the doctrine of the *filioque*. That's the Latin word meaning “and the Son.” The Western church started to insert it into one of the creeds without asking the east. You can't just change a creed without asking the whole church – that was the issue. But the west does. They start altering the creed, saying that the Father *and the Son* send the Holy Spirit.

If we take them in the best reading, they're trying to defend that Jesus is really God. It's not just the Father that sends the Holy Spirit – it's the Father and the Son, because the Son is really God. They're trying to uphold his divinity – a really good impulse.

The east objected, partly on political grounds: You can't change a creed without asking us – who do you think you are? The theological grounds for them is that the Father is the font of divinity – the Father is the *archē*, the chief, the head, the ruler. The Son and the Spirit are equal, but in a coordinated way. Always first the Father, then Son and Spirit. We think you're undermining the Father when you say “Father and Son.” If you undermine the Father, we think you're undermining the Trinity.

It's a complete (I think) talking past each other. What they both wanted to affirm, one by having *filioque* and the other by not having it, wasn't being heard. Language was a barrier, politics was a barrier, personalities were a barrier. It's one of the more bitter splits – the Great Schism, it was

called. It's still a schism today. We don't want to get into ecclesiastical politics too much, but it's complicated today by things like having a pope and a hierarchy, apostolic succession – things like that make it something of a barrier, as much as anything else.

Then there are us Protestants, who are generally stand outside of much of that today, and look on with some interest. A lot of Protestantism now is trying to speak into those situations specifically and say, Hang on, brothers and sisters. We have a shared and common sense of the Trinity, and the early church worked with Greek and Latin. They did settle on terms: this means that, etc. One being, three persons, in each of our languages, so can we get back to that Trinitarian understanding that we all share, and can we start to work backwards so that we can get behind the *filioque* to what you're trying to say, and what you're trying to say? I think you're trying to say the same thing, so can we just put the *filioque* to one side and construct a language that works and see what happens.

MM: And find some new terminology.

MH: New terminology, yeah. I would say the *filioque* is neither right nor wrong, because they're wanting to affirm what the east wanted to affirm, but they did it in a particular way. If the east is so disgruntled by the use of *filioque*, just (I think fair enough) don't use it. It's a barrier to ecumenical discourse. But what's the theology behind it – that's what we're really wrestling with, and I think east and west agree. I think Augustine and Athanasius and Basil and Jerome all agree on the core. If we get back to that core, the Trinitarian doctrine, I think it will (I'm a bit naïve) take care of itself.

MM: They haven't found the terminology that will achieve unity?

MH: No. There have been lots of suggestions. The one that I am happy to go with (I didn't create it, and it has been suggested many times – right back from the Council of Nicea onwards it has been suggested): "from the Father, *through* the Son." I think it solves everything.

MM: Obviously not everyone takes the same view.

MH: Right. There is political stuff involved, there is personality, there is a long tradition involved. It's easier for me as a Protestant to make that conclusion than for a Roman Catholic or an Eastern Orthodox.

MM: The Roman Catholic church is one church, whereas the Eastern churches are plural. Even if you could get the Greek church to agree to this, there'd be the Russians, the Coptics.

MH: Yeah. It's been tried. In 1995, the Roman Catholic Church brought in an agreed clarification of *filioque*. It was a result of Roman

Catholic and Eastern Orthodox dialogue. I think they went out of their way to temper the language, but at base, it's the same, but it's a good effort. Earlier, in 1991, the World Alliance of Reformed Theology and Churches met with a number of Eastern Orthodox representatives (Tom Torrance was the one who initiated and led that), and they worked out an "Agreed Statement on the Holy Trinity."

They're trying to get behind the *filioque*. As a result of that, they settled on language that those present (they weren't formally representing all those churches, but informally they were) agreed: "from Father through Son by the Spirit." The East recognized that this safeguarded what they wanted; the West recognized that it safeguarded what they wanted, and everyone was happy. I'm happy. But because it's not an official document, it's not binding on any actual church. Sadly, I think it's been ignored since 1991.

MM: Even though it seems to have potential for agreement.

MH: Yeah. A bunch of us, myself included, any opportunity we get, we try to put that back into the discussion, the agenda: "Here's a good solution that recommends itself; it has good support. Can we reconsider that, maybe? You might be able to improve on it, but can we at least..." A few of us keep putting that on the agenda, to work towards unity. That's our job.

MM: But unity is not just in terms of formal acceptance of certain creeds; there are other things involved in church unity, too. For one, Jesus said that whether we look like it or not, we *are* one.

MH: Right. There's only one church.

MM: We are all in him, so there's a unity there.

MH: Yeah. But what it gets to on the ground, when we have our academic inter-tradition dialogue, we do the academic stuff, the sharp end of the stick is when we come to the Eucharist. I'm a Baptist, and generally, in a Baptist theology, if one is baptized and loves the Lord, the Lord's Table is open. We don't ask if you're a Roman Catholic or an Eastern Orthodox or Presbyterian or Anglican – it does not matter. If you are baptized and you love the Lord, you may take. That's not true in other traditions and communions. I'm biased. I think Baptists are uniquely placed to have perspective on that, but so is everyone else.

On the ground, theologians can do their work and come up with some nice language, but when we come back into worship proper, around the Table, if Christians are excluded, stuff stops. That's where the challenge in ecumenical theology is, for theology to be consistent with practice, and

practice consistent with theology.

George Hunsinger wrote a book recently where he unpacks a lot of that from a Reformed reading and he tries to find in the early church (before the split) common ground, common theology. He settles on this very technical term “transelementation,” which is very hard to say, let alone unpack. Whether he’s right or wrong, that sort of work represents the very best of Christians working towards the “one holy, catholic, apostolic church” that exists. Even though it doesn’t look like it, it does. I think we need more of that sort of stuff.

MM: That’s not easy.

MH: No, it’s not. You need to be in positions of authority, positions of elected representation. There’s aren’t many of those in the Baptist world. Other denominations are far better placed to do that sort of discussion: Presbyterians, Catholics, Orthodox. There are spokespeople who do represent them. That’s what we have been seeing in the last what, 13 years of ecumenical discussions: genuinely working and striving towards agreement – not at the lowest common denominator (some of the worst World Council of Churches stuff: What can we all agree on? God loves us. Don’t define God, don’t define love. Let’s just say “God loves us” and we’re all happy.) That’s thankfully not happening in ecumenical discourse much now. It’s genuinely theological, robust, scriptural, looking for common belief.

MM: In some ways theology has been the source of the division; it is now being the initiator for healing that.

MH: I’d like to think so, as a theologian. But what I’m saying is, Theologians can do their work, and we should, but it needs to be translated, if you like, into priestly work – into actual people in front of congregations of believers, where it makes an actual difference. That’s our job, to translate, but it’s also pastors, ministers; it’s also churches’ job to be interested in participating. It’s a two-way thing.

The classic distinction that there are clergy and laity, that has lots of problems, lording it over, but in its best guise you have doctors – you have people separated to learn Greek and to learn Hebrew and do the history and think of this high-faluting theology, to try to unpack it, working with and for the church. But what we’ve ended up with are academies and the university structure (not that universities are bad), where you have a university which is independent thinking, and theology is housed there, and you have churches. That’s tended to split them. We need to bring them together.

THEOSIS: PARTICIPATION IN THE DIVINE NATURE

MM: Myk, you wrote your dissertation that was eventually published as a book: *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*. The title itself can be a bit intimidating – that’s the way dissertations often are. We can start with the first word, theosis. What *is* theosis?

MH: It has been an uncommon word to the West, but over the last 20 years has become almost popular. It comes from *theopoesis* – *theos*, meaning god – and *poieo* – meaning to make into. “To make one a god” is the literal translation. Theosis, to become god. In Christian discourse, from the early church onwards, it of course doesn’t mean that a human can literally become God – that’s idolatry – it’s that we become God-like. That’s probably the best definition. It becomes both a theme and a doctrine, depending on who is using it and how. As a theme, it’s a weak image; as a doctrine, it’s a robust idea that coordinates an entire theology. How’s that for a start?

MM: There’s a lot packed into there. But it sounds a bit non-Christian, that we are becoming like God. How’s this to be distinguished from, say, Indian views?

MH: Yeah, Eastern pantheism and mysticism. *Apotheosis* is a related word. It’s the making of a human into a god. The Egyptian Pharaohs, for instance, believed that they became gods – after death, for the early ones; and then the ones that followed thought, “Why should I wait until after death? In my lifetime I can be god!” There is a pagan sense to the term

which we want to rule out. There's a conception of it which is utterly not compatible with Christian attitude.

But when Christians use the term, from very early on in the tradition, they found within it an image, a metaphor, an analogy, that was profound. When we become united to Christ, we become something different – Paul talks about us being “new creations.” So they're trying to get at a profound sense of becoming more human, not less, but nonetheless different. How are you the same but different? Theosis was one way they described it – not the only way, but it was a significant way. The term is rhetorical – it demands a reaction.

My thesis title was actually “The Danger of Vertigo,” to get at the sense that it's too high, it's too lofty, we get a bit dizzy when we think about it.

MM: It seems like it has some shock value.

MH: Yes. But when the early church started using it, it wasn't simply shock value. The term was current, and they converted the term. Like the word *person* – there were definitions of *person*; they converted the term to give it Christian meaning. There were definitions of *god*; they converted the term. They baptized the term with gospel meaning.

So here's this term *theosis* – the Greeks are using it; it has a currency, it has a history. Like the word *logos* – it has a Greek and a Jewish history, and John says, “I'm not meaning the Greek idea, I'm not simply meaning the Jewish idea – I'm going to fill it with meaning, but the idea is still there.” So theosis has a bit of shock value now, but it's good value.

MM: The Greeks had this idea of theosis. Is it found in Scripture as well?

MH: The *idea* arguably is found in Scripture, although the term isn't – the term comes later. Within Scripture, we can group together categories of what Scripture talks about when we become Christians, when we become united to Christ, when we become something that we were not. We don't cease to be human. Before I was a Christian I was still Myk, and afterwards I'm still Myk. Nonetheless, we could look at least seven areas.

- There's imitation of God: Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect, says Jesus (Matthew 5:48). Really? Does he mean that? The Sermon on the Mount says, “Your righteousness should exceed that of the Pharisees” (Matthew 5:20). Whatever else you say about the Pharisees, they were righteous. So there's a sense in which we are to imitate, we are to be like God. That's a weak sense.
- Then there's taking on God's nature. That's 2 Peter 1:4, where the term *theosis* basically gets its name from: We are promised that we

can become “partakers of the divine nature.” We can become partakers of God. What does that mean, to take part in God? It’s not to cease to be what we are, yet it is to be more than we were.

- There’s being indwelt by God,
- and being re-formed by God.
- There’s being conformed to the image of Christ, from glory to glory, having his righteousness, having his likeness.
- There’s being transformed in the resurrection into a heightened state, a state above our current one. Even our physicality, our physical bodies, will resemble that of the resurrected Christ. It’s an utter transformation. We become more like God.
- There’s the, if you like, theosis or the divinization of the entire cosmos. Romans 8:19-21 says that all creation waits in eager anticipation for the redemption of the sons of God. I don’t know how rocks are eagerly anticipating our redemption, but in a sense all creation is, because it, too, will be conformed and transformed into something higher – new heavens, new earth, where (whatever the language means) the new Jerusalem comes down and makes its home on earth. God’s abode will be our abode; our abode will be his. It’s an utter transformation, but it still talks about trees, birds, and feasting, drinking. It talks about earthly things, but earthly things in a God-like way, humans in a God-like way. Theosis arguably is a good term to express that mystery and that reality.

MM: Is it just a synonym for transformation? What advantage is there in using this odd word?

MH: Many of my colleagues would say, “I agree with everything you’ve said but I don’t like the term *theosis* as a way to do that.” That’s fine, not all Christians do. Throughout the tradition, not all Christians have liked the term. I like the term because what I see in this constellation of images in Scripture, especially through the incarnation, Christ models this himself, of becoming human.

As Athanasius said in the early church, “God becomes man so that man might become god.” The early church talks about this theology of “the great exchange” – in Latin, the *mirifica commutatio*, the wonderful exchange. I get what’s God’s; God gets what’s mine, the great exchange. This is the incarnation. To me, that is profound and gets to the sense of Scripture which we’re reading throughout the Gospels and the epistles, that we are the same but we are so much different in Christ. The cosmos itself will be so much different.

I like the term because of its shock value, because of its rhetorical effect, because of the image, the metaphor, the analogy. It's not just transformation – it's an idea, a concept, a theology which encompasses the entire parts of salvation. I would use it as a doctrine, not simply as a theme. Some of my colleagues say, "I don't want it as a doctrine (you're going a bit overboard), but yeah, it can have a use." They'll replace being sanctified, or set apart or transformed, so *theosis* can replace that. All the normal stuff before and after, but during our transformation, they might use *theosis*. I think that undermines the term and doesn't coordinate it with the rest of our theology. Far better to have all, or nothing.

Have you met Julie Canlis? She's written a book, *Calvin's Ladder*, with wonderful spiritual theology. She's doing profound stuff. She doesn't like *theosis*, but she likes "union and communion with God." She likes "participation in the Trinity." I mention her because she's representative of a large part of the tradition. But I still think it has good value.

MM: You wrote your book on this doctrine in the theology of Thomas Torrance. Could you explain a little bit, who is Thomas Torrance? How did you become so interested in him in particular?

MH: Tom Torrance, Scottish Presbyterian, is credited as the chief interpreter, in the English-speaking world, of Barth's theology. He studied with Barth for a couple of semesters. He was born in 1913, so next year will be 100 years since his birth; he died a few years ago. He was a prolific author. No one's counted all of them, but the most comprehensive bibliography is over 650 published works. It's a large body of literature.

He's been described as a theologian's theologian. He described himself, apart from being a devoted Christian, as a missionary and an evangelist to academics. A large part of his work was, How do we think rightly? How do we know what we know? It's in the domain of epistemology. He's trying to clear the ground for a Christian conception of reality and truth, and it's Christ-centered. We only know reality by knowing Christ who is the real, who is the way, the truth and the life.

The rest of his work was unpacking a corollary of that – a Trinitarian theology – and teasing apart, What does the Trinity mean when we apply that to Christology, when we apply that to the Holy Spirit, to the church, when we apply that to science (it was a big fascination for him), when we apply that to creation? It's a large body of work from a profound thinker, a dense writer (not for the faint of heart). He left a body of literature that we can get our teeth into.

He had a younger brother, James, who was equally profound, and he

had a younger brother, David, who was also profound, and then they in turn, each of them had sons and daughters. Thomas's son is Iain Torrance, the president of Princeton Theological Seminary and a patristics scholar. James's son is Alan Torrance, a professor of theology at St. Andrews, and the dynasty goes on.

You've got this family of thinkers profoundly affected by Mr. and Mrs. Torrance senior. Tom, James, and David all credit the mother as being the formative influence. Their father was a missionary in China; their mother, an Anglican, taught them from birth, "God loves you in Christ. God is for you in Christ Jesus. God is a Trinity." Probably not in academic language, but nonetheless in gospel language, from birth. They all testified to her witness. Then they all find Barth, and they're critical readers of Barth.

Thomas Torrance's theology is highly patristic, from the early church; he's drawing on significant early church figures like Athanasius and Gregory Nazianzus etc., and so it's rich in the tradition. He's Reformed, and I have a Reformed theology, so there's an affinity with Calvin and the tradition there, and he applies it in constructive ways. (A lot of people don't do that – they're just happy to deconstruct. But genuine, evangelical Christianity doesn't just deconstruct – it presents the good news. It reconstructs. If we're not that sort of human, what sort of human are we? We're Christ-like humans.)

He latches onto theosis because he has this abiding interest in the Eastern Orthodox Church. He was a Christian with a world vision. So while he's Presbyterian, his mother was Anglican, so he's got nice relationships going on there; he interacts with Catholicism, and he came into contact with the Eastern Orthodox, who are also highly patristic.

What I sensed as I did my doctorate in his work was that he brings East and West together, so it's got to be good. But more than that, he brings different sorts of theologies together as well because he finds those theologies in Scripture. Instead of making them dualistic, either this or that, he manages to provide a coherent whole theology, and that's not easy. That's genius, I think.

MM: Is this where you learned about the doctrine of theosis?

MH: Yeah. I start my PhD and you have a proposal, it's sketchy, and a title, and you pretend you know what it means, but at first you don't. In the first part of that PhD, I immersed myself in Eastern Orthodox literature, reading the Philokalia and other spiritual writings of the Orthodox; Kallistos Ware and Vladimir Lossky, John Weindorf, all these key figures. (Praise the Lord that they are now translated into English.

Fantastic that I didn't have to learn Russian and Egyptian, etc. We live in a privileged time.) I was immersing myself in Eastern Orthodox theology. Historically, Gregory Palamas, John of Damascus, etc. in the early church, medieval church, and then into the current times. Then re-reading Torrance's stuff in order to get my own critical reflections.

MM: Thomas Torrance spent some of his time studying patristics, the early church fathers. Is that where he picked up the idea of *theosis*? Or was this an idea that he brought to them and found in them already?

MH: Undoubtedly he picked it up *from* them, because you can't read them and not pick it up. Every single church father, I think without exaggeration, spoke of *theosis*. He's finding it there. My suspicion is that it wasn't until he came into personal contact with the Eastern Orthodox that he joined those dots and *theosis* became a theme and a doctrine that he was also interested in.

He did a study, his PhD, on grace in the apostolic fathers. Theosis is there in them, but it's really the patristics just after them which emphasize theosis. Athanasius was one of his heroes, and others. He found it there – it's pervasive throughout their works. You can't read Athanasius, for instance, and not know about that divinization, *theosis*. Or Gregory Nazianzus, or Gregory of Nyssa, or Basil of Caesarea – all these key names that Torrance draws on again and again.

So he found it in the patristics, but I think it wasn't until his interaction with actual Eastern Orthodox people and theology that that became important. That was reasonably early on in his career, where he came into dialogue with them, and I suspect that's why it became such an important theme for him, as he continually tried to broker theological agreements with other traditions. "We have this in common." What we have in common, we celebrate, we share, because he wanted to work towards "one holy catholic apostolic church." I think (I never had an opportunity to ask him about that) that's why it became important.

MM: He was able to see this doctrine as useful in a practical sense in terms of relationships with Eastern Orthodox. Did he also find it useful theologically? Did he build on that?

MH: I think he did, and that's the contention of the book.

However, the answer is debatable. There is a T. F. Torrance Theological Fellowship that has 4 or 500 members, and growing. All those who read Torrance wouldn't agree that he has a profound doctrine of theosis. I think they're wrong – I think it is there, and it's there in a profound and coherent way from early on, where he first has his interaction

with the Eastern Orthodox, so my book is trying to set out to prove that across this very large body of work, there is a doctrine (not just a theme) of theosis, self-consciously there. It's not structuring everything, but it is consistent in everything. I tried to outline it through his theological method, his anthropology, Christology, soteriology, eschatology, ecclesiology, etc.

He argued that all creation is conditioned by the incarnation. So logically, the incarnation is before creation. Not chronologically, but logically. What does that mean? Adam and Eve were created very good... We should ask, "for what?" What were they created very good for? Good to become that which God has designed them to become – Christlike – which necessitates an incarnation, I would argue is Torrance's view. He coordinates all the little pieces of his theology with this theme of theosis.

And in other doctrines, like perichoresis, Trinity, etc. – it becomes a robust theology which he works out. To take creation again – the rocks, the trees, the very stuff of creation is designed to display the glory of God. But how do rocks and dung beetles display the glory of God? They can't without humans. So Torrance uses the language the Eastern Orthodox use, today and in history, and he picks up that humans are priests of creation. Humans represent creation – all of creation – to the Father in Christ. The creation itself will undergo transformation. It is good...to be transformed into the abode of God.

Creation – humans – everything, for Torrance, has this transcendental determination which the Fall affected, so we're turned in on ourselves. After the fall, we become gods, idols. We're not looking at God anymore, we're not looking to transcend; we become turned in. With the coming of Christ, he turns us back to the Father, in him, so that in the resurrection we realize fully what we were always created to be. That's theosis, that's theotic language, and that's Torrance to a T, throughout all of his work. I see it; others would disagree. They say, yea, it's a theme, but we don't see it that strongly.

So you publish, and you get response and critique, and we'll see.

MM: The doctrine of theosis was used in the early church on the Greek side. How did that come across into the Western church? When Thomas Torrance was studying it, it was not common.

MH: The West has tended not to think about theosis for a long, long time, so it is shocking. I'm not recommending that you preach to the congregation on Sunday that you can become gods. That language would be misunderstood. But within the early church, the Greek-speaking early

fathers, the patristics, were using this term and it was profound, and so were the Latins. They were using it in the same sorts of ways. It's embedded in their theology.

When we come into the medieval period, Thomas Aquinas was happy to use the term – in a weaker sense, but Anna Williams wrote a dissertation published with Oxford University Press comparing Gregory Palamas, the great medieval Eastern Orthodox theologian, where theosis is everything, and Thomas Aquinas. She argues that Aquinas hardly ever uses the term because it is everywhere assumed. That's a debatable thesis, but I think she does a very good job of showing the parallels in a Latin way and an Eastern way. The same sort of thing happened in the Reformation.

MM: Who in the Reformation?

MH: Luther's works are all digitized, so it makes a search a lot easier. Even if you just search for theosis and its cognates, deification, and divinization, it's often found. He interacts with it directly, he affirms it directly, in his own way – he unpacks what he wants to say. Recent Finnish scholarship, which is Lutheran, has gone back to Luther, asking these sorts of questions (rightly or wrongly, but I think more right than wrong; there might be an overstatement), they're finding this theme a doctrine in Luther. When we have Christ, we have *all* of Christ, says Luther, including his righteousness, including his identity, in a sense. We become, in a sense, small Christs. We don't replace him – we could never conceive of Luther saying that we replace him – but we do become like Christ.

I'm not saying we become God – we become God-like. We have these attributes of God. Luther is happy to pick up on *deificatio*, in Latin, the deification of the human.

MM: I was thinking of 1 Peter 2:4. There's a difference between “being partakers of the divine nature” and becoming divine.

MH: Right. The language and the meaning behind the language are very important to distinguish.

MM: Luther has the idea frequently, Calvin somewhat, but then it got lost.

MH: It became a minor key because of the problems. I think of Torrance's phrase, “the danger of vertigo.” It was possibly too easy to misconstrue what was being said. Lazy communicators cut corners, saying “we become God” – but that's pantheism. So it tended to diminish, but in the Reformed tradition, if we follow that sort of line, John Owen is quite happy to use it.

Jonathan Edwards saturates his work with theotic language. He uses

the term over and over again: deification, divinization. So reading someone like Jonathan Edwards in the American context – he is very happy to use this language. (But Jonathan Edwards was happy to use all sorts of language modern Reformed aren't. That's why I like him, I think.)

So it is there in a minor key, but it becomes muted because in the West, the Augustinianism, the dualism, the legal sort of stuff, forensic stuff becomes all-important. (Justification by faith alone is important, but it's not on every page of Scripture. Unlike Luther's comments, it's here and there.) The legal stuff, the forensic stuff, came to dominate in the West because that's our legal system, that's our culture, whereas the East didn't have that culture.

MM: I was wondering whether it was scientific language, that they expected language to be scientific.

MH: That picks up on the Enlightenment and modernity, that's true. But that itself would be from out of that Western, legal, dualistic view (Newton and the mechanistic universe). Deification is too mystical, too esoteric. It seems too intangible. So the term becomes associated with Eastern mysticism. For Protestants particularly, Eastern mysticism is ruled out of court. That's a mistake, though – it's not Eastern mysticism – it's robust and practical.

MM: Just because Eastern mystics used the term doesn't mean that they've got the corner on it. [**MH:** That's right.]

MM: You mentioned a couple other terms that are similar, more Latin-sounding: divinization or deification. Do you prefer theosis over them, or are they equivalent?

MH: Theosis is Greek, and then you've got deification, divinization, which derive from Latin. They're all the same – synonyms. You can use them equally. I use theosis because divinization has a sense in literature of being divinized, of literally becoming God. That's not a technical distinction, but that's often how it's used. Whereas theosis, because it's a funny word, it doesn't immediately have a sense to people today. It's like inventing a word, you know – what's a kuza? I don't know – tell me. And I'll tell them. What's theosis? And I tell them.

MM: When does theosis happen?

MH: If we take it as this Christian baptized view, then theosis happens, first of all, in the life of Christ, in a very robust sense. When Christ becomes a human, a historical person, he takes on our humanity in some sense, and he does something to it. He lives for it, dies for it, rises from the grave for it. He owns it, he possesses it, he re-creates it. This is the

offer of salvation, the finished work of Christ. He's not going to do it again – he's done it. It's objective, it's once and for all.

A major question of salvation is, How can we be holy, how can we be righteous, how can we be the expressions of God, who is light? Resurrection is Jesus' answer. So, when does theosis happen? It happened in Christ Jesus for all of us – and then it's repeated in actual persons, individuals, throughout the course of our Christian life.

MM: ...as we are continually being "partakers of the divine nature."

MH: Yeah. From glory to glory, from age to age. It begins now, at our faith, our baptism, and it works itself out now. And it doesn't stop at the resurrection – the resurrection is simply the beginning of what continues from age to age.

MM: There's more after the resurrection?

MH: Yeah. Because if God is triune, then God has always been *becoming* – as Barth and Jüngel say: "being is becoming." God is always active, God is always love (God is love, says John.) This is an ontology: The Father loves the Son by the Spirit, the Son returns the love of the Father by the Spirit, the Spirit is the love of the Father and the Son. You keep doing that movement, that's who God is. God is dynamic, God is community, God is relational.

If we are made in that image, which Jesus Christ bears uniquely and then we are in that image of Christ who is in the image of God, then in eternity, we can never exhaust that being of God. We emulate, we imitate it, we partake of it, which means (well, I like to think of it) we are always chasing after God (but never catching him, because you can't).

I don't know what time is in the new heavens and new earth, but if we use our notions, what's the song... when we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've only just begun. So ten thousand upon ten thousand, whatever time means, we're becoming more and more godly, God-like, Christ-like. We're partaking of him, we're relating to him, we're knowing more, feeling more, we're serving more, and that just never ends. It's dynamic, because God is dynamic. Because we are transcendent in that sense, we're always striving for that which we are not: God. And God gives us our wish: we become God-like.

MM: You were saying earlier that's what he created us for in the first place.

MH: From the first place, yeah.

MM: He gave us a desire for that.

MH: Yeah. So I'm trying to trade off the ideas that Paul talks about

Christ pre-existing; he talks about Christ being crucified from the foundation of the world. Christ is prime, Christ is primary, Christ is first. So whatever it means, before creation, in God's time, God elected the Son to be Jesus Christ; God purposed that the Son would be Jesus Christ. The triune God decided that the Son would take on flesh in order to have these image-bearers that could sense God, feel God, know God, enjoy God, participate in the very best that there is – the *summum bonum* – the highest we could ever conceive or think or imagine or feel or be: God.

We can't become God. God purposed in Christ that we could have the next-best thing. We can be in Christ, who is God, and he calls us children, not slaves. We can participate. That's why I find *theosis* not just convenient, but actually an appropriate term. It is shocking. That is revolutionary. That is hard to get our minds around. That's too good to be true – and yet it is true. The word has good rhetorical force.

ART AND IMAGINATION IN THE CHURCH

Introduction: St. Andrews, Scotland, is known as the birthplace of golf some 600 years ago. Here also stand the 850-year-old ruins of the Cathedral of St. Andrew, three of whose 100-foot-high towers rise majestically over the east end of the city. Nearby, the esteemed University of St. Andrews, founded in 1413, is the home of St. Mary's College, the university's renowned divinity school, which still uses its 16th century buildings.

In College Hall, a room within one of those buildings, *You're Included* host J. Michael Feazell, Vice-President of Grace Communion International, interviews Dr. Trevor Hart. Dr. Hart is Professor of Divinity and Director of the Institute for Theology, Imagination, and the Arts at the



University of St. Andrews. He is the author of *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology, Regarding Karl Barth: Toward a Reading of His Theology*, and *Hope Against Hope*, which he co-authored with Richard Bauckham.

J. Michael Feazell: Thanks for joining us today. We'd like to ask about historical Christian art. How has it helped to shape how Christians view doctrine and practice?

Trevor Hart: Much more than many Christians often suppose and realize, art has had a central place in the church for many centuries. At the time of the Reformation, and for very good reasons, there were some questions asked about certain ways of using art in church. Those remain important. But art has always been a way in which Christians have interpreted and made sense of the gospel.

There are lots of ways in which as human beings we make sense of things. We tell stories... Art such as painting, music, drama, have all featured centrally in the ways in which Christians have made sense of, interpreted, and represented to themselves fundamental truths of the faith, fundamental stories from Scripture. Whether we're thinking about what goes on in church, or outside church, art has been a central vehicle for the communication of the gospel.

JMF: There are many different forms of art – often we think of painting when we think of art, but art goes everywhere, from illustrations of stories, ideas, human imagination in many ways. We're trying to talk about things unseen and things we don't have a clear picture of, and yet we're trying to bring them down to our level. Doesn't that leave room for misinterpretation?

TH: It does. But if we limit ourselves to words, we get misinterpretation as well. One of the advantages, whether we are thinking of painting or of music – or if we bring things up to date a bit, film, and the more contemporary forms that now would be recognized as among the arts – one of the advantages is that art engages us at levels and in ways that words alone can't. I say "words alone" advisedly, because it's important to hold together the levels at which art operates visually or through sound or action, whatever it is, engaging our emotions as well as our intellect and imagination. It's important to hold that together with words, but words alone can only take us so far.

A lot of the more familiar ways in which we think of the Christian gospel, biblical stories being interpreted limited to words can end up being dry if we're not careful. Most people know that when listening to a sermon or reading a Christian book — it's when the writer or the speaker resorts to story, for example, which is an artistic form, things begin to take off and get more interesting.

There's a place for what we might call clear-cut reasoned thought, and there will never be a context in which we can let go of that or stop doing it. But that needs to be supplemented. It needs to be brought to life. The ideas are important and they need to be clothed in flesh, we might say, and made more accessible. But I don't want to suggest that art is simply a matter of illustration or making abstract ideas more palatable. It can do that, and we should be grateful for the fact that it can. But art can also open up depths of meaning that words alone can't reach. In tandem with words, taken together with words, art can be a powerful force to put us in touch with realities that often go beyond the level of our understanding.

JMF: What are some examples of the depth of, let's say, music? When you bring music to church, sometimes the music can affect us in a very negative way or a very positive way.

TH: It can. That's a complex subject, and there are people far more expert than I am who understand how it works, but sometimes the interplay of the words, and when we're talking about music, words set to music and the sound, whether we're listening to it or when we're participating in it, when we're singing, we're doing something, making sound in a certain way which can complement and amplify the meaning of the words when it's done well.

Equally, I think a bad setting of a set of words...whether it's church music (or any other sort, for that matter)... is one where the sound, the music, doesn't work with the words, the ideas, but in some way against them. That can be hard to pin down and explain, but I think we know when it happens. Somehow it doesn't work. There's no sync between the meaning that we're articulating through the words and the meaning that is articulated in sound.

JMF: In some of our Western churches today, there seems to be a carryover from rock concerts into the church service. The volume tends to come across that way, and in my experience, many elderly people have asked if the volume could be turned down, and yet they're willing to, if it helps the young people, to have that music. Is it a historical phenomenon for what is art in contemporary life (or secular life, let's say) to be brought across into the church, and is that usually productive, or should the church have its own art that does not reflect just what is around us?

TH: There are elements of truth in both sides of that. For many centuries, while the culture was shaped by the church, much music was written and performed as church music. The church was the key patron for

the arts, at least music. Someone like Bach was writing to order for church patrons, Catholic and Protestant.

The division between secular music and sacred music only arises in the 17th century and beyond, when music, among other arts, was forced to find business, as it were, outside church because there were more opportunities for it there than within the church. Since then it's usually been the case that church music has, to some extent, been willing to draw on wider currents of musicality, though not in an injudicious way.

The point of your question is good — we can't borrow anything simply because it might attract young people. We need to be careful. Music can work at deep levels which we don't always understand, so judiciousness and discernment needs to be carefully done. But, done well, done carefully, all sorts of things can be baptized and brought into the sanctuary and made good use of. There's a long history of that. Many hymn tunes and carol tunes were borrowed from the wider culture of the day. And we forget...we just claim them for our own in the church. I don't think there's anything wrong in principle with doing it, but it needs to be done carefully.

Music written within the church, for the church or from a Christian standpoint — we think not so much of music for worship now, but music composed by Christian composers — I think can have a powerful impact on the wider culture, too.

JMF: Much of contemporary music today, or what's called (at least in the United States) contemporary Christian music (much of which was written 40 or 50 years ago in some cases) has catchy tunes, repetitive tunes, but much of the theology seems to be weak, and yet that seems to be most popular and most repeated in many evangelical churches.

TH: If I wanted to start a new theological movement or a new Christian church with peculiar doctrines, the most efficient way by far of populating such a church would be to write songs, popular choruses, hymns, call them what you will, with appropriately theologically orientated words and get people to sing them, because when people sing things, they quickly begin to believe it. We're far too careless in the way we pick up and sing things in church. We aren't really thinking. I try to make it a habit of my own to always read through a hymn that I'm not familiar with and see whether I want to sing it. We don't all need to have theology degrees and be able to analyze church hymn lyrics in a precise way, but we should be cautious about what we sing.

The flip side of that is it's incumbent upon hymn writers, writers of

songs, to do a good job and to be better informed theologically, so that what they write is carefully thought through and not simply driven by the beat or by whatever. The best church music is a happy synthesis in which good words and good music complement one another. It's easy, and I suspect it happens, for bad words to arise because the music seems to drive it, just as it's possible for good words to be spoiled by bad music. We need to be judicious about what we sing and not be driven too quickly by the currents of music or fashion or what passes as popular in theological terms.

JMF: Are there other forms of Christian art that could enhance a worship service?

TH: It's a shame that in the Protestant churches and in the evangelical tradition, commonly we're still nervous about the use of visual art in church. The Reformation was careful in the direction of its criticism about the use of visual art in church. The key Reformers differed markedly on their attitude toward it. Luther was far more forgiving about visual art in church, was happy to tolerate it. Calvin was much more nervous and careful about what he thought was permissible. The key concern was idolatry. Calvin's worry was that if you put things in churches, people would tend to treat them in a way which might end up in idolatry and therefore it was far better to have them removed from churches. He was happy with art of a certain sort outside the sanctuary, not so happy with art in the sanctuary.

Luther's attitude was that idolatry is a matter of the heart. If you take away paintings, they'll simply find something else to latch onto — deal with the idolatry and then the paintings won't be a problem. There are a range of issues about which we need to be careful, therefore, about using visual arts in church. But painting and other forms of visual art can be powerful communicators of the gospel. They can enhance our church buildings in a range of ways which enrich worship, and used carefully and judiciously, so that we don't fall foul of the things which the Reformers were worried about, they could be a massive enhancement of our worship in a number of ways.

JMF: Art is a reflection of human imagination, and you've done a great deal of work on the imagination in a broader sense and how it is a reflection of faith and practice in our walk with Christ. Can you tell us about that?

TH: I got interested in this when I was asked to write an essay on imagination and the Christian hope, and I started to reflect on it, reading

around, thinking hard about it. It's apparent, when one thinks about hope, that imagination is bound to be central. When you're hoping, you're picturing things that aren't yet the case and making them concrete, so hope is one example of a place in Christian faith and life where we are employing our imaginations. There are many others.

In down-to-earth terms, if you ask yourself, what are most Christians doing when they pray? Most of us, I suspect, have a picture in our minds. Perhaps to some it will be a picture of God as father or something. For others it will be Jesus. It's hard to pray to a person without picturing them in some way. So that's another context in which imagination is quite indispensable for the life of faith.

Then I got to thinking, how about Jesus himself? Weren't Jesus' teaching strategies highly imaginative? In breaking open complex and difficult ideas — the kingdom of God, whatever it might be — Jesus tends to bring things immediately into the sphere of the imaginative and say, it's a bit like this, and he would tell a story or compare something abstract to something concrete so people could get a handle on it. In all sorts of ways, in almost any area of Christian life and faith, the imagination crops up very soon and seems to have a central function to play.

One could describe Christian faith itself as a way of imagining the world. People will get nervous about that because "imagination" tends to be associated quickly with another word — imaginary. The automatic association between the two isn't helpful. There's nothing wrong with things that are imaginary, but not everything that we imagine is imaginary. Lots of things that we have to imagine, because we have no other way of picturing them, are real. When one comes to faith, a different way of seeing, feeling, and tasting the world, slides into view. That's a matter of the imaginative. It's a way of picturing reality, picturing the world, picturing our relation to God in a new way as if someone has changed the backdrop against which we're situated. So a fundamental way in which to be imaginative seems to be basic to what we are, and in the life of faith, that has a basic role to play.

JMF: Many Christians will shy away from the idea, and yet everybody does it — we can't be alive without having some goings on in our brain that put together ideas...and that is imagination. Can Christians go too far? Is there something they should be worried about or careful about?

TH: Sure. I like to think of the imagination as whatever's going on in the mind's eye, as we might call it. That can be good and healthy, and it

can be bad and unhealthy. It's reasonable that Christians might be concerned about certain things the imagination is capable of.

One thing I'm slightly cautious about is that in the 19th century, there was a rediscovery of the imagination and a tendency to associate it too quickly, almost automatically, with things of God, with the divine spirit, and so on. So I point out to my students that the imagination can be enormously dangerous. I usually say to them that there's nothing more imaginative than a torture chamber. That's one example of how we can use our imaginations to devise things, which far from being good and healthy and the things of God, are actually manifestations of evil. That tends to be the thing which underlies a lot of Christian concern of imagination, is it can be the maker of all sorts of things which are dangerous and damaging.

But imagination also lies behind most of the things which are good and life-giving and healthy. For example, knowing how to deal with somebody who is in a difficult place — an act of love, we might say, or mercy, or charity, call it what you will, is a highly imaginative thing. Knowing how to relate to another person effectively and well in any context is an imaginative activity. The imaginative is a fundamental disposition of what we are as human beings, and like most of the other things that we are as human beings, it can be used for good or ill, can be in the hands of God's Spirit, or can be a device we use to withstand God's Spirit and struggle against it.

So I don't want to automatically baptize the imagination and say that everything that's born of the imagination is necessarily good and healthy, but I want to recapture it, to reclaim it, for the kingdom of God, and say, God made us imaginative beings. We can't remember, we can't think where we've come from, without exercising our imaginations, we can't anticipate or hope for what lies in the future without using our imaginations, we can have no sense of who we are, where we're going, where we've come from, or what we should do and who we should seek to be. The imagination is a place in our lives where if God's Spirit lays hold of it and renews and redeems it, can be a remarkable resource for good.

One way I sum that up is to say, as Christians we talk about God's Spirit being present in us and transforming us from within. We're not good at identifying the places where that happens. I have a hunch that if we talk about the imagination in that broad-brush sense of our mind's eye, the way

we envisage things, the way we see ourselves and the world, then the imagination could be one place, if not the main place, where God's Spirit, present and active, works in renewing us and conforming us to Christ.

JMF: Our imagination is all we have, isn't it, as far as any kind of planning, ideas, coming up with what to do next?

TH: Anytime we move in our mind's eye beyond where we are now, then we're being imaginative. Whether we're thinking about what happened yesterday or what we might have for dinner tonight, that's imaginative. If we're thinking or planning a service for the weekend, that's imaginative. If we're expecting something to happen in life, that's... Almost anything you can think of that gets us outside of the immediacy of the here and now, this moment, involves the imagination to some extent.

JMF: As Christians we're participating in the life of Christ. As we read Scripture, that is a part of that process as Scripture becomes the witness of who Christ is with us and for us... How does imagination play into that?

TH: If we look at what God has given us as a book through which he makes himself known to us — how much of it is imaginative, and the sort of the thing that any literary critic would say oh, that's an imaginative genre? Story, poetry, parable, and so on. History (I mean history which figures God in it) is a way of patterning things, creating a pattern through a series of events over centuries. That is imaginative in terms of the content of Old and New Testaments and the pattern in which we trace through them a story leading from creation to the last things.

But it's not just the content of Scripture that's highly imaginative. The ways in which as Christians we read the text, make sense of it for ourselves, find ourselves as well as God in its pages. Here, God's speaking to us through its pages. That demands huge acts of imagination. It's not a way in which people ordinarily would see or think of themselves, but we're called to do it. God gives us these texts, calls us to read them together, and to seek his voice. Seeking and finding are highly imaginative activities. Imagination is a living and vibrant thing through which we come to see ourselves differently, and therefore to live differently. It seems to be fundamental to the ways in which we engage with the text of Scripture as God's word.

JMF: Aren't there some principles or guidelines that Christians can bring to keeping their imaginations within some sort of reasonable boundaries when they come to the Scriptures? Often, as we read the Scriptures and bring our experiences to them, we can begin to abuse other

people, and as we interpret the Scripture, assume that our view is God's view. How can a person not let their imagination lead them astray as they're going through the Scriptures?

TH: You're right. We can do all sorts of things with the Bible if we wish to. We can misuse it as well as use it well. Putting that back in terms of the question — there can be good imagining and bad imagining in relation to Scripture. We have to be guided by what we find in the text. It's not a free-for-all. We can't just do what we like with the text. We have to be guided by the patterns that we find in the text and work with those.

Christians have never thought that being faithful to the text of Scripture was simply a matter of reiterating the text. The best practitioners of the Christian faith, and the best theologians, have been those who have identified patterns within the text and then extrapolated them in a way that's faithful to the text but applies it to new situations, answers questions which the text itself perhaps doesn't answer directly but to which it's relevant, almost in the way that a jazz pianist or saxophonist might improvise on a theme or themes that are within the piece, but now there's something new and imaginative to be done on the basis of it for a new context, a new situation.

Yes, it's possible to use the imagination badly in relation to Scripture, just as it's possible to use it badly in relation to almost anything else in life. We're fallen in our imaginations, just as we're fallen in our minds, in our wills, and in our bodies — that's all the more reason then to suppose that we're also redeemed in Christ in our imaginations as well as our minds and our wills and our bodies. The other thing to say when we're talking about Scripture is that we should do it prayerfully.

JMF: Is there something to be said for doing it in the context of the body of Christ as opposed to just on our own...

TH: Absolutely. This is to some extent something that Protestants and evangelicals need to rediscover — the importance of the church for the reading of Scripture and that it's not primarily an individual exercise — it is primarily an exercise within the Body in which we have to listen to others, learn from others, as well as offer our own voice, and expect to meet Christ as we meet others and engage with them and not in isolation.

That's not to say that God doesn't speak to people — that we can't meet Christ in the privacy of our own space — but I think the more normal expectation is that that will happen as we engage with other Christians in faith, in the community of faith, and share our interpretations, voice the

things that we think we discover in the text, and see whether those are resonated by what others find there and see whether they're confirmed or called into question by what others find.

JMF: I've seen a bumper sticker on cars that says something like, "God said it, I believe it, and that settles it." They're talking about specific social issues about which they have reached a conclusion in which they're condemning those who do it, and it's their way of using the Bible as a tool to get across their agenda.

TH: Yeah. We need to be cautious about that. It's always complex asking questions about issues to which the Bible itself sometimes appears to give no clear answer but which it would be easy, by using it in certain ways, to make it seem to speak. The secret is to approach the text prayerfully, to seek to be as aware as we can about our own failings, of our own tendencies to make it say what we want to find in it, but to situate our reading of it in the community — to air our readings, to hear the readings of others, and to seek truth together prayerfully, because what we're concerned with is not faithfulness to our own readings or even those of our tradition, but faithfulness to what we hear God speaking in the text as we read it together.

JMF: The fact that we have imagination and the fact that Christ is one of us and therefore shares imagination as well, but more than that, we're made in the image of God, then we have to think that God has imagination which transcends our imagination and is the source of our imagination. How would we think about God and imagination? Is that a fair question?

TH: That's a huge question. Some theologians have wanted to use the term *imagination* directly of God. Any term we use in speaking of God we're using very carefully, because as Christians have long recognized, God is not like us, as God says in Isaiah, "My ways are not as your ways," and that otherness is important. However, the Bible doesn't hesitate to use human terms of God — thinking, speaking, acting, and so on. It seems to me that imagining is a reasonable one to use. To think of God, in some sense, on the analogy of human imagination in his dealings with things, can help us get a grip, perhaps, on the ways in which God deals with things sometimes.

But we need to handle the terms carefully. We can't simply project all the features of human imagining onto the clouds and assume that they're true in some amplified sense of God — that would be a dangerous way to go. But I wouldn't resist the term *imagination* just because it's one that we

don't find on the pages of the Bible all over. The Bible does show God acting imaginatively, creatively, if you prefer the term, in response to all sorts of situations, so it seems to be reasonable to use it in that way.

JMF: The term *imagination* has to do with *image*, a created image of which we are.

TH: Yeah. Christians have sometimes wanted to use the image of the artist, coming back to artistic imagination, as a way of picturing God's creative relation to the world. We need to be careful about that, but as a picture it seems to work reasonably well in certain respects...and the idea of God taking care over something, pouring gratuitous amounts of effort into the making of it and then standing back and...

JMF: The Scripture uses the potter and the wheel as the image of God.

TH: Indeed. And I think that sense of aesthetic judgment that we get in Genesis 1, where God stands back and sees that it is good. All those things speak to the human experience of making something, doing it well, doing it as well as you can, and being pleased, satisfied, with the outcome. And, of course, caring for what you've made, putting great value on it.

GOD THE FATHER, REFLECTED IN JESUS CHRIST

J. Michael Feazell: How did you become acquainted with Trinitarian theology?

Trevor Hart: I was an undergraduate student at the University of Durham in England. In about the second year of my three years of study, someone introduced me to Tom Torrance's work. They lent me a copy of *Space, Time, and Incarnation*, and I confess it took a little bit of reading. But I moved quickly on and picked up some of his other books, *Theology and Reconstruction*, *Theology and Reconciliation*.

In his writing, I realized that it was possible to do hard-nosed, thorough, rigorous, systematic theology in a way that touched base on almost every page with the things that mattered to the life of faith. Sometimes I wasn't finding that in the other people I was reading. That's not to say that the theologians I was reading weren't men and women of faith – it's that the theology seemed to be doing something other than a game in which self-conscious meshing of theology with Scripture, with tradition, and with the practical concerns of Christian life and living was apparent.

I found that very encouraging, slightly daunting, because he did it so well, but also refreshing. I moved on, because when reading Tom Torrance, you don't go very far without finding allusions to other figures. One of them was Karl Barth. So I started to read Karl Barth as well, and found the same sort of thing in Barth that I found in Torrance, and both of them were casting the whole of theology in this Trinitarian way of understanding things.

Reading Karl Barth

JMF: Karl Barth has such a huge body of work that it seems that people...there's so much, that they don't even undertake to read it. And there's been a lot of misunderstanding. Do you think that that is improving? Is Karl Barth being better understood?

TH: I suspect so. I hope so. Barth is a complex figure, as you say. His work is daunting; there's an awful lot of it. In a way that is analogous to Torrance, it's not easy to get into. Part of the reason is that he has his own way of saying things, putting things. There's a huge level of overall consistency between the different parts of his work, which means that you need to have read all the others before you start any one of them. So wherever you leap in, it's going to be hard work at first. But if you stick with it, it becomes readable quickly, and you see the same themes occurring; you recognize where you are within the map, as it were, of his thought.

What struck me when I first started reading Barth, and still strikes me, is his clear dedication to the gospel, his concern that it be understood, and that its significance for life in the world be worked out and made manifest for as many people to see and to grasp as possible. He does that at huge length, with great care, but it's probably true that certain parts are less daunting than others in terms of their accessibility.

Usually I would encourage an undergraduate student wanting to start reading Barth to look at *The Doctrine of Reconciliation* [*Church Dogmatics* volume 4], where the themes are familiar: atonement, incarnation, and so on. He treats them in a way which is sometimes difficult, but sometimes just "home from home." What students get when they read that is the sense that even if they're not understanding everything on every page, nevertheless this is someone with whose thought they can feel at home.

Not that Barth won't stretch them, not that he won't make them re-think some things, maybe fairly fundamentally. Not that on occasion (and this remains true after 30 years of reading his thought) they may not end up disagreeing with him about one or two things, but they will have grappled at a deep level with some basic themes in the gospel, in their understanding of who God is, in their understanding of what God has done in Jesus Christ, and in the way that that plays out in the wider story of life in the world. For that, it's hard to better Barth, although if I wanted to cluster theologians who do it well, Barth and Torrance would be in the first league.

JMF: There are some interesting small books by Karl Barth, *Christ and Adam* and *The Humanity of God*, and many people have found those helpful. In *Christ and Adam* he goes through Romans 5. It's short and easy to read, but so meaningful as he takes you into the love of God that is in spite of who you are and what you've done. As a taste of what can come of reading Barth, it seems different from the way we typically go to church and hear a sermon about how you should be obeying and if you don't please God you're coming under the curse and you're going back like a dog to its vomit, and you come away discouraged. But when you read Barth, you come away encouraged about who you are, the commitment toward the same way.

TH: Yeah. Barth talks about the strange new world that we find in the Bible, and many readers have a similar experience when they first pick up Barth, that here too there is a strange new world, and you might not yet be able to identify all the landmarks or pick out the horizon. But nevertheless, you know that you're in somewhere that's unfamiliar, in a sense.

I cited a couple of moments ago that Barth's theology in some ways has a familiar ring to it. But you also get the sense that even though these are familiar themes and landmarks, somehow the configuration of them is different. The difference is intriguing, and when most people read it the first time, it's attractive. Something about it has changed. The players are the same players and the storylines are the same storylines, but something has been done to them which gives it a completely different feel.

It is that sense of the God who is from first to last *for us*, and determined to be for us, no matter who we are and no matter what we've done and no matter what we amount to, who values us not for our achievements but for who he has called us to be and who he has made us to be in his Son. That is completely foundational to Barth's thought; it colors every chapter of the story he tells. I think people catch that.

Even if they don't understand it at first and they can't see how it all plays out in the larger structure of their understanding of the Christian faith, most people I've met who have engaged with Barth at any length find that attractive immediately. It's something they want to hear more of, and that's because it is the gospel. It is the story of the God who gives all for us and is determined to be for us. Barth's got his finger on that pulse from the very first, and it's shot through the whole of his theology. There's no part of his theology where that doesn't come up again and again and shape the whole substance of what he has to say, no matter what he's talking about.

The doctrine of election

JMF: When we think of Calvinists today, we aren't necessarily thinking of John Calvin, but we're thinking of a theology that excludes people... On one side there's a declaration of assurance of salvation, but on the other side, there's a "How do you know that you're among the elect?" Well, you know by the evidence of your works, and yet that proves nothing to you. Is there a difference between John Calvin's theology and what has become of it, and what influence has Karl Barth brought to that understanding?

TH: Barth is a Reformed theologian, self-consciously so, and therefore I think his appropriation of the Reformed tradition and his reinterpretation of it at certain key points, not least in his treatment of the doctrine of election, has forced people, not least some Calvinist theologians (Reformed theologians) to go back and examine again and see whether the way in which Reformed theology has sometimes schematized that theme has been healthy, helpful, but more importantly, biblical.

What Barth saw and shows is that you can't formulate a doctrine of election, or any other doctrine, simply by lifting verses from Scripture and laying them out and putting them in a logical order. That's not how it works. It never has worked like that. You have to go further than that. You have to relate doctrines to one another. You have to ask questions about certain themes that perhaps have priority logically, theologically over others.

Barth's fundamental conviction is that while the theme of election, God's choosing, God's deciding, ultimately the sovereignty of God, is fundamental to the way Christians should conceive of God in biblical terms, that it's in the person of Christ that the theological center of gravity falls in Scripture and, therefore, in theology too, it should be.

His thoroughgoing insistence on rethinking what it might mean to say that God chooses, concerning a person's eternal well-being, in the light of Jesus Christ and his refusal to acknowledge the meaningfulness of talking about any God who, as he puts it, is hidden *behind* Jesus Christ, forced him to a radical re-reading of the doctrine — to the fundamental conviction that it's not in the text of the Bible as some work of literature that God reveals himself, finally it's in a human life lived, a death died and raised to life again that God has made himself known fully and finally. All the rest needs to be worked out in the light of what that means and the significance of that fact.

As Barth sees it, the significance of that fact is that this is who God

wills to be, and what he has done for each of us. Whatever we say about election or any other theme theologically has to reckon with that fact. That can't be something we come to after we've worked out the other things. That has to be where we start – that God's purpose eternally was to be the man Jesus Christ and to do what he does in Christ for us. That forces us to rethink some themes. So Barth has caused some rethinking of that doctrine, but for some people that's problematic, and some people find him difficult to cope with theologically because they're convinced that the traditional version of that doctrine is non-negotiable.

Jesus as God

JMF: Why is it significant when Jesus said, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father”? What is important about that?

TH: One way of answering that is pastorally rather than theologically, differentiating between those two for the moment. (I wouldn't want to drive a wedge between them, incidentally, but let's look at it pastorally.) Most people, if they think of God at all, have a question mark about what sort of God it is they're dealing with. Luther had the question, “How can I get a gracious God?” Christians sometimes live with this lurking suspicion that God may turn out to be rather unpleasant, or to have a grudge against them or a good case against them.

What Barth says so clearly is that Christian life ought to be based solidly on the God we see, and the face of God that we see in Jesus, that we can be sure that God turns out, finally, to be like Jesus, like his Son. That provides a huge ground for assurance, because what do we see in Jesus? We see God forgiving sins, we see God loving the sinner, rehabilitating the sinner. Once we realize the Father is no different in that from the Son he sends into the world to do it, then it banishes any specters we might have of a God who, even though Jesus is like that, may turn out to be rather different.

On a pastoral level, in terms of the God we pray to day and night, or the God we hope to meet at the end of our lives beyond life, if we live with a question mark, it seems to me we're going to live finally with fear and guilt and a suspicion, and possibly be driven to some form of seeking to secure ourselves by earning salvation through good works or some form of that. It's hard to shake that off completely when you don't think you know the answer to the question “What is God like?”

Once you've come to the realization that God is no different to Jesus, on this level at least, he's like Jesus. God's character, the Father's

character, is fully reflected in the face of his Son. That sets you free from all those fears and guilts and suspicions and enables you to live in a liberated way, in a way that is born out of gratitude and joy rather than fear and guilt. So, on a pastoral level, quite apart from the theological niceties of it all, it seems to be fundamental that we can say, when it comes down to it, there isn't anyone (when we come to talk about God), there's no one there who isn't fully reflected in the face of Jesus and Jesus' dealings with us.

Jesus as a human

JMF: The theological term “vicarious humanity of Christ” – what are we talking about?

TH: It's something which most Christians, most evangelical Christians anyway, will be familiar with as a category in one respect – most evangelical Christians would be happy to think that Jesus did something in their stead. Most of them will think that that thing he did for them in their place, in their stead, is die on the cross. That's absolutely right.

The phrase “vicarious humanity” captures the realization that it doesn't stop there. In Jesus, God stands in for us at almost *every* point of our relationship with him, because we fail him at almost every point in our lives. No matter how hard we struggle and strive (and most of us are good at struggling and striving, even though we know we shouldn't), we fail. To use a biblical category, we're not very good covenant partners for God most of the time. “Vicarious humanity” picks up on the idea that in Jesus, God stands in for us in all aspects of life. It's not simply in his death that he takes our place and does what we can't do – it's in his faith, too, in his obedience, in his responses to the Father. At each point God, as it were, looks at us through him and in him and together with him, and not standing isolated on our own.

I suppose this is a Pauline image, but I like to think of it as God being like a parent who puts his kids on their way to school in a set of clothes... (We have school uniforms in the U.K. – I don't know whether you have those... [**JMF:** Some schools do.]) Often a parent will buy a uniform several sizes too big because that way it lasts longer. You don't fit the clothes – they're way too big for you – but eventually you grow into them, or begin to. As an image, that works nicely. We're clothed with Christ. Every aspect of us is covered with him. When the Father looks, he sees Christ, Christ's response, Christ's obedience, Christ's prayer, Christ's faith.

The biblical term isn't "vicarious humanity." That's a technical term. The biblical category is *priesthood*. Jesus is the great high priest who mediates our human responses to God through himself to the Father. Jesus stands in our place and does for us what we can't do properly for ourselves.

But the flip-side of that, and it's a vital flip-side, is that that sets us free *to do it for ourselves*. It sets us free to do it because we're not afraid of falling. We're not afraid of any wrong. Why? Because our eternity doesn't hang on whether we get it wrong or not. Our eternity rests on his response made for us. So we can get on and do it, and if we fall he'll pick us up.

In the meanwhile, we grow into the uniform. We never quite fill it out, but nevertheless we begin to grow more like him, so that our faith becomes more adequate, our prayer becomes more appropriate, our obedience becomes more identifiable as the Spirit gradually makes us more like Jesus. But our relationship with God doesn't rest on any of that. Our relationship with God rests on what he has done once for all, not just on the cross, but at every point from his birth through to his death and resurrection.

What are people afraid of?

JMF: That's so radical in terms of the way most people think. Why is something that good difficult to accept? Why are we afraid of it? It's as though we think, "If I believe that and I accept it, then it's like saying that I don't have to do anything, Christ has done it all, so if I accept that, God won't like me because I'm assuming on his kindness or something." Some preachers even get angry about it and say, "Don't listen to that kind of nonsense because God calls you to obedience."

TH: One reason why someone might be uncomfortable with it might be that it could be seen to encourage an approach that says: "If Jesus has done it all for me, then I don't have to do it for myself, do I?"

JMF: "I can go out and live any way I want."

TH: Exactly. In theological terms we call that antinomianism, or something like it. That's a worry. We can do almost anything with grace, can't we? We can reject it, we can turn it to what we think is our advantage. But that's not proper to the reality itself. That's why I said that Jesus does it for us precisely so that we can do it for ourselves, and the work of the Spirit draws us into the Son's work and brings it to fulfillment in individual lives. That's one reason why I can imagine a preacher being nervous, because "maybe my people won't try so hard anymore." Well, maybe they're trying too hard in the first place. Maybe *trying* is not what it's about.

JMF: Isn't it an irrational fear? Those who believe don't really do that.

TH: That's right – it probably is an irrational fear. I wonder how much it isn't a bit of resurgence of sinful pride in us, whether as preachers or as individual Christian men and women. Grace has a massive advantage which is also a bit galling – it says, “God isn't taking your responses as the most important responses.” It devalues the things we like to think we can take to God to deal with him. You know, I bring my little bit of righteousness to God and say, “God, I have something for you.”

Don't get me wrong – I think God delights when we bring righteousness to him. What he doesn't like is when we try to make it the basis of a trade, as if we have something to give to him, and now he can give something back to us. The message of grace, the gospel of grace understood in this way, in terms of this category of “vicarious humanity,” robs us of that, because it gives us nothing. There's nothing left that we can give to God and say, “God, you need this, and I'm giving it to you, so now you give me something that I need.”

That's wrong. Everything has to be predicated on the idea that God gives everything freely. I'm sorry, that devalues the currency that you're working with. In our heart of hearts we, even those of us who believe this gospel, still, on occasion, find ourselves, I suspect, thinking, “I'd rather like it if I had something to give back to God.” Well, you can give it, but now you have to give it freely and joyfully, not as the basis of some sort of trade.

JMF: That reminds me of how you have to give your five-year-old some money so they can get you a gift.

TH: Absolutely. And when they get to 15, it becomes more expensive (laughing).

JMF: It all comes from God in the first place, and so anything we offer back isn't ours to begin with.

TH: But it doesn't kill the dynamic of giving. The unfounded fear is that somehow the idea that God gives everything and we're only here to receive is going to deny the capacity, or simply not provide a context in which we can offer back to God. On the contrary: I think the complement of “vicarious humanity” is a life lived from first to last in (if I can use the term) a Eucharistic manner, and that's to say, thanksgiving.

Everything, because it's freely given to us, we can now freely offer back to God without fear that our offering won't be adequate and therefore will come back to haunt us because we did it badly. It sets you free to give and to offer back rather than killing it. But there's always that little bit of sin which wants something of its own to give to God.

Why confess our sins?

JMF: Some people ask, “Since we’re already forgiven and we stand in the forgiveness of God, why are we asked to confess our sins?” How does that work together?

TH: I’ve moved a long way on this one. When I first came to faith and was part of an evangelical congregation, I confessed my sins every day with the sense that my eternal well-being depended on doing it well. There’s a benefit to that, because everything was intense, and I knew that this matters.

I was liberated from that by discovering the gospel of grace and God’s grace in the life of Jesus lived in my place, so if I didn’t confess all my sins, I wasn’t on an immediate slippery slope that evening. There is a slight risk that the immediacy and urgency of confessing sins gets lost. It does have an important place – this constant recognition that we are sinners. It’s just as well that our salvation doesn’t rest on our shoulders, because we continue to get it wrong.

With that mechanism, with gratitude, with thanksgiving, goes also a sense of penitence, that God has given so much to us and continues to do so and yet we fall so far short. No matter what we seek to do in and of ourselves, we continue to betray him, to hurt him, to act in ways that deny who he would have us be. It’s vital for the health and well-being of our lives as Christians that we keep that firmly in our sights precisely so that we also keep firmly in our sights the importance of turning to Christ and having him stand in our place.

It’s like two blades of a pair of scissors. If we lose either of them, it becomes useless. If there’s going to be a means of achieving something, then what God has done for us in Christ needs to be constantly being applied by the Spirit in our Christian day-to-day living.

JMF: That was my experience when I was a legalist. In confession, I couldn’t be quite sure that I had done it well enough to feel like I’d been forgiven, so I had to do it over. Then I had to do it with more intensity...

TH: That’s a small-style version of what Tom Torrance talks about, and his brother James (who is a great hero of mine and a colleague of mine at one point) used to talk about. I’ve seen it in my own experience as a preacher in small churches, often evangelical congregations, where, at the end of the Sunday evening service there will be an altar call of some form, and often the same people, not necessarily every week, but on a regular pattern will get up and go forward. If someone were to ask them why, they would say, “Because I’m not really sure I had a real experience of

repentance last time.” That seems to have got things wrong because it puts the focus on you and your faith, on the quality of your response.

I’d want to go at them and say, you don’t have to repent harder. If you’ve repented at all, if you’ve opened yourself and turned to Christ and seek to lay hold of him, then *his* repentance is the one that counts. You can be thankful for that. That doesn’t mean that repentance and penitence doesn’t continue to be important, but your eternal destiny doesn’t rest on your response, which is just as well, otherwise we’d all be up there every Sunday, week in and week out.

JMF: It brings such comfort and relief. It’s like a participation in the assurance of the forgiveness that’s already ours.

TH: Yeah. In my own tradition (Episcopalian), for good or ill we have a weekly celebration of the supper, the Lord’s Supper, the Eucharist. That is a tangible way of reminding one’s self and constantly putting one’s self in the way of the priesthood of Christ and saying, I eat and drink the body and blood of Christ in taking the bread and wine, and I’m symbolically identifying myself with Christ’s response to the Father for me and realizing that that’s what matters. It’s not my response. It’s only as I eat and drink of him that I’m drawn into the presence of God. That shifts the gaze away from the individual’s own spiritual response to the Father. There shouldn’t be such a thing. We don’t have an isolated spiritual response to the Father. We have an indirect one that goes through the Son.

ZOOMING IN ON SALVATION

J. Michael Feazell: Let's talk about salvation. Christ has saved us, we want salvation, salvation is good. What is it we're being saved from? Are we being saved from something, for something, what is salvation all about?

Trevor Hart: That's a huge question. Scripture and Christian theology use lots of different *pictures*, we can call them, in order to answer that question. Some of them have more prominence in the Bible than others, some of them are more prominent in certain strands of Christian tradition than others, but there are a number of them. For example, we're being saved from something which is like being (in terms of the court of law) guilty. We're being delivered from the dangers hanging over us of guilt. When you think in those terms, then you use the language of the law court to explain what it is that God has done to deliver us from that...so the language is of judgment, of the execution of justice and so on.

But there are other ways of describing it, too, so the Bible will talk equally of us being in bondage to some sort of slavery, whether it's personified in terms of Satan and evil spirits or whether it's left more abstract than that. In some sense we're struggling with something that we can't break out of ourselves. The language of salvation is cast in terms of deliverance, of being set free, redemption, the liberation of the slave in the marketplace, being bought with a price, all that sort of imagery comes into play. There are others — disease and healing is another. Victory over forces that we're struggling with. Someone is victorious over them for us,

because we can't defeat them ourselves, and so on.

That leads us to realize that salvation is multi-faceted. Whatever it is, it involves something way beyond our understanding. It's complex.

Correspondingly, the human situation — that which we're being rescued from — also needs all these different pictures and probably plenty of others to help us articulate it. One that I haven't alluded to yet and probably should, given its contemporary relevance, is debt. We have this huge debt that we can't possibly pay. So what are we going to do? We're crushed by it, we have no resources to pay it. The corresponding picture of salvation is, someone steps in and pays the price for us. All these pictures help us to get some partial understanding on the mystery which is salvation, and therefore helps us see the scale of the problem that confronts us.

If there is an overarching answer to "What is the problem?", it has to be answered at a high level, and say, "It's the consequence of being in a broken relationship with our Maker. It's the consequence of being out of kilter in terms of our relationship with God, for fellowship with whom we were created." That's the fundamental premise, that we were created, we were made to be in fellowship with God as Father.

Once we get that out of alignment, once we become alienated from God as our Father, then things go wrong in all sorts of departments of life, and we need all these different ways of thinking and speaking to make some sense of what's going on, because frankly, we don't know what's going on anymore — we've lost the plot. We're in a mess and we need someone to get us out of it. That's the other *leitmotif* [or theme] that moves along with the story of salvation: we can't fix it. We may have got ourselves into the mess, but we certainly can't fix it, so salvation is God doing what needs to be done for our sakes to get us out of the mess and to put us where we were always meant to be — back in fellowship with himself.

JMF: There's a sense in which we're already saved, and yet in another sense we're saved in the future. The one blossoms into the other...

TH: If we're going to take the whole of what the Bible has to tell us seriously, then we have to reckon with some things that seem to run into conflict, but actually need to be held in tension. There's a sense in which the most important thing has already happened, and the Bible leads us to say that God came in his Son Jesus and did what needs to be done. C. S. Lewis uses a military metaphor — the decisive battle has been won, but there are lots of skirmishes still to be carried out before the war is over.

What happened for you and me has happened. Nothing can undo it. But we still live in an age where that remains to be worked out through whatever is left of human history. That is the Spirit's work applying what God has done for us in Jesus Christ — living his life, being crucified, then risen in our individual lives. Paul used the imagery of crucifixion and resurrection for what goes on daily in a Christian's walk with God.

It's important to see it not just as, "God's done the most important thing, and now there's this inconvenient time where we're not one thing or the other and we just have to hang on and eventually it will all come right and God will bring it all to a close." God doesn't do things without reason, and I suspect there's something important... what he has done for us needs yet to be worked out in us — it's important that this happens to you and me through the threescore years and ten or whatever it proves to be of our lives — that application and working out, in and through the particular circumstances of your life and mine, matters for who we shall be when finally, we're raised anew and brought into God's presence in the kingdom.

What about other people?

JMF: Yet, some people come to faith and then die very soon afterwards. How do we equate the two?

TH: That's a huge question — difficult to answer with any clarity. It suggests that we don't all need to have a certain amount of time in order for things to be worked out in this life for salvation to occur. Salvation, in some sense, as we've already said, has been done. It's a done deal, once and for all, in Christ. And God deals with individuals individually.

It matters that you or I continue in faith for several decades or whatever it is. Perhaps in God's purposes it doesn't matter that someone else doesn't. We have to trust that their salvation will be worked out in full (as it were) in some other way, so that they are who they are called to be in the kingdom. I don't think the process of working it out in life is, in that sense, *necessary* to our salvation, but it seems to be important nonetheless when it occurs.

JMF: In the *Narnia Chronicles*, sometimes one of the kids asks Aslan about somebody, "Why is this happening to him and not to me (or vice versa)?" Aslan always says, "That's his story. I'm talking to you about your story."

TH: Exactly. God calls us to be who we are. Karl Barth says in his

discussion of this that God grants each of us our time. We don't know how long our time will be, but that's the time God calls us to be faithful in. Our salvation, in a sense, doesn't depend on it. Our salvation depends wholly on Christ and what he has done. But for now, this is who God calls us to be, and our task is not to ask about others and the brevity of their appearance on the stage. It's to get on and live faithfully the part he's called us to play so that when the judgment comes we can say, "I tried to be faithful to what you called me to be." That's what will matter. Salvation won't rest on it, but it matters that we do it, that we're faithful and not unfaithful.

JMF: Which raises the question, what about people we care about and love who didn't hear the gospel? Is there anything wrong with thinking that the heart of God toward such people is more full of love than we can have for them?

TH: I think we have to believe that. It's such a powerful question and a painful question. It ought to be painful for any Christian because Christian faith is driven, or should be, by the realization that that is precisely who God is — that God is a Father whose heart beats with love for all those he's made — that he created them to call them into fellowship with himself, that's the reason for their being, that's the calling to which they're called, and his greatest desire is that they should fulfill that calling. That has to be the context in which we ask questions.

It also has to be the theological context in which we interpret passages of Scripture that seem to point to the possibility of that not happening. We can't treat those passages lightly. We can't ignore their teaching, but we have to interpret them in the light of that fundamental conviction. That makes it more difficult, and far more uncomfortable than Christians have sometimes been, to consign people to some wherever other than in an eternity in communion with the Father.

Any consideration of that question has to be with fear and trembling. It has to be undergirded by that fundamental conviction that who God is, is who we see him to be in the face of his Son for everyone — not simply for us. We can do no more than commit people to the God who we know in that way, rather than speculate about their eternal destiny. We should be concerned about it, we should pray for them, we should do everything we can to bring them to know the Father if they don't already know the Father. But finally, it's in his hands and not ours. As you said a moment ago, God calls each of us to be concerned with our story, not theirs, at a certain point.

JMF: In the Inquisition the idea was supposedly (apart from the political considerations and so on) that in doing everything we can, we have to get somebody to come to a confession of faith, because torturing them is worth preserving them from the alternative and so on. What is wrong with that thinking?

TH: It raises the question about what the confession of faith is, doesn't it? If we're agreed that faith is about gratitude — it's not simply about discovering who God is, discovering him to be our Father, but discovering that and receiving it joyfully, and with gratitude — then extracting intellectual assent or apparent intellectual assent from somebody under the pain of torture or worse seems to me to be an absolute nonsense in terms of bringing someone to faith — it simply has nothing to do with it.

Thomas Erskine, the Scots theologian from the 19th century, says somewhere that you can't frighten people into love. Even if we're not forcing them to confess with the use of pain, another version of that has been to extract confession from people by frightening them. Again, that seems to have little to do with the true nature of faith and response to the gospel. The thing that's the most wrong with it, is that it misunderstands completely the nature of faith as a response to the good news.

The other thing to say is that the good news for Christians is not simply good news for Christians — it's good news for all. That's the message, that this is who God *is*. It's not simply who God is for some, it's not simply who God chooses to be on certain days of the week, it's who God is. That has to set the boundaries and the context in which we reflect on what it means to bring others into a saving knowledge of this God. Until they discover that that's who God is, they can't respond in an appropriate way. Getting them to tick boxes or make verbal confessions has got nothing to do with it. It's a fundamental shift of disposition, to discovering that this is who God is, that the universe is God's creation, and this is who I am as God's creature, and I'm responding joyfully to that. That's in God's hands, not ours.

The fear of hell

JMF: Much of evangelism is still done with the idea of fear, of avoiding hell. It seems that knowing God as the God who is for us, for humanity, changes the face of evangelism — the approach — turning it around.

TH: Yes. I don't think it means that we lose sight of the language of

hell, or the sense of urgency about accepting the gospel. But it's a different sort of urgency. Who, knowing if this were true, would not want to respond to it quickly? You're missing out on something good. It completely recasts it, because it's now a message of genuine good news, unalloyed good news, not a threat with a salvage hatch provided. It's news which changes everything, changes the way I see the whole of life, my own purpose and existence, and to which there can only be a response of gratitude.

When that's not forthcoming, that is, as Barth somewhere else says, the ultimate mystery: why would someone hear the good news, understand it as good news, and then say no to it? He characterizes that as the most mysterious of all things. He leaves it open as a possibility, but he sees it as a denial of all that we are as human beings. That means that if we are going to talk about danger of loss of salvation or hell, then it has to be cast in terms of the shadow cast by the light.

The fundamental thing about the gospel is that it's light, it's good. That is who God is. God is not someone who is out there to get us, or waiting for an excuse to get us — some Dirty Harry character that's waiting for us to make his day, just itching for an excuse to judge us. God, on the contrary, desires nothing more than our salvation and goes to whatever lengths necessary to secure it. But there remains that colorfully illustrated inference that if people, notwithstanding all that, and for whatever reason finally identify themselves so thoroughly with that which is incompatible with God and his purposes for us, that then they will finally isolate themselves from that.

That's hard to reckon with theologically. It's a very odd circumstance. If God is this good and all-powerful and loving Father who seeks our salvation, it makes that problematic. But I think Scripture compels us at least to reckon with the possibility that if someone so identifies themselves with evil, and the things of evil, to cease even to want anymore to respond to that goodness, then that's where the language and the imagery of hell starts to come back into play. I don't think we can ignore it. We have to take it very seriously. I'd rather people found that problematic, and got a grasp of the good news as good news.

JMF: It was strange, in terms of the gospel, after the terrorist attacks in 2001. We had the images and descriptions of firemen who saw the building was in distress, but went back in to try to pull out as many as they could, and were killed. Then on the following Sunday, many preachers, rather than calling them heroes as everyone else had, consigned some of

them to hell because they had not become Christians before the building fell on them.

It was a message of “something like that could happen to you at any moment, and if you don’t want to be like them, then you need to accept the gospel while you’re still alive.” It presented God and the gospel as kind of inept, in one sense, because he doesn’t care about the selflessness of the people who went in to save others — that amounted to nothing and was no reflection of him and he really didn’t care, or, conversely, maybe he was wringing his hands and saying, “I wish somebody had gotten to them with the gospel before that.” It doesn’t make sense, that sort of preaching. At least it doesn’t seem to square with the...

TH: It’s very problematic. The temptation is for us to slip into thinking, “Of course they’ll be saved because they did what they did.” I don’t think that’s relevant. It’s hugely to their credit that they did what they did, but that’s not really where the stakes are in terms of salvation or loss of salvation. They proved themselves to be brave and worthy human beings, and that’s what needs to be said, and they gave up their lives for others. Whether they are saved will not rest on that.

Does God rely on the ability or inability or the timing of human beings, does he get caught out by something like 9/11? That brings in a whole raft of problems that we could go around in circles on for a while. What we *do* know is that God loved each of those people in the towers, each of those people who went into the towers to get people out and themselves gave up their lives — he made them to exist eternally in fellowship with himself, he sent his Son to die for their sins, and he desires nothing more than their salvation. When we’ve said that, we’ve said the most important things.

At some stage we have to hand it over to God and say, “God, in your mercy, you deal with these people, because you know whether any of them had made in their heart of hearts some sort of a decision in life which distanced them so much from God as to exclude themselves from that.” It is up to him to know, not for us to know.

Dealing with that extreme instance seems to be unhelpful because it puts the issues in the wrong place and suggests that it’s in those extreme circumstances rather than in the everyday life, where these life and death, in a sense, decisions confront us day in and day out. That’s where what matters really occurs in life. The thing that matters is what God has done for us, not the decisions we make day in and day out. Although they may seem to be vital decisions, they’re overshadowed by that one big decision.

Eternal life

JMF: Let's talk about eternal life for a moment. The Bible says that we've already entered eternal life. The Bible has us already seated with Christ at the right hand of the Father. How should we understand eternal life in that context as something that's already taken place, and yet we want to think of it as something that takes place after the return of Christ?

TH: It is, in a sense, a matter of things which we believe will be the case after the return of Christ already breaking in and shaping, reshaping, the quality of life in here and now. Maybe the word *eternal* is a bit misleading, because we tend to think of it in terms of temporality, that something eternal goes on and on, like a dreary lecture or sermon, whereas the temporal aspect of it is difficult to picture, and we don't know what temporality or non-temporality will be like after the return of Christ.

It's more important to picture it as a *quality* of existence — it is life with a capital L, as John talks about — “and this life is in his Son.” If we think about it like that, then perhaps we can see how, in a sense, we both look forward to having that quality of life in the hereafter — when history has reached its close, when God has judged the world and wrapped everything up and handed it over to his Son — and that already breaks in *now*.

The way it breaks in now is that we already have communion with the Father. When people say, “I can't picture what the quality of eternal life is going to be like,” I want to say, “No, in a sense you can't picture what it's like, but you're not left wholly without some indication.” Probably the most obvious indication is those moments of intimate communion with God that we have in prayer and in worship and so on, because that is relationship with the Father through the Son in the power of the Spirit. That is going to characterize the whole of our experience in eternity.

That qualitative aspect is helpful in making sense of the idea of eternal life, because we do have that now. We only have it partially, we only have it on an occasional basis. We're probably not conscious of it, most of us, for much of the time. But we get glimpses of it, we can anticipate it, and we can enjoy it in part already. So rather than thinking about it in terms of a temporal model of eternity, what we might be doing for all that time, we think about it in those qualitative terms, of enjoying God's fellowship, and that's probably a more helpful way.

JMF: In the time we have left, if there's one thing you would like for people to know about God, what would it be?

TH: If I haven't already got it, I think it is that God made them to enjoy being in his presence — that was in his mind's eye from the very first. It shapes everything he does and who he is, and he has done all that is necessary for them to enjoy that. That's who he's calling them to be. He has not waited for them to decide that it's a good idea, he's already decided it's a good idea, and now he offers it freely for them to lay hold of and make their own, and enjoy in this life and then in the life to come, too. God isn't a problem – God calls us to enjoy being his children in the Spirit.

WHAT CHRIST DID WAS EFFECTIVE FOR ALL

J. Michael Feazell: Our guest today is George Hunsinger, Princeton Theological Seminary's Hazel Thompson McCord Professor of Systematic Theology. Dr. Hunsinger is an ordained Presbyterian minister and a major contributor to the new Presbyterian Catechism. He is author of several books, including *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology*, and *The Eucharist and Ecumenism*.

Thanks for being with us today.

George Hunsinger: I'm very glad to be here. Thank you.



JMF: You're part of the Reformed tradition as a Presbyterian minister. Could you tell our viewers something about the Reformed tradition and the role it has played in the history of Christianity?

GH: The Reformed tradition developed in the 16th century at the same time as the Lutheran Reformation. The Reformed tradition originally was based in Switzerland and southern Germany and eventually came to be associated with the name of John Calvin, but there were many different theologians who were founders, so to speak, of the Reformed tradition, and that's why we don't usually hear about "Calvinistic" churches. You hear about Reformed churches or Presbyterian churches.

Then it spread to places like Holland and Hungary and then, in its English language versions, England and Scotland, and eventually to the United States. Our most prominent theologian historically is John Calvin. The Continental version of the Reformed tradition used the Heidelberg Catechism as its basis of instruction, whereas in the Anglo-American version and then coming into the United States, the catechisms and confessions came out of the Westminster Assembly that was held in the 17th century. The Westminster Catechisms were the English language catechisms, as opposed to the Heidelberg that was used on the Continent.

JMF: You're also president of the Karl Barth Society of North America and you're active in the T.F. Torrance Theological Fellowship. Can you give us some perspective on how Calvin, Barth, and Torrance fit into major theological themes today?

GH: Karl Barth has been described as the most important theologian since Thomas Aquinas—those were the words of Pope Pius XII. He was a larger-than-life figure who wrote a massive amount. His great work is called *Church Dogmatics*, but he wrote much more than that. Like Luther and Calvin, he was also a person of affairs. He played a leadership role in church and society in the course of his life. He was born in 1886 and died in 1968.

Barth is often remembered for the role he played in the confessing church, which was that element of the German Protestant Church that stood up to Hitler. Barth was the principal author of the Barmen Declaration, which now has a kind of confessional status in my own church, the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. We include that in our book of confessions.

Thomas Torrance was Karl Barth's most important English-speaking student. Torrance went from Scotland to Basel to study with Karl Barth, and when Barth was about to retire, he hoped that Torrance would become his successor. But Torrance wanted to stay in Edinburgh and continue there, so that didn't happen. There are at least three Thomas Torrances.

There's Torrance the dogmatic or systemic theologian, there's Torrance the figure who did groundbreaking work in the dialogue of theology and science, and Torrance the historical theologian. He's the one who's least well known, but the one I profit the most from, I think.

Along with being a historical theologian (there's not a single major theologian in the history of the Christian tradition about whom he hasn't written at some length—these things are scattered in journals and anthologies and so on), Torrance was also an ecumenical scholar and devoted a great deal of his career... especially to dialogue set up between the Reformed churches and Eastern Orthodoxy. That's also a part of the Torrance legacy that I try to follow in.

JMF: One of the books that you have written is *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology*. I wanted to talk about a few things in here. On page 106 you make this comment, “Two points above all seemed essential to Barth about salvation. First, what took place in Jesus Christ for our salvation avails for all. Second, no one actively participates in him, and therefore in his righteousness, apart from faith.” Could you elaborate on that?

GH: That's a very deep aspect of how Karl Barth understands salvation. It's a little simple, but it makes the point...sometimes a distinction is made between the objective pole of salvation and the subjective pole. So the first part of the statement that you read has to do with the objective pole—what God has done for us in Christ apart from us before we know about it, before we receive it, before we make any response to it.

Here, Barth started with the central conviction of the Reformation based on Christ alone and the significance of Christ alone as the exclusive Savior of the human race. He started from there and tried to think it through in a way that had little precedent in the West. In some degree he ended up thinking himself into the Eastern Orthodox and Greek wing of the church. So (and Torrance has written about this) in many ways, Barth is closer to Athanasius, a great figure in the history of the [Eastern] church, than he is to Augustine, who was formative for the Latin West.

It's not as uncommon in the Eastern Orthodox traditions to give more centrality to the idea of the universal significance of Christ's saving work—especially in its objective pole so that...when the New Testament says all, A-L-L, which it does quite a lot, that shouldn't be marginalized. That has an important place in our understanding of Christ and his saving

significance.

But in the West, Augustine started from the bottom up and thought about whether we love God more than ourselves or ourselves more than God. The self-love and love for God were seen as competing with one another, and apart from conversion to Christ, self-love trumps everything and therefore you have the two loves, the two cities. The city of God is composed of people who order their loves properly by subjecting self-love to the control of love for God, if not eliminating self-love completely in its selfish forms. You have the city of God, and you have the earthly city. Augustine, in this bottom-up approach, thought it back into the reality of God. The two loves and the two cities had their eternal foundation in God's eternal predestination of the human race. So this division is thought to be ultimate—it has the last word.

It's not how Athanasius thought about these things. If you go to the great St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, it's a huge structure. They have markers showing where other cathedrals would fit in. You know, Cologne and so on would end here. It's filled with magnificent art. Way toward the front, there are huge statues of four figures of importance to the whole church, and even to the Roman Catholic Church. On the one hand it's Augustine and Ambrose. They're all bishops – Ambrose was important in bringing Augustine to the faith, and Augustine is more the theologian and Ambrose is more the administrative Bishop of Milan.

Then they have two Greek-speaking theologians. One of them is Chrysostom, which means he was a golden-tongued orator, and the fourth statue is Athanasius. If you flee from Augustine to Athanasius, it's not like fleeing from the clutches of the bear into the jaws of the lion—you're going from one great world historical theologian to another.

Athanasius, and the Greeks in general back in the 3rd, 4th, 5th centuries, thought about these matters not so much in a bottom-up way as in a top-down way. Athanasius thought about election beginning with the Trinity and the Incarnation. When you do that, you don't have to marginalize the passages that say that Christ died for all. Second Corinthians 5:14 was a seminal verse for Athanasius, and then later for Karl Barth and Tom Torrance. It says, "One has died for all. Therefore, all have died." It goes on that "those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised."

That first part, that one has died for all, therefore all have died. That's interesting because it doesn't follow. It's a non-sequitur. It's not logically the case that just because one died for all, all died. That's what the death

of Christ means according to Paul in that important passage of 2 Corinthians 5. I've looked this up—it's the same verb tense both times—died is aorist in the Greek, which means a completed event. I thought it would be in the perfect tense, which has some kind of ongoing consequences, but it's the stronger sense. One died for all, therefore all died.

Even though it's aorist both times, the death of all can't be exactly the same as the death of the one. But somehow the all are included, not just potentially. This is how Barth read it, this is how Athanasius read it. It's not *potentially* that all died, or that it's *sufficient* for all but efficacious only for those who respond in faith. No. In some mysterious way, *all* are included in the death of Christ. That's the objective pole of salvation.

It means that if someone comes to faith, it's not a transition from being an outsider to being an insider. We're all insiders, whether we know it or not. Christians are those who are brought to the point of awakening, of realizing that Christ has already accepted them, has already embraced them, that they may have been resisting their salvation. They may have been resisting their election, but their decision of coming to faith or their being awakened to faith, however that happens, doesn't bring about the transition from being an outsider to being an insider. That has been accomplished by the grace of God apart from us.

That's the objective pole of salvation, that has this strong universalistic element. But it's not fulfilled. It doesn't reach its goal until each person comes to acknowledge and recognize Jesus Christ for who he is. The way Barth thought this through...is something like that story many of us have heard about the pair of footprints on the beach: at first there are two pairs of footprints and then there was only one pair, and then there are two pair, and where there are only one pair of footprints, that was the most difficult period in my life, and where were you while I was alone? Christ was absent somehow, and the Lord says, "That's when I was carrying you."

The Lord is somehow, in an incognito way, carrying all of us whether we know it or not. There comes that point at the end of all things when who Christ has been for us is disclosed to each one. No one, whether before Christ or after Christ, as Barth understood it, isn't included in the grace of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to whom Christ is not present in mysterious and imperceptible ways that will only be made fully known at the end.

But on the subjective side, it's essential that Christ be acknowledged as Lord for who he is. We have the great verse, for example, in the hymn

in Philippians 2, that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow. Again, it's an "all" passage—*every* knee whether in heaven or on earth or under the earth. I don't quite know what those distinctions are about, heaven or earth and under the earth. It's not crystal clear how to interpret that, but it's perhaps hopefully that even under the earth, Jesus is acknowledged for who he is.

If there's a difference between faith and sight, that final transition from faith to sight, there's also a transition from lack of faith to sight for those who don't come to know Christ and acknowledge him and love him and serve him in this life. At some point, everyone will see him and know him for who he is. His identity will no longer be hidden—he'll be revealed in glory. That's at the end. But here and now, some are called to faith and called to be Christ's witnesses, called to be Christ's servants, called to be the people who know and proclaim him through word and deed here and now. That's the subjective side, and that's what Barth is getting at in that passage.

This is not exactly what Athanasius would have said, but the longest single quotation from any theologian in the *Church Dogmatics*, which is a 10,000 page argument, is from Athanasius. Barth wrote large-print sections and then he wrote fine-print sections where he went into historical matters, like long footnotes or digressions, so they're little essays on their own. In a fine-print section, when he's talking about election and taking this Trinitarian, Christocentric, top-down approach, he goes into a long quotation from Athanasius. It's the longest quotation from any single author, another theologian, in Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, and it's on this point.

I think what Barth discovered there was that Athanasius anticipated what he wanted to say and Barth took himself 150 pages to do it whereas this is about 3 pages in Athanasius. Athanasius's view is Barth's view in a nutshell. But in the West we are conditioned to think that the Augustinian way of reading the New Testament on these matters is the only way.

There's a rule of biblical interpretation that says that the clear passages should interpret the obscure passages, or the less-clear passages. That's great, that's a good rule, but it presupposes that you know what the clear passages are and what the obscure passages are. Augustine decided that Matthew 25 was the clear passage. It had the separation of the sheep and the goats. He made that the controlling idea for anything else, and that's why the "all" passages got marginalized in Western biblical interpretation.

Whereas you might think the statement "one has died for all" is clear,

but in the West, and this is true of the Reformed tradition also, Calvin and Luther included, it was thought that these “all” passages always had to be read with some kind of mental reservation because the clear passages told us that “all” was not true or it might be too good to be true.

Because of the emphasis on the universal efficacy of Christ’s saving death in the theology of Karl Barth, people have thought he’s a universalist. He’s preaching universal salvation, and if you’re a universalist, what does it matter if you come to faith—as if the only reason to come to faith is to save your own skin, there’s a kind of the self-serving reason... “you need to turn to Christ to escape some sort of terrible outcome,” which is not the best way of preaching the gospel, but it’s the Western tradition.

One of the wisest things I ever heard said about Karl Barth’s theology...and he’s known for representing what’s called dialectical theology, which means that you create tensions and you don’t resolve them. Somebody once said, “It’s amazing how many wheels within wheels Barth’s dialectical engine can keep spinning.” So you might read him up to a certain point and then stop and say okay, he’s a universalist. But no, there’s a wheel within a wheel there. The dialectical engine goes on.

Almost all mistakes in interpreting Barth’s theology, of which there are many, come down to not thinking dialectically enough with him and not seeing how he doesn’t always stop and say, okay, there’s a tension here and now I’m going to develop one side of it. No. He just develops one side of it and it might not be for several hundred pages later that you get the wheel within the wheel. It takes a long time to get the overall sweep of it.

Barth takes a position that I call reverent agnosticism. That is, he leaves the question open in hope. He doesn’t give up hope for anyone. He thinks we don’t have to give up hope for anyone. Think of all the anguish that devout Christians have gone through if a loved one or a parent or a child or someone close to them dies without coming to faith in Christ. It means the only alternative is that they are lost eternally. They’re in eternal damnation, eternally cut off from the love and joy of God.

Barth says, “We’re human beings, we’re not God. We have to leave the outcome to God.” He leaves the question open in hope. So if the option is not all are saved (the Augustinian option), or all are saved (which goes back to the theologian Origen and some others in the East, Gregory of Nyssa and so on, although it’s not the standard Eastern view. They don’t embrace universalism outright either, but it’s more prominent in some of the historical sources in the East than in the West). Barth rejects that forced

alternative. He won't say all are saved, he won't say not all are saved. All are saved *in some sense*, but how that will work out he leaves open.

There's a wonderful line at one point where he's talking about that sort of last judgment that each of us will face. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. It's like that ultimate interview situation, where you're confronted with Christ and you find out about the footprints in the sand and so on. Barth says, "Perhaps the Holy Spirit will have a little less trouble with the others than he had with us."

JMF: (laughing). How does Torrance build off of those concepts of Barth?

GH: Torrance seems to position himself somewhere between Calvin and Barth. He doesn't go as far in the direction of universal hope as Barth does, but he doesn't retreat from it either. He feels the tug of the historic Reformed tradition a little more strongly—not a lot, but a little more than Barth did. Barth is fascinated and delighted by the passages in the New Testament which use the word "all." Barth wants to take those passages seriously.

The biblical literalists as we know them in the U.S. and in the English-speaking world, can't take the word "all" seriously or literally because of this Augustinian... They know that that's not true, so wherever it says *all* it can't quite mean *all*. It has to mean all in some qualified sense. Even Aquinas takes that view. Aquinas says that the death of Christ is sufficient for all, but efficacious only for some. It has saving power only for some. That's the standard distinction. You find that in Calvin, too. Torrance stays a little ambiguous on this point. He doesn't reject Barth, but he doesn't depart as much from Calvin and the Latin West as dramatically as Barth did.

JMF: Going back to the statement that Barth made... maybe the Holy Spirit won't have as much trouble with them... Can you elaborate on that?

GH: Barth was a Reformational theologian. He saw his task as trying to go back to the Reformation and rethink it from the ground up, because there's a sense in which the Reformation was unfinished and didn't fully break from, according to its deepest insights, from the penitential way of thinking about salvation that was established in the medieval church. This medieval penitential view was one of the reasons the Roman Catholic tradition (and I don't think this is a terrible thing, but everything has its downsides) always has Christ on the cross. The Reformed traditions, the Protestant traditions, have an empty cross.

The Greek church doesn't have Christ hanging on a cross, either, but

it's a church of splendor and magnificence—usually they've got a gilded cross, with jewels and so on, but not Christ hanging on the cross. That man of sorrows, that sense that Christ sacrificed himself and shed his blood for us, that focus on the moment of the cross, that negative, sorrowful moment, has its place. But it tended to eclipse other aspects of the gospel that are equally, if not more, important.

Barth felt that the East was more correct by putting the accent on joy and resurrection than on the cross, keeping them in tension. No matter how seriously you take the cross, you have to take Christ's resurrection even more seriously—something like that.

JMF: Romans 5.

GH: Exactly. Barth liked the 18th century for its optimism. Even though he thought its optimism at the surface level was off, in a hidden way, it had some insight into Christ's resurrection whether it knew it or not. By going back to the Reformation and trying to think it through again from the bottom up, to get outside this dominance of the medieval penitential tradition and introspection, and having to do penance for your sins, and worrying that your salvation is constantly at stake because if you have a terrible misstep, if you commit a mortal sin in the penitential tradition and in Roman Catholicism to this day, you lose your salvation. So you're the weak link in the chain. You can blow it all no matter what has gone before.

This is not Luther, this is not the Reformation. Part of what it meant for Barth to go back and try to rethink the Reformation on its own terms was to pick up on Luther's insight that all sin is mortal sin. That's what Christ saves us from. It doesn't mean that some sins are not worse than others. They are. But it does mean that sin is categorical first before it's a matter of degree. You can drown in a few inches of water, or you can drown at the bottom of the ocean, but if your head is not above the water line, you can't breathe. Sin is like that—it's like death. You're either dead or you're not dead. Or pregnancy—you're not a little bit pregnant, you're either pregnant or you're not pregnant. You're either a sinner or you're not a sinner.

Some people like Mother Teresa may be close to the top of the water, and others, like theologians, are down near the bottom of the ocean, and there's a whole gradation in between. But all sin is mortal sin, and therefore when Christ saves us from our sins (Luther says this explicitly in his great commentary on Galatians), it's *all* our sins—past, present, and future.

So the idea that the Holy Spirit might have a little less trouble with *them* than he has with us, is kind of a wry way of saying we're all sinners. It's connected not only to sin being mortal sin, but being *simul justus et peccator*, Luther's great insight that to be a Christian is simultaneously to be sinful and justified, saved, at one and the same time. That's a dialectical or a paradoxical...I think it's a really liberating idea.

We see the consequences of the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox churches not having fully grasped or accepted what this is about, because they have to be too holy, they can't allow criticism and divine judgment beyond a certain point. They have to make these sort of qualifications. Even for Protestants, you either have to sort of delude yourself that you're not as sinful as you are, or you fall into despair and you're so sinful that you've blown everything.

This is the great liberating aspect of putting the primary weight on the objective pole of salvation—that Christ's love for us and grace toward us comes to us as lost sinners. This is Luther. Grace always comes to lost sinners and only to lost sinners. When that is known and understood, that's the liberation of the gospel. This is true even for those who do not *yet* (that's how Barth puts it), know and acknowledge Christ for who he is.

JMF: Like the woman Jesus spoke to—who loves God more? The one who is forgiven more? She knows her sinfulness, everyone sitting around the table...

GH: And is she going to have smooth sailing from then on? No lapses? No, of course not. There's always more grace in God than there is sin in us.

OUR LIVES ARE HIDDEN IN CHRIST

JMF: I'd like to ask you to comment on something from your book *How to Read Karl Barth*, page 124: "Salvation is not a process imminent within us in any sense that we can observe or perceive directly from our own experience," and then further down, "The truth of our being in Christ as Barth understood it is not only real and hidden, it is also yet to come."

Then you go on to discuss how we're not only included in his being, and in his humanity, in his history, in his transition from shameful death to glorious resurrection — it is transformation of the old creation into the new. "We're also confronted by his being here and now as the real but hidden future of our own being," and so on. Could you comment on that?

GH: Last time, I began with a verse from the New Testament. I find it helpful to try to peg these difficult and complicated theological ideas to certain verses from the New Testament. So I talked last time about 2 Corinthians 5:14, the first part, "One died for all, therefore all died," as a way of suggesting those parts of the New Testament would seem to lift up some sort of universal hope. Other verses that I didn't mention that we could cluster in like, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son," one of the most beloved verses in the New Testament, John 3:16. It's the *world* that's the object of God's love, and it's the world in 2 Corinthians 5 that is reconciled to God in Christ. Part of the genius of Barth's theology is to make those ideas more central to theological teaching than they have been, by putting the verses that suggest some sort of ultimate division between the sheep and the goats, not excluding them,

but capping them by this more inclusive hope.

For the passages you began with out of my book, the verse that I think of is Colossians 3:3. I learned to appreciate the significance of this verse from a comment that Karl Barth makes somewhere near the beginning of the *Church Dogmatics*. He says that this verse is decisive not just for Colossians but for the entire New Testament. I had never thought about it that way before, but it turns out that yes, Colossians 3:3, if you watch for it, is really important for Luther, Calvin, and the Reformation.

Colossians 3:3 says, “You have died, yet your life is hid with Christ in God.” Where does that link, in a way, with 2 Corinthians 5:14? People who are alive are spoken of, and here addressed, as those who have died. There is some sense in which by the grace of God they have died, because they are already included in the death of Christ.

This is profoundly mysterious, but it is one of the ways in which throughout the New Testament that ordinary patterns of thought about time where things happen one after another in sequence — that’s all presupposed, it’s never denied, but it’s not the whole story. There’s another level, there’s a higher level, there’s another dimension. These sequences are real for God. But God’s apprehension of time as we experience it is not limited to these sequences. There’s a sense in which — and this is mysterious and there’s no way to see *how* this can be the case, but *that* it is the case is affirmed — these sequences are seen by God somehow also as being simultaneous.

You get all that strange language in the New Testament about things having happened “from before the foundation of the world.” In Matthew 25 when Jesus says, “Enter the kingdom that has been prepared to you...,” he says to the sheep, “...from before the foundation of the world.” Or, in Ephesians 1, we are elected in him “from before the foundation of the world,” and then that extraordinary verse in Revelation, Revelation 13:8, “The lamb being slain from before the foundation of the world.”

What’s being suggested here? What’s being gestured at with this phrase? What kind of intuition? It’s the intuition that time doesn’t mean the same thing for God as it means for us, or more precisely, it’s not perceived by God in exactly the same way as it is for us. Things that are only sequential for us are held together in a kind of simultaneity for God.

I think, and this is sort of Barthian, there’s a sense in which the last judgment, the cross of Christ, and pretemporal election from one perspective (not every perspective) are not three different events. They’re

three different forms of one and the same event. So you get the lamb slain from before the foundation of the world or you get the last judgment occurring on Calvary, which is also a Johannine-type affirmation.

Colossians 3:3 fits into this general pattern of intuitions — that you have died, you're alive, but in this deeper sense, from God's standpoint, God sees you (it's actually plural here, each one individually also) — you have died, and God sees you in and with the death of Christ, as being included in it. Your life is hid with Christ in God. That hidden-ness is from our standpoint. It's not hidden to God, but we don't see ourselves as having died. We don't grasp the full sense of that already.

What has taken place objectively by grace? First, we participate in Christ and his obedience and his saving significance. We participate in him by grace whether we know it or not. Eventually, whether by faith or by sight or eventually both, it becomes subjective. It becomes a matter of our direct apprehension. But for the time being — the time between the times, as it's sometimes talked about in theology, between the already and the not yet, between what has already taken place in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ for the sake of the world (that's the already) and the not yet (when it is fully revealed and actualized and fulfilled) — we live in the time between the times. There's a lot that's hidden to us here and now. But our true selves, our reality, is not what we see and apprehend even by faith directly; it's who we are in Christ in God's sight. God does not look on us except as we are in him because he has embraced us by his grace in Christ already.

So Colossians 3:3 has three aspects. Our life is real (that means eternal life), it's hidden — we don't see it directly, we might get glimpses of it, but the point about not having any direct apprehension of it which you quoted from what I wrote, we don't know about that life — and about our inclusion in it, and about its really belonging to us on the basis of inferences that we can make about what we see in our own lives or on the basis of judgments that we can make in our own case or anyone else's case.

We know about it from the gospel. Where else would you learn Colossians 3:3 except you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in death? This is proclaimed to us, and it's proclaimed to us not necessarily because of the spiritual progress we might think we're making, but very often in *spite* of the progress that we're not making or in spite of the setbacks and falls and the disasters that we're making out of lives. It's real,

it's hidden, and it's yet to come. It's a matter of hope.

In order to make this more intelligible, people will sometimes say, "It's just a matter of hope. It's not yet real." But the way Barth reads that verse, and I think this is correct, it's already true in one sense, and it's yet to come as a matter of promise and fulfillment in another sense. Just because it's yet to come doesn't mean it's not already real. Just because it's hidden doesn't mean that it's not already real. We need those three aspects together — real, hidden, and yet to come. You died and your life is hid with Christ in God.

The same thing is true for Luther and Calvin when they're talking about our righteousness. Your righteousness is hid with Christ in God. For Luther, the great summary of the gospel was Christ is our righteousness and our life. Both of those are hid with Christ in God. They're real, they're hidden... We have to take it by faith and not expect to see too much or at least not base our understanding of ourselves on what we can observe or judge about ourselves. That's the main thing.

There's that hidden element, but it's still a promise that will be brought to its fulfillment either with us or against us or both. Grace works against us as much as it works for us and with us. It has to work against us insofar as we still remain fallen and still remain hostile to the grace of God.

JMF: Which is exactly why we need grace.

GH: Yes. Exactly how grace works is a...there's a great German word, *trotzdem*, in spite of everything. That's the Protestant word "nevertheless." "Nevertheless I am with you always, until the end of the age." I may have fallen into sin — "depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful human being." In and of myself I still remain a sinner. Baptism is supposed to have drowned the old Adam, and a joke that Barth liked to make is, "It turns out the rascal can swim." There's a certain sense in which Adam is drowned in baptism, but in the time between the times, Adam is trying to pull us back under, and it's a matter of hiddenness and tension that sin and grace exist in us in an ambiguous and complicated way until that final resolution.

JMF: Doesn't that give us a sense of rest and peace with our brokenness and our struggle with sin, to know that we have been made new in Christ already and that that is real even though we don't see it?

GH: That's right. The objection coming out of the old Latin theology is "Then it doesn't matter what you do with your life, or there is no necessity for good works." It's taking everything out of the realm of necessity and translating it into the realm of freedom. I like to think of that

great hymn by Isaac Watts, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.” (I think Charles Wesley was the greatest hymn writer in the English language, but Wesley said...this was very moving to me...he would have given every hymn he had ever written if he could have written “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.”)

It says in there, and this is exactly right, “Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.” That’s the transition from freedom to freedom. The free grace of God, love so amazing, so divine, eliciting the free response of total self giving back to God. This is how much God has loved you. This is what God has done on your behalf. Look to Christ on the cross to see the depth of the love and grace and mercy of God.

It’s not what you have to do, what do I have to do... What do you *want* to do? It goes from the indicative to the imperative [from a statement to a command], whereas the other way is, “*If* you do the right thing, you’ll have a good outcome.” That’s conditional. The hymn is not putting the indicative in the conclusion – it’s in the premise. This is what God has done for you, therefore act accordingly. Therefore, make the proper response – and what response could there be, but a life of total love and self-giving to God in return for so great a love that God has bestowed on us?

JMF: Going back to the earlier comment about the universality of inclusion of humanity in Christ and the idea of everyone participating in Christ because that’s the nature of human existence, to be in Christ, how does that work? What does that look like for someone who is not yet a believer? In other words, how does a non-believer participate in Christ?

GH: There are no formulas. There’s just no one way. That’s hidden with Christ in God, I think. But Nietzsche for example said, “Why don’t the redeemed look more redeemed?” That’s a good question. Sometimes people who are not redeemed look more redeemed than the redeemed do, and they set a standard that the redeemed would do well to live up to.

Sometimes there are incognito ways in which the grace of God seems to be at work, and if we have this concept of the church militant... sometimes the Holy Spirit is more militant than the church, and if the church is not ready to move, the Holy Spirit will move somewhere else... I think in general this is true of the Enlightenment. There are ways in which the Enlightenment has taught the church to be more truly the church than was happening out of the church’s own traditions. Many of the things that the Enlightenment stood for have their proper grounding in the gospel.

The Enlightenment sometimes had trouble hanging onto them indefinitely. But there are ways in which grace is operative outside the church. How do we know that? We know it when it seems to be at least compatible with the gospel — an expression of things we wish the church were doing, if the church isn't doing it.

Bonhoeffer once went to a student evening... Karl Barth used to have gatherings of students in his home from time to time, and they would talk about some theological text or events of the day. It was called an open evening. Dietrich Bonhoeffer never had Barth formally as a teacher, but he was visiting, and went there. He caught Barth's attention by quoting from Luther when Luther said, "There are times when the curse of the godless is more pleasing to the ears of God than the hallelujahs of the pious." The grace of God will work outside the walls of the church in ways where people who are not yet Christians will recognize injustices and try to do something about it, or will raise a cry of protest that also needs to be incorporated by the people of God. Sometimes their piety is really a form of unbelief, a form of evading the grace of God.

Barth liked to say that Christians go to church to make their last stand against God. This is what was at stake in the idea of "the religion" as sin. The religion becomes a form of self-justification. It becomes a way of defending ourselves against the threatening apprehension that we are sinners deserving to be rejected by God — that God's love takes the form of wrath whenever it's resisted, whether in subtle ways or blatant ways, and certainly including religious ways. God doesn't compromise with sin. God doesn't call sin good. God does not turn a blind eye toward it. The wrath of God is a very important part of the gospel, but it's not split off from his love. It's the form that God's love takes. It's the wrath of God's love when God's love is resisted, and God's wrath overcomes all forms of resistance, but finally in such a way that the sin is removed and God's purposes are fulfilled even for the sinner in spite of the sin.

JMF: The only source of anything good is God. So anytime we see good things in anybody, whether it's any form of love, any form of courage or sacrifice, or self-sacrifice, every good virtue and every good thing can only have one source, which is God, and it seems that they would be God's love and grace working itself out in humanity even though a person may be an unbeliever and may not know the source of every good thing. But every good thing does come from God.

GH: How could it be otherwise? Yeah. Hegel has this wonderful

phrase about the divine cunning that is at work in history. These unexpected moments of goodness or grace in unexpected places, this is the divine cunning in history. The difference between believers and unbelievers at this point might be that believers are equipped to see it for what it is.

JMF: At least a little better.

GH: A little better sometimes than the others. They have the key because they have Christ. Whenever it's Christ-like, we know that somehow this... You wouldn't preach it, but you could perceive it and hope and pray that this seems to be some sort of work of God. It could be in ways that don't make sense from more worldly ways of thinking. Somebody who thinks that mercy toward a wrongdoer is preferable and more God-like than vengeance and exacting retribution. I would see that, and it happens sometimes, as a Christ-like occurrence, whereas other people might feel that no, that's not what justice requires, no, that will jeopardize our security somehow and we can't take those kinds of risks, it's naive to try to implement the concerns and values of the gospel in a hostile world. God and God's grace have a way of prevailing even when it doesn't always seem immediately to make rational sense.

JMF: On page 154 in *How to Read Karl Barth* you write, "In Jesus Christ we see that God does not exist without humanity and that humanity does not exist without God." It's a great quote, and I'd like you to expand on it.

GH: There is such a thing as a godless human being — that is, a human being who tries to live as if God does not exist, and in that sense God is not real for them or acknowledged by them. It's one of the great quotations from Barth, and it's difficult to put into English. But if you're a godless human being it would be *Gottlosigkeit*, godlessness of the human being.

Barth says there's no humanity-less-ness of God, no *menschenlosigkeit*. English would require us to say something...there's no such a thing as a God without humanity. Even though there are human beings who are godless, there's no human-less God, because God has made the world, and God has made humanity his own in the Incarnation. God has made the sufferings of the world and the sin of the world his own, irrevocably, in and with the Incarnation as it reaches its fulfillment in the cross and the resurrection. God has committed himself to being God with us, and therefore there's no such thing as a God who does not have humanity by the grace of God. This is God's free decision; there's no

human-less-ness of God.

JMF: Just as there's no Father without the Son and the Holy Spirit, and no Holy Spirit without the Father and the Son.

GH: But that's true by nature, but this is true by grace.

JMF: Yes. So we can't think of God in any other way except as the God who has included humanity in himself.

GH: Right, and that means we can't think about God except in terms of the covenant as it reaches its fulfillment in the Incarnation and death and resurrection of Christ.

JMF: I think Tom Torrance said something similar to that when he said in *The Mediation of Christ*, "God has bound himself to us in such a way he will never let us go."

FOCUS ON CHRIST

JMF: I'd like to talk about one of the subjects you brought up in your book, *How to Read Karl Barth*, and that is *ordo salutis*, and how that plays out. Could you begin by talking about or by telling us what it means in English, and then about the history and...

GH: *Ordo salutis* means order of salvation. This term comes from the 17th century. I tend to think about these things more from the standpoint of Calvin and Luther and the original Reformers, and not what the later more scholastic theologians did 75 to 100 years later. Is there a temporal sequence in which things have to fall, or, if not, are there ways in which one thing necessarily presupposes something else first? Like, can I have faith without having first repented? That might be temporal, but it might also be logical. The very idea of faith presupposes that I have repented. Calvin thought repentance, for example, was a lifelong process.

Sometimes it's related to how justification and sanctification are related. First you would be justified in point of time and then that would kick off a process of sanctification. But it might be not temporal, but logical. You couldn't be in the process of sanctification if you had not logically already been justified. And where does adoption fit in? Do you have to be adopted first in order to be justified and then sanctified?

One that is pretty important and is (not always but sometimes) brought out in this idea of ordering is: when do you enter into union with Christ? Calvin's idea was that the person is brought into union with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit who creates faith. So Calvin taught that faith is

the principal work of the Holy Spirit and faith joins us to Christ. Then Calvin would use the word *simul*, and then simultaneously out of union with Christ, there's a "double grace" he put it, *duplex gratia dea*, a two-fold grace of God, justification and sanctification. Calvin did not make sanctification dependent upon justification. He made justification and sanctification dependent upon union with Christ. That's the order that I would hold to.

There's another order in some later Lutheran theologians, that you have to be justified first in order to enter into union with Christ and to participate in Christ. That almost seems contrary to Luther to me, insofar as I understand it, because of Luther's emphasis that grace comes to lost sinners. Grace brings us into union with Christ, Christ enters into us, we enter into Christ, there's a kind of mutual indwelling. You don't have to be made holy or righteous in order to have union with Christ. Union with Christ brings about justification and sanctification, righteousness and life. That is one way the question of the order of salvation is still important.

Does union with Christ depend upon repentance or justification or some other thing, or is it the foundation of everything else? Calvin and Barth, and also Luther, all believed that union with Christ was bedrock and was given by grace through faith. Every other aspect of salvation, whatever it might be, comes out of that. But from that point, on it's a kind of a hodgepodge. There's no clear order. There's no logical set of ordering principles, no temporal order.

The important thing is union and communion with Christ by grace through faith. After that, the idea of *ordo salutis* becomes a kind of a distraction. It directs your attention to how you're doing when living out the Christian life, as opposed to keeping your focus on Christ alone. It's almost like Peter being out there on the water, and he's looking at Christ, but all of a sudden the question of *ordo salutis* arises and he looks to himself and starts sinking. There's a way in which Christian piety can become too preoccupied with itself, and the *ordo salutis* concept is perhaps one way in which that is fostered. The important thing is to keep our focus on Christ.

JMF: In your recent book, *The Eucharist and Ecumenism*, you have a passion for unity in Christ between churches and the ability to take communion together. What triggered that? What lays behind your interest in the topic and the development of it?

GH: It's profoundly disordered that we should have so many separate

churches and denominations. Jesus came that we might all be one. If we have reached the point where some Christians are excluded from the Lord's Supper or the Eucharistic celebrations of other Christians, this is not only wrong in itself, but it's a terrible testimony to the world. I read a story recently about a man in India who was a Dalit, a member of the untouchables, and he became a Christian. He had been a leader among the Dalits, and he said, "Christianity recognizes the dignity and the full humanity of all human beings and therefore of the untouchables. We should all become Christians."

The response he got was, "We can't become Christians because if we did we would lose our unity as Dalits." A lot of them have become Christians anyway, but it's a sign of how the missionary movement imported the divisions that had grown up in Europe to the rest of the world by reproducing those divisions in the mission field. The ecumenical movement in recent times has come out of the missionary movement in the great conference that took place in Edinburgh in 1910. It was missionaries gathering together to see what could be done to try to recover some more robust expression of Christianity so that it wouldn't be undermining the efforts that they were engaged in around the world.

It seems profoundly wrong to me that Christians have allowed things to get to the point that there's not Eucharistic sharing. This is something that is perceived in some sectors of all Christian traditions and communions. Vatican II has a very strong decree on ecumenism, the Vatican has been very dedicated in doing what it can, within limits, to overcome the divisions, especially in the outreach to Eastern Orthodox Christians. There's a new openness on their part to trying to work together to see if we can't live more faithfully in accord with Christ and the gospel, because there's this perception that there are true Christians in all the different denominations and traditions, and yet we're divided at the point where we ought to be the most united. So it's a matter of faithfulness to Christ and obedience to the gospel that we should all strive to do what we can from our side to make sure that we are all one. There's a scandal to this wound, around the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

JMF: In the book *The Eucharist and Ecumenism*, you say this, "The Christian community is called to attest, mediate, and anticipate the unity of Christ in the Eucharistic assembly." Can you expand on that?

GH: We talked once before about Colossians 3:3, "You have died and your life is hid with Christ in God." There's a sense in which that's true of

our unity in Christ. It's hid with Christ in God. We are one, and we need to become one — we need to become what we are. Attesting that unity means attesting it in its reality as it exists in Christ with God. That can't be undone, even by our divisions. But it also needs to be anticipated. There will be a day when these divisions will be made to seem ridiculous and indefensible, but they won't be in force anymore.

I like to think of the promised future in terms of a meal, in terms of the Messianic Banquet or the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. I think the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist is the present tense form of that final meal. It's the presence of that future here and now. I've talked before about the last judgment, the cross of Christ, and pretemporal election as being three forms of one and the same event, the Messianic Banquet, the Last Supper, and Calvary together in a complex unity — these are three forms of one and the same event. So the Lord's Supper also mediates that unity.

The present tense form of that unity is most significantly and intensively expressed when the church gathers together around the table in order to celebrate the Lord's Supper together. That's bringing you Christ in his saving significance into the present from the past where his once-for-all sacrifice was accomplished, and it's also anticipating that which is yet to come. We are attesting something, something that has taken place in its perfect and definitive sense, the finished saving work of Christ, that once-for-all aspect of it. The only thing we can do in that respect is to attest it.

We can't add to it, it doesn't need to be added to. We can't possibly add to it, it's a finished and perfect work, but we're called to be witnesses to Christ and his once-for-all obedience and saving sacrifice. We attest it, we anticipate that future form that it will take in the kingdom of God, and it should be mediated here and now, which means that we shouldn't be excluding one another from our individual denominational celebrations of the Lord's Supper. If we're doing that, we need to dig into the roots of what's behind these divisions and ask what can be reasonably and faithfully done to overcome them, so that that invisible unity which already exists can be made more fully visible for what it is here and now.

JMF: So, ironically, for a church that doesn't have communion with other churches or share communion with other churches, when they partake of communion, they're actually attesting and anticipating the day when that very attitude and exclusion will not exist anymore.

GH: I think so. But the people who have these exclusions think that

they're the only true church and that the ecumenical solution is that we should all join *their* church. Every denomination has people like this. It just can't be true. There are real Christians spread throughout the churches, and it needs to be worked out that these sinful divisions are suffered and overcome and not just tolerated and written off as if they're insignificant.

Another thing to keep in mind is the shape of world Christianity. There are about 6 billion people in the world, roughly. How many of them are Christians? A third of them are Christians. So there are about 2 billion Christians in the world. Let's just stick with that, and that's a pie-shaped graph. How many of those 2 billion are Roman Catholic? About half of them. Half of the pie-shaped graph are Roman Catholic.

What about Eastern Orthodox churches? It's hard to find out. I wrote to some Eastern Orthodox scholars, and it depends on how you define Eastern Orthodox churches and are you talking about active members or people just on the rolls, and you get these kind of problems with statistics, but as a ballpark figure, 15 to 17 percent more. So we're looking at almost 70 percent of the world's Christians that have this high sacramental understanding of the church and the Christian life.

What about Protestants? Protestants as a whole, including Anglicans and Episcopalians, they might be another 20 percent. But they're fragmented among themselves. There are more Anglicans than there are Lutherans, they're within this little piece of the pie, and there are more Lutherans than there are Reform. I'm a Reformed theologian, I'm a Presbyterian minister, but I represent one sliver of world Christianity, maybe leaving one or two percent in there, and then, where things are burgeoning is with the Pentecostal and the charismatic churches.

But the Roman Catholic Church also is growing rapidly in the global south. My little sliver there is (where I have my home, so I think about that), you know how many different Reform denominations there are? The World Council of Churches and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches did a study. They were shocked. There are 750 Reformed denominations. So it's like we've got this little sliver of pie...you have to be like a Japanese chef, you've got to divide that little sliver up into 750 pieces.

From a Catholic standpoint and an Orthodox standpoint, that's what they would expect. They thought, "you get rid of bishops, you get rid of any institutionalized form of authority, you're going to fragment, you're going to disintegrate." We're not in the 16th century anymore. The evidence is in. Protestantism is fissiparous, as they say. It breaks up into

parts.

You may know the little book by C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*. Lewis's idea of hell is that nobody can get along with anybody else, so they're constantly moving away from one another. This is almost an image for Protestantism. Every time somebody does something that you think is wrong, you do what's right in your own eyes, and you form your own little new denomination. There's something wrong with this picture. We need to give serious thought to what it would take to bring the church into some sort of tolerable unity. To me, that means Eucharistic sharing. It doesn't mean one monolithic church structure, but the Catholics and the Orthodox, they have their own set of criteria about what would be necessary if the divisions in the church were to be healed and overcome.

Here I have to be pragmatic as well as principled, because I'm thinking we've got 70 percent of the world's Christians that we need to bring into some sort of reconciliation along with all these Protestants. I don't know what to do in my book about Pentecostals and Anabaptists traditions, so I just sort of factor them out for the time being (and finally that will be a work of the Spirit and not the work of the theologians, so I figure I'll just leave that to one side). We're not going to achieve consensus.

In the ecumenical movement, it's understood that visible unity in the form of a single church structure is not only not going to be achieved, it's not necessary. One of the terms that is used is "reconciled diversity." The project in my book, in part, is how can we widen the circle of acceptable diversity? I've tried to go back to some little-known developments from the time of the Reformation that I think would be fruitful for the Reformed tradition to adopt, and that might have some appeal across the board.

I've gotten favorable reviews so far from Roman Catholic writers. The Orthodox are a question unto themselves. They think they have the true church and they won't... When I would talk to people about my book and I'd say, "I think the divisions about the Lord's Supper as they developed in the West have a lot to do with the absence of an Eastern Orthodox voice. At the time of the Reformation things split apart and polarized in the history of the Western churches that the Orthodox have had together."

I thought they would say, "This is great, you want to make ecumenical progress and you want to draw upon the Orthodox traditions." No, it's like, "So what?" My words fall to the ground. The average view is they don't need us, we're very problematic, and the solution is that we should all become Orthodox. Even when the Orthodox participate in the World

Council of Churches events, that's kind of the underlying attitude. They're waiting for the rest of us to find our way back to Eastern Orthodox. I don't think that that's the solution. I think the Catholics will actually bear the burden of achieving that reconciliation with the Orthodox.

But meanwhile, in my hope of expanding the circle of acceptable diversity, I had to figure out some way of determining what views are church-dividing, that's the way they talk ecumenically. What views are church-dividing, and what views aren't? How do you know what views are church-dividing and what aren't? Vatican II decided, so this is an official Roman Catholic position. Vatican II decided that there are no obstacles...

JMF: Vatican II being the church council.

GH: Of the Roman Catholic Church in the 1960s. Vatican II decided that there are no obstacles in principle (you have to state this carefully) from the Roman Catholic side to Eucharistic sharing with the Orthodox, but the Orthodox hold views that are different from Roman Catholic teaching. If there are places, as there are, where Eastern Orthodox views are more possible for Protestants than Roman Catholic views as we're familiar with them, then if we can adopt those views without compromise, as I think we often can, there's an ecumenical imperative that we ought to move in that direction for the sake of achieving unity and Eucharistic sharing.

So I argue that nobody has to give up anything that is essential to them, but everybody has to stretch to accept some things that they thought they had to reject. The history of the Eucharistic controversies has largely been the history of false contrasts, and an important part of the argument in my book is trying to show that things can be held together that were split apart.

I'll give you a simple example, not a terribly complicated one. In my tradition we talk about the Lord's Table. There was a professor in a previous generation at Princeton Seminary who used to tell his students it's a table and not an altar, and it's not a table unless you can put your feet under it. So "table" is good and "altar" is bad, and if you read Luther's catechisms and so on, he's constantly using the phrase "the sacrament of the altar." He gets this phrase from Augustine; to me there's nothing wrong with it. But when Luther starts using it and then as the Lutheran tradition developed, there's a kind of hardening. It's not just a rhetorical term anymore, it becomes more of a semi-technical term. It's an altar.

Altar has its metaphorical home in priestly and cultic activities. *Table*

has its home in thinking about the royal office of Christ — Christ as the Messiah, the Messianic Banquet. The priestly office of Christ and the royal office of Christ can't exclude one another. These are two different ways of talking about one and the same Jesus Christ and his work of salvation. It's not like a pie where you divide them up into parts — these are two ways of looking at Christ as a whole.

There is a term in the tradition, and I learned about it from reading an Eastern Orthodox writer, Alexander Schmemmann, who has this wonderful book called *The Eucharist*. In that book, even though he primarily talks about the sacrament of the kingdom, and he uses table imagery and so on, so royal. In a way, the Eastern Orthodox ethos (even though it doesn't exclude the priestly), is oriented toward the splendor of the kingdom of God. The goal, the icons and the precious gems and so on...there's something royal about this. Schmemmann uses the term "altar table."

I was at a conference, I was asked to speak in Strasbourg...all these ecumenical figures from across Europe were there. I said Schmemmann has this great phrase that he uses that shows how we bring things together that in other places have been split apart. So my tradition will say table, but it won't say altar, Lutherans tend to say altar but maybe not so much table. It's a false contrast. You don't have to polarize around this. So Schmemmann has this great term.

The next day the Eastern Orthodox speaker from Romania got up and said, "I have to correct one thing that Professor Hunsinger said the other day. It's not just Schmemmann who talks about altar table. We all talk this way." This was simultaneous translation; he was speaking in German and he had a German text and photographs of Eastern Orthodox liturgies and so on. Right there in the German text was "*altar tisch*," there it was.

So I started watching for it. This term has deep historic roots. I've seen it in some Roman Catholic writings, and in the Reformation there was a figure named Martin Bucer who was the reformer of Strasbourg. There was a period when Calvin had been called to Geneva and then he ran into conflict with the city fathers and he had to leave Geneva. He went to Strasbourg. Martin Bucer became Calvin's mentor, and later Calvin went back to Geneva. Bucer is an important figure, that's what I'm getting at. He was also very ecumenically-minded and even in that period was striving to do what he could to hold the Reformation together and to make sure that there weren't these divisions about the Lord's Table. Bucer also knew the term "altar table."

So there's no good reason, it seems to me, why Reformed Christianity or Protestants in general can't develop this vision that we need both the priestly and the royal aspects. This perception has a lot of implications that we might want to talk about, but the priestly side has been lost by much of Protestantism. We have an atrophied understanding of the priestly elements of worship and of the Eucharistic liturgy.

The Catholics have priests, the Orthodox have priests, the Episcopalians have priests, but we don't have priests anymore. We have ministers and the priesthood of all believers, which is great, I think that's important, but what does that mean? It's almost a priest without a portfolio. It doesn't have a great deal of meaning, and while each person is a priest to every other person, fine, we intercede for one another, fine. But it doesn't have a lot of development and currency. Recovering that priestly side of things... it's not just the Messianic Banquet, which would be royal, it's the Marriage Feast of the Lamb, which is priestly and cultic. These are two different...

In the book of Revelation, what's happening? It's the lamb who is sitting on the throne...well, who is beside... The royal aspects, the royal activities and offices are somehow assimilated to the lamb. To me this suggests that there's something central to this priestly complex of images that we need to recover. Liberal Protestantism had an aversion to all things priestly. I read something recently by H. Richard Niebuhr (who I have a lot of respect for); he talked about sacrifice and love, and these "primitive" ideas. They thought they could move beyond all that... Expiation and propitiation, and who needs that?

We need to find a responsible way of recovering these ideas without theological compromise, because they're essential to reestablishing the Eucharistic unity of the church. So I'm looking for ways in which we can stretch to accept things we thought we had to reject without theological compromise. We're going to have to tolerate a fair amount in other traditions and communions that we're not entirely comfortable with. But if we can just reach the point where we're not excluding one another from our celebrations of the Eucharist, that would be huge. That would be the correct thing to do in its own right, but it would also have great implications for the church's witness to Christ in the world.

THE EUCHARIST AND ECUMENISM

JMF: I'd like to talk about a couple of terms that our viewers might be familiar with, but maybe you could define them and then move on to a third term that you put forward in your book, *The Eucharist and Ecumenism*. Many of our viewers are familiar with "transubstantiation" and "consubstantiation" and that there has been controversy, but they may not remember what the controversy was, and what the definitions are. You introduced the concept of "transelementation," so could you describe those and move on to transelementation and the potential you see for that term?

GH: Thank you. There are three main issues that need to be addressed if we are to get beyond the impasse in ecumenical discussion about the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist. One has to do with the real presence of Christ. That's where your question about those terms comes in. Then there's the question of the Eucharistic sacrifice, and finally there's the question of the ordained ministry. I address all three of those areas in my book.

The churches have divided historically over the question about how are we to understand the idea of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper. It has to be given a special formulation. It can't just be that Christ is somehow really present with the Lord's Supper. It has to do with the bread and the wine as consecrated elements, and in what sense are the body and blood of Christ present *in* and *through* and *with* the elements of bread and wine.

The historic Roman Catholic answer to that is *transubstantiation*. This

term has been defined by a church council for them. The Council of Trent gave a technical definition to transubstantiation, so that's the one we have to look at. The word was around much longer than that, but it didn't have a technical definition prior to the 16th century. The Reformation forced the Catholic Church to come up with a more careful definition of what they meant. That then divided the Protestant churches from the Roman Catholic Church. The Council of Trent drew largely upon the definition that Thomas Aquinas had developed in the 13th century.

Transubstantiation involves conversion and containment. The bread and the wine are somehow converted so that they become the body and blood of Christ in a particular form, and the body and blood are then contained in the bread and the wine, respectively. So transubstantiation is, in a sense, a theory of descent and containment. The grace of God descends from heaven, and when the priest or the bishop presiding at the Eucharist says the words of consecration, the words that Jesus is recorded as having said at the last supper, "This is my body, given for you, this cup (in the New Testament) is my blood, shed for you."

When the priest says that in the Catholic liturgy, a bell is rung, because that's where you're supposed to pay attention — that's where the miracle and the wonder takes place that the bread is no longer merely bread, the wine is no longer merely wine, but is the body and blood of Christ. But the outward form, called the *accidents*, remains. This distinction about substance and accidents comes from Aristotle, was used by Aquinas, and the Council of Trent changed it just slightly and instead of talking about accidents, they used the word *species*, but it was the same thing. It's form and content.

The outward form remains the form of bread, and the outward form remains the form of wine. But the inner content, the inner substance, has been converted and transformed into the body and blood of Christ, which are then contained by the elements. The Reformation felt that this was a terrible idea, and it made no sense, so they didn't want to have anything to do with it. Whether they had a suitable alternative or not is another matter. The Lutherans and the Reformed within the Reformation split apart over this question. In the first generation of Reformers, the Reformed were from Switzerland and southern Germany, but especially Switzerland, led by the Zürich Reformer Ulrich Zwingli. The Lutherans were led by Martin Luther from Wittenberg.

Zwingli had what is thought of as a very low understanding of how the

bread and the wine function in the Lord's Supper. They are merely symbols of something that is not necessarily present. There's more than one way to work this out. What happened in the past, in Christ's once-for-all saving work, that is symbolized and remembered in the Lord's Supper — that was Zwingli's basic view. What the Reformed tradition was especially concerned to protect was the integrity of Christ's human body after his resurrection and ascension. They thought if Christ was somehow substantially present in the Lord's Supper, it was impossible to maintain the full integrity of his human body in heaven.

Calvin, who modified Zwingli's views considerably, still had that as a primary concern. One reason they had that conviction was that they believed salvation was at stake. If Jesus' humanity ceased to be real humanity in its full integrity as a human body, as a part of his humanity, then the ideal of our salvation was destroyed. He had to remain a real human being, even after the ascension.

The Lutheran view is sometimes called the *consubstantiation*, the term you mentioned, and some Lutherans are okay with that term, but some aren't. Some Lutheran documents from the 16th and 17th century deny that this describes the Lutheran position. Some still use the term. Partly it's a matter of definitions. Consubstantiation can mean more than one thing. If it means that you just have two substances together — the substance of the bread and the substance of the body of Christ (whatever "substance" means... even for Catholics this substance/ accidents scheme is perplexing today; nobody quite knows what to make of these Aristotelian terms).

A dictionary definition view of consubstantiation has the two substances coexisting together. The bread remains bread, but the body of Christ is joined to it mysteriously. Maybe it's not taken any further, but you get the impression sometimes that they're externally related — they're coexisting side by side. I don't think that was Luther's view, but it is a view that is ascribed to Luther and accepted by some Lutherans.

Luther said different things in different writings. He's not an easy theologian to pin down, because he's so situational and he'll say one thing here and another thing there — it's like a bell-shaped curve, one or two standard deviations... In his treatise of 1520 called *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, one of his most widely read treatises, he takes a position that was somewhat neglected, or put to one side, in the heat of Reformational controversies between Luther and Zwingli and their

colleagues. In *Babylonian Captivity*, Luther focuses on the verse 1 Corinthians 10:16. That verse says “the bread that we break, is it not a (blank) in the body of Christ.” In English the word that I left blank is often translated as “participation.” Luther knew it in the Greek – *koinonia*. One way of interpreting the verse (there’s more than one way) is to say that the relationship between the bread that we break and the body of Christ is a *koinonia* relation. It’s some kind of participation of the one in the other. The idea of participation is not always kept in mind when the term consubstantiation is used. But consubstantiation can be used to cover this other case where there’s a more intimate kind of indwelling, at least of the body in the bread.

The Eastern Orthodox view that I have found to be helpful as a way of moving beyond the impasse ecumenically...it’s not called consubstantiation by them, but Luther’s view in the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, based on 1 Corinthians 10:16 and other verses, is not far from that ancient Orthodox view. The Orthodox have several terms that they will use, and it makes it hard to find out what they actually think, but if you read long enough, you can see that there’s one term that stands out among the rest. That is what I put forth in my book as transelementation, *metastoeicheisis*. It’s a deep interpretation of 1 Corinthians 10:16.

What is a *koinonia* relation? There’s more than one way to work that out, but it can be a relationship of mutual indwelling. If you take that view, then the bread can remain bread (without any loss of its definition as bread — it’s not substance and accidents), and it somehow participates in the body of Christ. It’s not just that the body of Christ participates in the bread, but there’s a relationship of each being in the other.

For the Catholics and for the Orthodox, and for this view that Luther espoused, it’s not just the body and blood of Christ that are thought of in detachment from the rest of his person, this is the form in which he’s present to us — this sacrificial form...in and with the sacramental form of his body and blood, the whole person of Christ is present. He offers himself to us under the sacramental form of his body and blood. He gives himself to the church in that form, and in the same way he unites the church to himself.

As in the incarnation, he assumed human flesh, he made himself one with us...even though he was God, he emptied himself and took the form of a servant even to death on a cross, as we read in Philippians 2. He took that flesh, he made himself one with us in order to bear our sins and bear

them away — the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He makes us one with himself through that same body and blood, that same sacrificial death. There's only one body of Christ, it is definitively present in Christ's life and death there and then, but then it becomes sacramentally present. It's here and now under the forms of bread and wine.

The image that was used in the ancient church to bring out this idea of transelementation was the image of the iron in the fire. They used that image both for the incarnation and for the relationship between the bread and the wine and Christ's life-giving flesh. There's an important incarnational analogy here. In the council decision at Chalcedon in 451, the fifth-century decision defining the person of Christ (this is a decision that's definitive for Catholics, for Orthodox, and for Reformation Protestants), they had to give some account of how Christ's deity and humanity were related. They said that they were related "without separation or division."

That meant there was, to put it more positively, an inseparable unity between them... "without confusion or change." The deity of Christ in the union remains deity, the humanity of Christ in the union remains humanity. How can they be together in one person? That's the mystery of the incarnation. If God by nature is immortal, how can the immortal God assume mortal flesh? Questions like that. That's the mystery of the incarnation.

There's a third element here that's implied, a kind of a symmetry... Deity and humanity are not on a par with one another. They wouldn't balance the scales if you could put them on some kind of scales. None of these images would be perfect then. Let me use another one that has real limitations: Gregory of Nyssa, the great Cappadocian theologian from the fourth century, said that deity and humanity in Christ were something like a drop of water in the ocean. The deity of Christ has this immensity to it and the humanity has a kind of smallness, and, relative to his deity, a kind of insignificance. The problem with that image is that it loses the idea of "without confusion or change." If you put a drop of blood into the ocean, it disappears. But in the scale that we're talking, or the *incommensurability*, the absolute difference between deity and humanity — it helps us imagine that.

We need three things to think about the person of Christ, and this carries over by analogy to thinking about the bread and the wine. You need asymmetry. You need the priority of one over the other. You need unity,

you need an inseparable unity of these two that would not otherwise come together except for the miracle of grace, and in that unity, you need an abiding distinction. This is the model that the Orthodox have used for thinking not only about the incarnation, which is true of all Nicene Christians and Chalcedonian Christians, but they use this incarnational analogy to think about how Christ's life-giving flesh is related to the Eucharistic gift of bread and wine without separation or division, without confusion or change.

This is what's missing from transubstantiation, this element of asymmetry which gives the precedence to Christ and his body. It's not just that the body is contained in the bread, it's that Christ in the power of the Spirit takes these Eucharistic gifts and joins himself to them in a certain respect so that he, not the priest, is the acting subject in the working of this sacramental miracle in order to offer himself through the priest to the people in these sacramental forms.

Transelementation involves an explicit place also for the work of the Holy Spirit. The Orthodox have this wonderful idea, in the Greek it's called *epiklesis*, invocation, the Spirit is invoked while celebrating the Eucharistic liturgy. But the Orthodox don't pin it down to a particular moment in the liturgy. There's no bell that is rung when the transformation takes place. In a sense, the whole liturgy is one long *epiklesis*, one long invocation of the Spirit. The Spirit is thought to take the bread and the wine into the presence of Christ, who then joins himself to the elements and offers himself in a sacramental form through the bread and the wine to the faithful.

So the bread remains bread, and the body of Christ remains the body of Christ, but that iron in the fire image is something like that Chalcedonian pattern that I was laying out. It's an impersonal image, it has its limits, but the iron remains iron. It doesn't cease to be iron. It doesn't lose anything of what defines it as iron. It doesn't lose its substance. The fire remains fire, and yet the two become one. As long as the iron is in the fire, there's this inseparable unity, so there's an abiding distinction and an inseparable unity.

If you push the analogy a little bit, there's also that asymmetry. There's a way in which the iron is in the fire in a different sense than the fire is in the iron, because there's more to the fire (if you think of a campfire situation) than the iron itself. So you get that sense of something larger entering into the iron, the fire being like the deity or being like the glorified

body of Christ joining itself to this more ordinary element, as it were, of Christ's flesh in the incarnation or the bread and the wine in the Eucharist.

The image that illustrates this mutual indwelling in the idea of trans-elementation is the iron in the fire. But it turns out that not only did Luther essentially have this idea (without making it as explicit as I make it), but he actually had the image of the iron in the fire. I don't know where he got it, but maybe he got it from reading ancient theology.

The Orthodox are out of the picture. The church split apart in the 11th century and the East and West had gone their separate ways. One of the reasons things polarized so badly in the West is because the Orthodox were absent. They didn't have a voice at the table. They managed to hold some things together that entered into one of those either-ors, one of those false decisions that have characterized Eucharistic controversy in the West.

But there are some Protestant Reformers, not just Luther, who knew about this idea, and for my purposes the important thing in my book is not that they took this idea of the iron in the fire or the idea of transelementation and made it central to what they wanted to teach about the Lord's Supper. The important thing is that they knew about it and didn't reject it. They didn't see anything problematic with it. That's all I need in order to make my argument that we need to take every step we can toward achieving unity in the church around these divisive issues as long as it doesn't involve us in theological compromise.

So here's a view that's different from the Roman Catholic view but that the Roman Catholics don't reject. The Roman Catholics, at Vatican II, the official church council in the 1960s called by Pope John the 23rd, decided that from the Catholic side there's no reason not to enter into Eucharistic fellowship with the Orthodox. The Orthodox don't, as a rule, subscribe to the technical definition of transubstantiation that is official Roman Catholic teaching. They have the iron in the fire idea, transelementation, and there were Reformed theologians, not just Lutherans, who knew of this image and this idea and talked about it, sometimes used it in argument, and they didn't reject it. They didn't see anything problematic with it.

The important figure here is not very well known; his name is Peter Martyr Vermigli. He was an associate of John Calvin. He is one of the few Reformers with whom, as far as I know, Calvin never entered into any serious disagreement. They were not in the same place at the same time; they just had a correspondence. Calvin said once, "Nobody has a better understanding of the Lord's Supper than Peter Vermigli." Vermigli dis-

covered this idea of transelementation, which is how I learned about it. But I didn't know what it was until I was able to connect it with the image of iron in the fire. Vermigli found it in an Eastern Orthodox theologian from the 11th century (because in those days the Reformers wanted to show that their ideas were not coming out of nowhere, that they had backing in the tradition. The patristic theologians often said things...or theologians in the church wanted to say that the Catholics were the ones that had gone off the rails and the Reformers were recovering the authentic traditions).

Vermigli, more than any of them, because he wasn't a Reformer who had a city and church to superintend, was a scholar (this is my supposition) ...he had time to dig around in the library, and we now have a fair number of his writings in English in the last decade or so because there's a Vermigli industry that has sprung up centered in Orlando, Florida, and all these people are busily translating Vermigli and putting his works out there. One of them is called the *Oxford Disputation on the Eucharist*. Vermigli is debating a high-powered Roman Catholic theologian, and he needs all the ammunition he can find. So I imagine him having the time that Calvin didn't have, or that Martin Bucer didn't have, or that even Thomas Cranmer in England didn't have, to find out about these precedents. He's the one who gave this term "transelementation" prominence.

Then it shows up in the most important, the most lengthy and important writing on the Lord's Supper by Thomas Cranmer. People have had trouble figuring out where Cranmer finally comes down. Some think he's close to Zwingli, which would give him a low view — others try to see him in a different light. In Cranmer's treatise, there's not a page where he's discussing the same figure... I think it was Vermigli who must have discovered... it's an enigma wrapped in a mystery again and again.

This guy I had never heard of named Theophylact from the 11th century was a distinguished theologian, kind of on a par with Anselm in the West. He became the Archbishop of Bulgaria and was in exile there. He was constantly longing for the society and the theological conversations and the libraries of Constantinople, but his bishop made him go to Bulgaria, so he lived out his days in Bulgaria. He wrote commentaries on Scripture. Vermigli found in Theophylact the term transelementation, so he used it. He didn't know that it went all the way back to Gregory of Nazianzus, Cyril of Alexandria and the most seminal and important patristic theologians on the Greek-speaking side of things.

It has a heritage, a lineage that even the Reformers didn't appreciate when they embraced this idea.

Here's Cranmer, writing this treatise, which some people think is basically Zwingli, but he'd come to Theophylact. He has Theophylact by name, he has the image of the iron in the fire, he says the bread and the wine become infused with the body and blood of Christ so that they are the presence of the body and blood of Christ in sacramental form. This might look like transubstantiation, says Cranmer, but it isn't. It might look like a problem, but it isn't, he says.

Calvin's mentor Martin Bucer also has the term transelementation. So here's Vermigli, Cranmer and Bucer, each of whom is making use of this idea that has its roots in the Greek Church and in Greek-speaking theologians that go back to very ancient times, and they don't find anything wrong with it.

There's even one little passage in Calvin's *Institutes*, not very explicit, it doesn't have the image of the iron in the fire and it's an overlooked passage, but Calvin says the ancients...(every time I read that, until I started working on this book, I thought he must mean the Latin theologians, but I think he means the Greeks). The ancients had the idea that the bread and the wine are elevated into a different domain. This is (I'm being a little more explicit than Calvin was) so that they don't cease to become bread and wine, but they're converted. He has the idea of conversion. They're converted into the body and blood of Christ. This is not an idea that Calvin does anything with, but he says, explicitly, of this, "to this, we have no objection."

So insofar as this Eastern Orthodox understanding was known by the Protestant Reformers, it was embraced in various ways and not rejected. I think this is a way that we could reach convergence on this historically divisive issue. I find it to be a very deep and rich idea that Christ's body and blood, without ceasing to be definitive in their historical enactment in his life and death on earth, can assume a sacramental form. It means that Christ is not separable from his saving significance or from his work and benefits. If he's present, his work is present, his benefits are present. And in the Lord's Supper, they're present in this unique and miraculous way that the bread and the wine, without ceasing to be bread and wine, come to enter into an inseparable unity with his body and blood so that he gives himself to us under the forms of bread and wine.

George Herbert, the 17th-century Anglican minister and poet, has a line

that says, “Love is that liquor, sweet and most divine, which my God feels as blood and I as wine.” That’s compatible with transelementation.

So it’s not descent and replacement, which is what you get in transubstantiation – it’s elevation and enhancement, where the bread and the wine are enhanced by being joined into a mystical union with the body and blood of Christ. (It’s odd to do all this focusing on the elements and so on, but it’s necessary, because that’s where the divisions have arisen.) The mystical union with Christ with the bread and the wine becomes the means by which we enter into mystical union with Christ. He gives himself to us and we enter into union with him through his self-offering under the forms of bread and wine, which are the sacramental forms of his body and blood.

That’s roughly the way I try to work things out in that part of my book, and I don’t see any losses here for the Reformation church. This is no compromise. None of the Reformists... I could say in principle there’s no compromise, and make a case, but I don’t even have to do that by myself, I’ve got Vermigli and Cranmer and Bucer doing the same thing, and maybe Calvin...he’s not explicit enough for me to rely too heavily on him, but he has a very promising idea that could help get us beyond this impasse around how to think about the real presence of Christ. There’s a non-church-dividing alternative to the Roman Catholic view, that is, not church dividing from a Catholic standpoint.

This is part of a more general strategy in my book. There are often places that the Orthodox don’t agree with the Catholics that are more congenial to the Reformation. Insofar as we can move closer to the Orthodox and go on their coattails, so to speak...because remember, we Protestants are little slivers in the big pie that comprises world Christianity, and Catholics are 50 percent, and Orthodox are 17 or so percent. That’s a big chunk. There are other questions that I wouldn’t think would need to be considered so intensively if they weren’t important to the Catholics and the Orthodox. But if they think they’re important, and if we’re striving for church unity, then we have to make a good-faith effort to try to find a way that we can approximate what they’re calling for without compromise.

At every point, as far as I can see, this leads to an enrichment for Protestants — and not losses, which is what the Reformers always feared — that if we came too close to the Catholics and we did not know much about the Orthodox, it would just be compromise and loss. Well, there’s

another way of trying to work this out that doesn't lead to losses. We're recovering elements of the ancient tradition which would only be to our well-being and the well-being of Christianity.

JMF: Do you see progress along these lines being made yet?

GH: Nobody has come to terms with the argument I make in my book, because it's too new. By and large, Catholic reviewers have been favorable. Orthodox, being Orthodox, they're not going to embrace it with open arms, but they're not hostile. It's a kind of parallel movement that I don't engage with very much, but that I need to give some more thought to now that I've gotten things to this point in my own mind with the book.

Let's say we want to do something with this idea of transelementation. You have to figure out what kind of language you would want to incorporate into your worship. How would you express that? What difference would it make liturgically? This can be incorporated without anything terribly extensive or elaborate. You don't need the kind of arguments, you don't need the kind of explanations that I need to give to back it up at a theological level. On this parallel track of thinking about liturgy and the language of worship, yes, progress is being made. Insofar as a theologian can give good reasons for why this liturgical progress should continue, that's where it finally has its payoff. How does it show up in the language of worship?

JMF: The average Christian who comes to the Lord's Table and partakes of the Lord's Supper knows ...if anything, very little about all this kind of discussion and meaning. All they know is that this is what Christians do, and so they do it. It's the hierarchy and the government of a given denomination, church, or whatever who decides they're not going to have communion with someone else because they don't understand it the same way. But in the case of the believer, it seems that this idea of the iron in the fire is what's going on with the believer. They're participating with Christ and it happens regardless...

GH: Yes, that's right! That's another application of the word trans-elementation. It's used to cover that case, what's going on with the believer.

JMF: As we talked about, I think in a previous interview, the irony of the fact that your taking of the Lord's Supper is expressing in that participation in Christ, in his body and blood (regardless of how you interpret or understand it or describe it or how your superiors do in the church), it is pointing to the unity that exists in spite of all of our...

GH: To a large degree. There are people, though, who think...when Jesus says, “Do this in remembrance of me,” there’s a Protestant perception that this is a mental event. As you are receiving the blood and wine, you’re supposed to remember something.

JMF: Yes, so you’re thinking about that as a...

GH: A better translation is, “Do this as my memorial.” I don’t have time to work this out, but it’s like Passover. The original Passover becomes present in celebration of the Passover, and the people who are celebrating here and now are in some sense incorporated into the original Passover so the boundaries between past and present are transcended in the celebration.

JMF: They’re taking part in the deliverance that occurred originally.

GH: Yeah. The enactment is the memorial. It’s not a second mental event along with it. Apart from all this theoretical work that I’ve outlined, the ecumenical minimum has to be there to overcome these divisions, because we have to be able to say, regardless of how we get there, without crossing our fingers, that this is the body of Christ, this is the blood of Christ shed for you — that it is the case that this bread and this wine are the body and blood of Christ.

Luther uses the incarnational analogy. He says, just as we can point to this man and say this man is the Lord, and we don’t mean that his humanity is his deity, but by virtue of the union this man is the Lord, or the Lord, the man on the cross, is God. By virtue of the union we say these things that would not otherwise be possible. By virtue of the relation, we can say this bread is the body of Christ because of that *koinonia* relation, because of that mutual indwelling, because of that mystical union accomplished not by the presiding minister, not by the priest, but by Christ himself in the power of the Spirit through the priest and with the congregation. That’s the breakthrough that the Reformation needs in order to be able to say, without crossing their fingers, this is the body of Christ, at least the Presbyterians.

JMF: It’s a “so what” until someone partakes of it.

GH: Exactly. But the communion in the elements is what brings us into communion with the living Christ, and he’s not absent. I hate this term that is sometimes used, the real absence of Christ — the real presence and real absence. There’s no such thing as a real absence of Christ – I mean, “Behold I am with you always, until the end of the age.” He’s present in some sense where two or three are gathering together, which is probably a Eucharistic passage. “I am in the midst of you.” There’s no such thing as

a real absence of Christ.

He's present in this mode — he's present under the forms of his body and blood, the sacramental union of the body, the life-giving flesh with the bread and the wine. That's crucial, that's ancient, that's deep, that is not just a “so what” kind of perception — that Christ is with us in this palpable way that brings his sacrificial death to us and him in his sacrificial significance so that we are renewed and nourished by our participation in what he did there and then. It becomes present to us sacramentally here and now so that we are given an active share in it by grace through faith.

INVITATION TO THEOLOGY

Gary Deddo: Mike, please tell us about your time in Aberdeen and sitting with James Torrance and what that was like, and what you took away.

Michael Jinkins: It was a wonderful experience. I didn't know what to expect. I had been a pastor for about 10 years when we went over. It was a life-changing experience in many ways. The most important thing I took away from James Torrance was his personality, his character. Almost everyone who worked with him says the same thing.

His brother Tom was one of the great minds of his generation, perhaps a genius. James was brilliant also – very creative – but the thing that meant the most to me was his personality, his extraordinary grace. He had the uncanny ability to accept you where you are. I still remember the first time



I met him on a stairwell in the old Kings College Quad leading up to his office.

The first visit with him, we sat down and talked. It was striking what a gracious, open, quiet person he was. That never changed in the many years from

being his student and becoming his friend.

GD: Yeah. My own memories match yours.

MJ: Very much the pastor in many ways. A great theologian, but very much the pastor.

GD: Yes. Some people ask us to compare Thomas F. Torrance, his older brother by 10 years, and James. Would you say this is fair, that Tom's interest was in the intellectual connections (methodology between theology and science certainly came out) whereas James' emphasis was connecting theology with pastoral ministry; that's where his emphasis came through?

MJ: Without any doubt. I served the church that Tom Torrance served before he went to Edinburgh. I served Beech Grove Church as the pastoral assistant while I was in PhD work. I remember doing pastoral visits one time. I did them week after week and one elderly lady remembered Tom Torrance as her pastor.

GD: Really.

MJ: She said, "Often he would preach and we didn't know what he was talking about. Then he would bow to pray and it was just clear and beautiful, and we always said he was boiling things down so that God could understand them." [laughter] That was Tom. Tom never stopped being this first-rate mind who was relating theology to science, to physics especially, but James related to human beings. He was remarkable in that.

GD: Tom also saw himself as an evangelist to the academic world. To evangelize the mind, might be a phrase that he used (I can't quite remember), to evangelize the world of the mind, and James's ministry was the congregation. They had a different emphasis. Even though it was a practically identical theological framework, they aimed it two directions.

MJ: That's true. You could tell that with James, even in his interest in a research subject. He zeroed in on John McLeod Campbell, who in many ways theologically, became his alter ego. Someone who had served primarily as a pastor, and who saw the human relationship as the primary paradigm for understanding the being of God. You see Tom entering in a different trajectory.

GD: It's an interesting contrast. I'd like to talk about your book, *Invitation to Theology*. One thing you talk about in the introduction is kind of a paradigm shift for yourself. You're in a crisis for a little bit, but then you have this reconfiguration of how you viewed things and viewed theology and viewed God in Christ. Can you say how that change that came about?

MJ: To put a larger picture on it, I think that real faith develops, grows

over a lifetime, and any time you feel that you have come to the end of the growth, you have misconstrued the relationship with God. The pilgrimage with God and the pilgrimage of faith is for a lifetime, and in many ways the key to being human is humility toward that knowledge that continues to unwrap.

When I was a pastor (this goes back a long way, to the mid '80s), before going to Aberdeen I had gotten to a place where my faith was cold (I think that comes out in this book); I don't think I believed much in God. It wasn't so much intellectual – it was just a coldness that I had come to. I remember coming in from pastoring one day in Aberdeen. This was my first or maybe my second semester there. I took off my dog collar (in the Church of Scotland you wear a dog collar), threw it on the bed and said to my wife, “Debbie, I don't believe in anything anymore.” She said, “I know. I can tell.”

I had come to a point, and you know it well, because we were friends and we would talk about this a lot. I said to you, “It just doesn't add up. You put this statement to this statement to this statement, it just doesn't add up.” I remember you saying to me, we played this little exercise, “Imagine that Jesus Christ is a pair of spectacles and you put them on, does life come into focus better?”

I played with that some, but in many ways, the critical event occurred that summer when I began to explore other vocational options. I went quietly to the University of Durham for a summer program in literature and history (I have a lot of interest in both literature and history). Two things occurred. I found myself right after moving in. A funny thing happened. I'm moving everything in. I'm there by myself, incognito. Nobody knows me as a minister. I'm putting my bags away and I can hear someone crying out on the stairwell. I thought, “What is that? That's sad.”

I opened the door to the stairwell and I stuck my head around. There was a young charwoman, one of the maids for the dormitory. She was sitting on the stairs weeping. I sat next to her and said, “What's wrong?” There was an illness in her family. I listened to her and she just poured her heart out and I said, “Would you like to pray?” She said, “Yes, I would,” so I prayed with her.

I got up from that conversation and I said, “Now what the heck is going on here? I'm not sure I believe in God and yet I found myself drawn into a pastoral relationship that was the most natural thing in the world.” I go into this class and I consistently found myself unhappy when the class found itself stuck. We were studying Shakespeare's plays, the Henry IV,

Henry V cycle, and I found myself consistently frustrated with the lack of transcendent reference. For Shakespeare there was, and in the class there was, resistance to finding a transcendent reference.

I found myself thinking, “I’m not happy with this either. I’m not happy with not having this transcendent reference.” I found myself about a day later in a place that I have come to love. It’s one of my most important sacred places in the world, the Durham Cathedral. I went in and bowed and prayed, “God, I don’t believe you exist but I think we really need to talk.”

At that point is the journey back to faith that kept unwrapping for me, and it continues to unwrap layer upon layer. At the end of my program, during the viva voce [oral exam], my external examiner, Colin Gunton, one of the most distinguished theologians of his generation (and he died so young) said to me, “I feel that there’s a kind of Victorian coziness in the theology of the Trinity that’s being described by John McLeod Campbell.” He said, “It doesn’t feel as expansive as it should.”

I found that very critical. I didn’t like that comment at the time and I remember resisting it. About 10 years later, I was a professor at Austin Seminary. I’m teaching at Regent College and I’m realizing that I’m feeling growing pains in my theology, and where is that happening?

I happened to be reading A. N. Wilson’s book, *God’s Funeral* – a brilliant book, which tells the story of the loss of faith in 19th-century England at the explosion of scientific thought. I thought, “I’m going through another crisis. Why am I feeling a dissatisfaction with the Trinity? This doctrine has become key to my theological life and it is key to orthodox Christianity. Why am I feeling this tension here?”

I realized that once again, my sense of God wasn’t large enough, and I found that with Wilson, which was fascinating to me. He had written a fascinating biography of C.S. Lewis, during which he felt he (Wilson) had drifted from faith by the end of that book. He writes this book on the loss of faith in Britain and he finds himself coming back to faith.

I found in William James a conversation partner who was extremely helpful in pressing out and reconfiguring once again, “What do I mean by Trinity? It isn’t a cozy Victorian family. What do you mean by Trinity?”

All of that, I’m on a long trajectory. All of us are on a long trajectory. The key to it is remaining humble in the face of the mystery of God.

GD: Thanks. You’re president of a seminary, you’ve taught in seminaries. Many people are skeptical about theological education – about theology itself. I was, years ago. I only believed in biblical studies when I

was in my first years in seminary and didn't come to appreciate the place of theology (not that it's everything). What is the place of a theological education for those doing pastoral ministries but possibly also for lay persons? What do you think about the place of theological education?

MJ: That's a wonderful question. I didn't know you started in biblical studies. I started out in biblical studies, too, in college, and probably for the same reasons. I grew up in an evangelical church and I'm thinking to myself, "What do you study? You're going into ministry, so you study the Bible." I did my undergraduate degree in biblical studies with a minor in New Testament Greek. In my last semester of college, I took my first theology course – a Christian doctrine course. I got into it and I thought, "These are questions I'm wrestling with. These are questions at the heart of the Bible. Who is God? What is God like? What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to live in community? What does God require of us?" In many ways the fundamental questions that are being asked again and again in the Bible are the questions that are the bread and butter of theology.

I found myself stepping back one step from the immediacy of those first questions and I started reading theologians. My first theologian, as a serious theologian to read, was Karl Barth. My second was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Those two have remained touchstones for me throughout my life.

I am now probably more in the Bonhoeffer world than in the Barth world because I continue to find, I found Bonhoeffer to be a mind that traversed such a wide range, and it felt to me at some point, disappointingly, that Barth seemed to draw in the questions a bit. For Bonhoeffer, it was that engagement with culture that continued to open him up, so I find him to be such a winsome character.

For Bonhoeffer, I would go back to this issue: this must have been around the early '30s. Bonhoeffer is teaching in Berlin and did a wonderful series of lectures on Christology. When I came across those (titled in America, *Christ the Center*), I was struck that just staying in textual study of the Bible wasn't going to be enough for me, because Bonhoeffer does this wonderful thing that James Torrance picks up from him. Bonhoeffer says we often get stuck in asking questions of *how* and the great question is *who*. The great question is asked first by Jesus Christ, "Who do you say that I am?" That question came to dominate much of my theological life.

Expanding and impressing it, what does it mean to stay with the "who" question? Not "how is Jesus Christ both God and man?" That's a mystery.

It's wonderful, but it can become simply a matter of speculation and curiosity. The real question is, "Who do *you* say that I am?"

Then we turn that question on ourselves. If Jesus Christ reveals this God, what does it mean to be one who follows Jesus Christ? Those are the core theological questions. Anytime theology gets off the track, it is stuck in asking "how" or "why." When theology is doing its job, it's asking the question, "Who?" That goes to the heart of being a human being.

GD: As we discover who God is, then the follow-up question is, who are we in relationship to God? [**MJ:** That's right.] We discover the nature of our humanity in relationship to who he is.

MJ: All the core questions of God are linked up in that. For example, in the rationalistic movement, the 18th century especially, over and over again God is defined as a singular bare monad, and you see the movement of individualism coming out of that, the lack of community that we still wrestle with, so identity becomes an individualist issue. If you're grounded in a God who has revealed himself to be Father, Son and Spirit – Creator, Redeemer, Spirit, Lover, Beloved, Love – any of those images draw you into community, which means that we find our identity in relationship to others. That's a radically different way of thinking about God and then about the necessity of church, as challenging as it can be to live in community. We find ourselves as human in community; otherwise we disintegrate. All of that traces itself back, in a way, to who God is.

GD: In theological education, many people feel a tension between theology and the mechanics of ministry – the "how to do ministry." You talk in your book about the "trap of utility" and all that. Can you say a word about how does that work in theological education, because there *are* things you have to do?

MJ: The example that comes to mind, actually came from one of our alumns. About 10 or 15 years ago, I was talking to an alumn of the theological school I was serving then. He graduated about 1980. He said, "Every course I took that had 'relevance' in the title or in the subtitle or in the course description, every one of those courses was irrelevant in five years. Every single one of them. All the courses I thought as a student were most irrelevant are the only ones I still draw upon."

GD: That's interesting.

MJ: I found that fascinating. I asked him to talk about it more and he said, "I took a course in Galatians, now how relevant is that?" He said:

What I really needed to learn [I thought] was how to do an every-member canvass of the congregation. That's what I needed to learn

because I'm going have to do stewardship programs and nobody was teaching me how to conduct an every-member canvass of the congregation.

What I discovered is, theological education was three years of intensive reflection on God, on the Bible, on the history of the Christian movement. All of those things that took so much time and distracted me from what I thought I really needed to know as a pastor, those were the foundations. The other things I was able to pick up in a weekend.

Eugene Peterson once said: "Most of the skill-based things we need to be a good pastor, you can pick up on a rainy Sunday afternoon, reading a book or going to a conference." The process of slowly soaking in a theological perspective on the world, you really need theological education to make that happen. It's hard to come by that kind of time, otherwise.

APOLOGETICS AND THEOLOGY

Gary Deddo: Alister, you have an unusual background – in both science and in theology. There aren't many people who have that kind of background. Can you tell us a little about how those two things came together for you?

Alister McGrath: Sure. I began in high school, studying sciences, and that was my first love. My future was going to be in science and, at that time, I thought science entailed atheism. For me, science and atheism went together. Then I went to Oxford University, studied chemistry, and I went on to the doctorate in molecular biophysics.

Then something else happened, which was while I was at Oxford, I discovered Christianity. This question of how I held together Christian faith and natural sciences became very important. I decided if I was going to do this properly, I would have to do some degrees in theology as well.

That's how I transitioned from the natural sciences to theology, although I tried to keep the two of them together.

GD: Why did you think science was an objection to Christian faith?



AM: I can go with two things. One was that it just seemed to me that science offered an explanation for everything. A kind of reductive explanation, which mean that it gobbled up the space that God might occupy. Also, I felt religion was terribly old-fashioned. Who in their right mind would believe in this stuff? I took the view that people who believed in God were mad, or bad, or sad, or possibly all three. I didn't want to be like that. It's both intellectual and cultural.

GD: Somewhere along the way you took an interest in the theology and writings of Thomas F. Torrance. Can you tell me how that came about?

AM: One of the things I was trying to find was someone who would help me think through how I might relate science and theology. I was looking for, I suppose, some kind of role model, someone who had integrated these. I found several good people who had integrated science and the Christian faith, but not necessarily science and Christian theology.

In June 1976, I think it was, I came across Tom Torrance's book, *Theological Science*, and devoured it. It was very exciting. As I began to read this, I discovered he was someone who had thought this thing through and gave me an intellectual framework to make sense of the relationship between theology and science. Torrance gave me a mental map, a way of thinking about things, that allowed me to see legitimate, interesting ways of holding science and Christian theology, and mapped out how I might develop my own thinking on this.

GD: Many people consider that science and Christian faith (or any belief in God) are at odds – there's been some talk about a war between these. You saw past that. Was there some key insight that helped you recognize there's not a war? Somehow, the writings of Torrance were helping you sort this out.

AM: It's a cliché, that there's a war between science and faith. It's terribly out-of-date. Scholarship has moved on massively, but the cliché still lingers in the media, who haven't caught up with the literature. Torrance showed me that if you saw them in the right intellectual context, then there was no question. If anything, they complimented each other. Torrance was saying if you see them in the right way, they give you a mental map, which allows you to position them and enable them to have a positive, constructive, and fruitful conversation. That is what Torrance helped me to discover.

GD: That's wonderful, because I run into people who are stuck in the past.

I know some of your interests as well. You've written quite a number of books. Some of them have to do with addressing not so much science and faith, but theology and faith, and helping people grow in their faith. You have a textbook on Introduction to Christian Theology. What's important there and why have you written these books?

AM: When I was transitioning from natural science to theology, studying theology at Oxford, having come to it from natural sciences, I found it difficult. I was switching from the sciences to the humanities. I was entering into a new discipline. I found it very difficult to pick it up. I thought, "I'm sure I can learn from this difficulty. If only there was a textbook that might help with this," because all the textbooks I read were useless. They assumed far too much on the part of their readers.

I decided that one day, if the occasion emerged, I'd try to write a book which would have helped me discover theology, because I had a very steep learning curve and I thought, "I'm sure there are many others who are having this experience as well." I thought, "Supposing I write a theological textbook which begins at ground zero, assumes absolutely no previous knowledge of Christian theology, and gradually introduces them," which is what I needed myself. I thought maybe my own experience could help others do the same.

I see education, helping others discover theology, very exciting. Because, in effect, I'm saying, "Look, I've discovered this. This is really wonderful. Can I help you discover it as well?" My own pain, if you like, has been somebody else's gain because it means it's easier for them after that.

GD: Another obstacle that people run into is the dichotomy between head and heart. They've said there's a gap between the head and the heart. That's generated some negative idea about theology and what it's good for. It seems to me that's another gap that isn't really there, but many people assume it is. How do you address the head/heart gap?

AM: That's a real issue, and there's a danger that theology is seen as very cerebral or very dry, very academic – almost as if it has no connection with the vibrant life of faith or, indeed, Christian worship. One of the things you have to try to do, it's said, when theology is done properly, it doesn't simply inform you – it creates a vision of God. It makes you want to respond in prayer and in worship. It brings together the head and the heart, even though it is focusing on trying to make sense of the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

For me, it's about intellectual engagement without losing that

essentially relational activity of loving God, wanting to praise God, and so forth. It's a danger, you're quite right. It's very easy to see theology as simply as an obsession with words, losing any connection with the life of faith, evangelism, worship, and so on. That's a risk, but it doesn't need to be like that. I think the challenge is to make sure that theology nourishes both head and heart.

GD: How do you go about that? In your books, how did you approach it differently to overcome that problem?

AM: The way I approach it is to say that you need to think of God as being so radiant, so majestic, that we cannot possibly hope to do justice of him. You're very grateful you can make so much sense of God and things of faith, and that's why it leads to theology. On the other hand, the fact that it's so immense, overwhelming, that naturally leads you to worship, because you realize, "These things are so wonderful I can't put them into words," so the appropriate response is to get down on your knees and pray and worship. I think holding those two perspectives together stops them falling apart.

GD: James Torrance, who I studied with, used to emphasize, "We need to talk about who God is – God's character. Not just whether he exists or abstract concepts, but the nature and character." It sounds like you're saying something similar to that, getting at the majesty and the glory of God, the character of God, not abstract descriptions of his attributes or things that don't help people see head and heart together.

AM: Right. Theology does its job best when it makes people want to worship God.

GD: In Christian teaching today in the church, are there any topics or theological themes that you think are undeveloped or misunderstood? You did quite a bit of work early on on the issue of justification. That's a detailed study that I'm sure you found helpful. Perhaps that's a theme, you think, or is there some area that you see Christians are missing it and we might need to review this and bring this back?

AM: That's an interesting question. There's a general point to make first: I worry that Christians have less inherited knowledge of their faith. That might have been the case a generation or two beforehand. Maybe we need to say that perhaps across the board, there's a need for Christians to develop their understanding of their faith, perhaps through catechesis or something like that.

There are areas where there are lots of misunderstandings. The doctrine of the Trinity is a good example. Many Christians are nervous about that

because they say, “Hey, one in three? That’s bad mathematics, you know? Where does that take us?” They almost hold back from engagement because they’re frightened that if they open this can of worms, they’ll find all sorts of stuff there. Of course, if they do it properly, they will be excited and so forth.

Justification is a good example. Most Christians, to give a simple example, misunderstand what justification by faith is. They think it means that, “If I start believing in God, I am justified.” That’s not what it means at all. You need to go back a long way.

Every Christian is on a journey of discovery. The creeds of Christianity give us a framework for discovery. They say, “Here is the landscape of faith. You probably know that little bit very well, but there’s more to discover. Please engage and discover.” We need to encourage them to discover their whole realm of faith, because often they know little bits very well, but the rest remains undiscovered.

GD: You’ve written a little book based on the Apostles’ Creed. That’s what you’ve attempted to do in that book a little bit, right... [**AM:** Absolutely.] open up the whole of the Christian faith. You mentioned a misunderstanding about justification. Could you give us a short, brief definition?

AM: For Luther, who I agree with on this occasion, what justification by faith means is not, “I choose to believe in God and as a result, God says, ‘Oh, you are justified.’” It’s much more: Even the faith I have by which I embrace God is God’s gracious gift to me. It’s about God reaching his hand out towards me, not me reaching my hand out towards him. It’s this wonderful idea of God, in effect, providing all we need. That’s such an important emphasis because we often feel that there are certain things that we need to achieve in order to be right with God. Luther is saying, “No, no. God does it.” We need to trust God and get on in the knowledge that that relationship with him is secure.

GD: Are you saying that we’re justified by our belief in the doctrine, of itself? That’s not where we want to go.

AM: It’s not where we want to go at all. If I could coin a phrase, that’s justification by words rather than justification by faith.

GD: Right. I know you’ve had some interest in C.S. Lewis. Tell us about that. How did you encounter Lewis and what have you taken away from him?

AM: I was born in Belfast. Lewis was born in Belfast as well. But when I was growing up in Northern Ireland, I always thought Lewis was English.

It was one of those things I had never really made that connection, but I didn't read him. What happened was when I discovered Christianity, I began to ask all kinds of hard questions. My friends got fed up and eventually one of them said to me, "Look, why don't you read C.S. Lewis?" I said, "Oh, well, okay."

I bought my first book by C.S. Lewis, in 1974 I think it was, and thought, "This is good," and bought more books by C.S. Lewis and thought, "These are good." Kept on reading them. I began almost a lifelong relationship with C.S. Lewis because he is so good. He's so clear. He is very good at explaining things. When you read Lewis the first time, you see some things. When you come back to the same work later, there's something else you missed. It's a journey of discovery.

I wrote a biography of him to celebrate the 50th anniversary of his death [in 1963]. In researching that biography, I came to appreciate the man all the more simply because I began to discover more of him as a man, as a deeply-flawed, damaged human being who nonetheless achieved remarkable things. That gave me hope for myself.

GD: I've had a similar experience. Lewis is known as an apologist. He was more than that, but a lot of people concentrate on his apologetics and things like that. You have an interest in apologetics as well. Do you approach that task, that ministry, in a similar way, or do you approach it a little differently than Lewis did?

AM: There are differences between me and Lewis, but I think the similarity between Lewis and myself is we're both atheists who became Christians and know why we did it. We've inhabited another place and we understand the patterns of thought in that place. We've moved to a different place and know why we made that transition. Now we're both well placed to be able to say to people who are still in this place of unbelief, "Here are some problems you have, and here are some things about Christianity you probably haven't grasped."

For me, apologetics comes very naturally. It's about me trying to set out some of the reasons that brought me to faith, but also I think engaging with some of the questions our culture is asking. For example, Richard Dawkins and others are saying, "You can't believe anything you can't prove. That's just right, isn't it?" I take great pleasure in exposing all his hidden beliefs that are unjustified, trying to make the point that we believe an awful lot of things that cannot be proven and yet we have good reason for thinking are right.

For me, apologetics is important to support the cultural defense of the

Christian faith. Going back to a point we were talking about earlier, I was just suggesting to you maybe people don't know their faith as well as they should. All of us probably have to have some kind of apologetic ministry, trying to explain what Christianity is, and also why it makes so much sense.

GD: As you've interacted with people who are outside the church and outside the Christian faith, is there a general sense of what those outside the church and Christian faith don't get, and what Christians need to be aware of, sensitive to, and address first? Are we missing the boat in some ways? Where would we focus conversations with those who aren't in the church?

AM: There are a lot of important points here. One is that many people don't see what the point of belief in God is. They think that believing in God means believing there's some extra item in the universe, like an extra planet orbiting the sun. It may be there, but makes no difference. Why get excited about that?

What you have to try to do is something like discovering meaning, or being loved. It's something that's not simply cognitive, but relational. It's something that changes life. Trying to bring out the fact that belief in God is about discovering what life is all about, that's very important.

Moving on from that, many people outside the church are puzzled as to why people should believe in God at all. Often we have to say, "There are some good reasons for this," and try to set out what some of these are. Often, people are not being hostile when they say, "We can't see why you believe in God." They're actually curious and inquisitive.

It's important to tell your own story, which is, "Here is how I discovered faith, or here is how I grew in my faith, or here is how I was in a household of faith and discovered its inner meaning," and so on. It's important to tell those stories and help people grasp that believing in God is not just about one extra item in your mental inventory, but it is much more about having discovered what life is all about, and that's a cause for celebration. It gives you a big picture of life, which helps you figure out how to behave, how to live, and how to hope, which is very important.

GD: That seems to put aside arguments for the existence of God or abstract proofs. You're talking about something that talks about relevance, meaning, and significance. Some apologetics sounds pretty arid, a line of argument and things like that. It sounds like you're talking about a different approach.

AM: Right. Pascal, many years ago, said, "You should try to make

people wish that there were a God, and then show them that there is.” The danger is we often start off by saying, “Let me tell you why there is a God.” People aren’t interested in the question. You’ve got to, in effect, make them want to ask the question because this sounds interesting.

GD: You do a lot of speaking. I suppose there’s a mix of Christians and non-believers in the audience. What have you learned in that context? Are there certain questions that regularly come up? What’s that been like?

AM: It’s a wonderful experience, because people will often want to ask questions. Often some timid person will put up their hand and say something like, “What difference does Christian faith make,” or something like that. There are a lot of other people who wished they’d asked the question, but hadn’t. When you’re talking to a large audience, people are often anonymous. You can say some things and you’re not saying them to any specific individual, and so it’s actually easier for people to hear them.

It’s a great privilege to be able to talk about the difference that faith makes to people and trying to explain what some key Christian ideas mean. The response I often get from people is, “Now we get it. We see what this is all about.” That is so exciting when that happens. A penny drops or a light gets turned on.

Often, I think what gets the most response from people is simply when I talk about my own transition from atheism to faith, why I did it and the difference it makes. People begin to realize this isn’t just about some mental adjustment. It’s about something that really changes your life and gives you hope and meaning and so on. I find that very exciting. I’m glad I’m able to do this kind of thing.

GD: You’ve entered into formal debates with individuals. A couple of what we refer to as the new atheists: Richard Dawkins, and Christopher Hitchens, and such. I viewed a couple of these on YouTube. What was that like to be with them? That’s an extraordinary event.

AM: They were quite extraordinary events, and I had the feeling that this was like people talking past each other. It was almost as if there wasn’t really all that much engagement. They were almost like set pieces.

Often the debate was invariably, “What is the problem in believing in God,” and it was very difficult to get the new atheists to talk about what their proposed alternative was. If you don’t believe in God, then what is your basis for morality? Christopher Hitchens, when pressed on that particular issue, will say, “I don’t know.” In effect, “I just believe certain things and I don’t see the need to give a reason for them.”

It's important to have these civil debates, if only to show that answers can be given to the questions these people are asking. I don't think the debates necessarily are very productive, but it's important they take place and, in effect, faith is shown to be able to stand up to some of these interrogations and make some good points in response.

GD: It sounds like your approach in these debates was not to win the debate, but to have a conversation, and to listen, and show responses. Yes, civil debate. Sometimes debates don't go in that direction.

AM: No, they don't. What I found myself doing is talking to Richard Dawkins, or Christopher Hitchens, or Daniel Dennett, but actually talking through them to an audience beyond, trying to say, "Look, we're going to get excited about this. They're going to be angry about it. It's a simple, but very important question: what are the reasons for believing God and the difference it makes?" Trying to get people to see that there were some important questions here, which were being hijacked in the name of an aggressive atheist agenda, but good answers could be given to the questions being asked.

GD: In my conversations with people, sometimes it seems the defensive questions and attacks on Christianity and all, actually there are other often personal issues, backgrounds, bad experiences, and things like that that don't necessarily get brought up, but their responses seem so personal and so full of energy and even vitriol. It seems to me that if you don't recognize that, if you just think it's an intellectual problem, that we're missing the boat, especially in a personal situation of having a conversation and dealing with them as full human beings, not just brains or ideas. Did some of that come out in some of these interviews?

AM: Very much so. Often, particularly very angry atheists, have a personal history. It's not an intellectual issue at all. A parent may have died and they've been angry with God for allowing that to happen. Or they may have had a bad experience in the church. Or they may feel that, as Richard Dawkins does, that Christianity tells lies. Of course, that's a very bad thing to do.

You are dealing with people who are deeply committed for non-intellectual reasons to atheism. When you start to probe, they become extremely defensive because it's not simply a question of whether there's a God or not. It's about my personal history or my personal integrity being called into question.

Often, the anger you find in the new atheism reflects a history. You're right. We need to be aware of that, but at the same time, you have to say

that we cannot be trapped by our personal histories. These are big questions. Somehow, we need to break free from our personal histories to think about these things.

GD: That dimension doesn't make the task easier. It makes it more complex and more personal. I find prayer is essential for these kinds of breakthroughs.

Now, another question that I'm interested in ... This is the big picture, where you've dealt with the personal, but now on larger things. I don't know if you think of Western culture – Europe, North America – being post-Christian. One of my questions has been, how did we get here? What happened?

You've studied intellectual history and all that. What do you think about the big picture? Why is Western culture largely leaving behind the Christian faith, especially the intellectual leadership? There still is faith around, churches are still there, but in the direction of the culture, what do you think about that and how did we get where we are? Are we just going to be on this post-Christian decline? What do you think about that larger picture?

AM: That's a really big question, isn't it? There are a number of things going on here. One is a very significant distrust of institutions. Inevitably, that means Christian churches are objects of suspicion. In our culture, there's a shift towards wanting to talk about "spirituality." Spirituality, if you like, is non-institutional religion. It's a personal thing. That's something we're going to have to think about. If people are suspicious of institutions, it means that bishops or church leaders will not be well-received because they're seen as institutionally linked. What we need to do almost is rediscover the early Christian detachment from power, from institutional structures, and see if we can bring that into our way of thinking. That's one important element of this.

There's something else, as well, and this is in at least one study of this process of erosion of faith. One of the difficulties is that parents did not take trouble to pass their faith on to their children. In effect, just saying, "You decide what you want to do." There is an issue there about how Christian organizations, how Christian churches think about the transmission of faith to the next generation. We seem to have failed on that. That's something we need to come back to.

The third thing I think we need to come back to is this: Perhaps we have failed to understand the imaginative, the moral, the esthetic vision that Christianity contains within itself. We've not helped people to see

why it is exciting and important. People find themselves having walked away from Christianity without really understanding what it is. We need to re-unpack the riches of the Christian faith so people can see it.

Another point I would make here, in wrapping this little section up, is a lot of Christians tend to be defensive about this. That creates a perception in the culture that in a kind of way, they're on the losing side. I think we are on the losing side. We have failed to play our cards properly. Perhaps we need to go back, take our packs out, and look at all the cards and say, "These are wonderful cards – why aren't we playing them properly?" and begin to rethink how we present the Christian faith, how we teach it, how we live it out. Those are big questions, but it seems to me that we need to come back to them.

GD: Well, make some suggestions. We talked about the problem, but how would you approach it, especially this esthetic and imaginative? How would we even start taking this new path that you're suggesting?

AM: In Western culture there are many who are overwhelmed by the beauty of nature, or who love good literature, or who visit art galleries. These people are looking for something significant or looking for something deeper, but might not necessarily think of making any connection with the Christian faith. We need to work at how we can reconnect Christianity with groups of people who we seemed to have disenfranchised. That means we're going to need people who are able to talk about Christianity and the arts, who are able to talk about Christianity and literature, who are able to say, "This will bring an even greater richness to what you're doing." It's about trying to build bridges, and no one person can do that.

We need Christians who are scientists, artists, musicians, whatever, to say, "I need intentionally to build bridges between my faith and the professional communities I'm engaging with." That's something very important, but it can be done. We almost need to think of this as a calling. In the past, you might have thought of a calling towards a ministry. Maybe there's a calling to be a bridge person between the faith and particular interest groups.

GD: Well, thank you so much.

AM: You're welcome. Wonderful talking to you.

THE GRACE WALK

Michael Morrison: Steve, you've written a book called *Grace Walk*. It's sold quite a few copies now, and in the book you describe the story of how you came to an understanding of grace, and I wondered if we could start today by rehearsing that story as to what motivated you to write this book.

Steve McVey: Sure. I grew up in a Christian home. My parents were Christians; they're both in heaven now. I was taught about the Lord from the time I was a small child. I understood the gospel when I was 8 years old, and by the time I was 16, I was preaching. I preached my first sermon at 16 years old and was very sincere....became a senior pastor at 19. Can

you believe that?

19 years old and I was a senior pastor of a church with about 100 people — about 80 of them were over 65, which seemed old to me back then. It doesn't seem so old these days.

I was sincere in my Christian walk,



but little by little I found happening to me what I think happens to a lot of people: my focus began to move, in small increments, away from being on Jesus and began to be more directed toward my own performance — how well I was doing and living the Christian life.

The essence of legalism is thinking that somehow we can make spiritual progress or gain God’s blessings based on what we do, making sure that we do the right things, making sure that we’re keeping all the rules. In the modern church, I think we get grace when it comes to evangelism for unbelievers, but then once people believe, it’s like bait and switch — we turn the tables on them. It’s like “OK, it was grace for you to understand the gospel, but now that you’re a believer, everything’s changed. Now it’s all about you and what *you* do.” I lived that way for the first 29 years of my Christian life. 17 of those years I was a senior pastor.

In my first book, *Grace Walk*, which was published in 1995, I described how the Lord brought me to a place where I realized that although my heart had been in the right place, my head was in the wrong place. That book starts out with me lying on my face in the middle of the night at 2:00 a.m. crying in my office, as a pastor, saying, “If this is the Christian life, it’s overrated, and if this is the ministry, I want out.” How’s that for sort of a tease introduction to a book? A pastor who wanted to quit.

MM: It sounds like you’d been a successful pastor, if you had 17 years, and if you then continued to focus on performance, perhaps that’s because you were “performing” well.

SM: Right. It’s interesting. I write about it in the book, that for many years as a pastor I felt successful. I felt that way. I got that from accolades of other people, the affirmation of my ministry and those kinds of things.

But I began to pray a prayer, and I tell you this is a prayer that the Lord takes seriously. I began to pray a prayer, and I said, “Father, I want to know you more intimately than I’ve ever known you. I want to be used by you. I want you to work through my life to impact people with your love, your life, more than I could even imagine it.” Then I said this: “And whatever it takes, I want you to do it to bring me to that place.”

He heard that prayer. I’m making a long story short...I wrote a whole book about it. Shortly after that, I moved from a church where I served as senior pastor in the state of Alabama to Atlanta, Georgia. I moved to Atlanta anticipating that I was going there to build a megachurch, and that I would see unprecedented success in my ministry. The church I was going to had been dying in every measurable way for five years before I got there, but I thought when I got there, things would turn around.

But to my surprise, things didn't turn around. The church just kept dying, right out from under me. After I had been there a year, that's when, as I mentioned a moment ago, I was approaching the first anniversary date of my tenure as pastor, and I found myself lying on my face, and I said, "If this is the ministry, I want out. If this is Christian living, it's overrated."

But the ironic thing is that what the Lord used in my life (as he does in all of our lives when he wants to bring us up to a deeper or higher understanding of grace), is he had to bring me to the place where I had discovered my need for grace. You see?

We "get" grace [i.e., understand it] for unbelievers. But sometimes as pastors, especially, we don't get it. We think, "I'm preaching the Bible, I'm counseling, I'm doing all the things a pastor should be doing. I'm having success with it." The Lord has to work in our lives to bring us to the place where we say, "I can't do what I thought I could do," so that we'll be open to what he wants to teach us.

MM: So in some ways, failure was good.

SM: Failure is always good, because failure is not the end. Suffering and pain and what we interpret as failure is sometimes not failure at all. It's the principle in the Bible about dying to live. Jesus said unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it abides alone; you've got to die to live. The Bible is full of paradoxical statements like that. We have to think about that the Bible says we die to live. We have to be weak in order to be strong. We go down so we can go up. It has to get dark before the light comes.

But we're wired in this world. Our flesh is programmed this way. Especially those of us who live in Western culture, we're wired to think that we have to succeed, and we have to make our mark, and there has to be this continuous upward trajectory toward success and what we're doing. But we don't get strong enough for God to use us. We have to get *weak* enough for God to use us. The best way to learn that is in the midst of our failures.

MM: That kind of thing hurts, doesn't it?

SM: It does. Just like when my children were small and I took them to the doctor for their vaccinations, it always hurt. When I took them for their booster shots, it hurt, and it was for their good. It was a good thing, though in their little minds it didn't seem like it. In our minds, as human beings, sometimes when we're in painful circumstances, we think, "If God cares, why is he letting this happen?" If we could hear him answer, we would hear him say, "It's precisely because I do care, that I'm letting this

happen.”

In my situation, I came into that church and it kept dying out from under me (numerically, I mean), and I had always been used to growing churches. So I prayed, “Lord, what’s going on?” I began to feel weakened. I began to feel discouraged, despondent, finally despair. I kept praying, “Lord, make me stronger, make me stronger.”

I realize now what he was saying is, “Steve, I’ve got a better idea. I’ll make you weaker.” I’m going to say it again: We don’t get strong enough for God to use us, so we might as well stop praying “make me stronger,” because grace isn’t afforded to the strong. It’s not the strong people who tap into grace. It’s weak people who understand our need for grace, so we’ve got to become weak, so that we’ll reach a point where we can become recipients of grace in an experiential way.

MM: When we have strengths, we tend to rely on our strengths.

SM: Absolutely.

MM: For some people, it’s physical strength, others it’s intellectual, some social.

SM: That’s right. That reliance on our own abilities and our own strengths as we’re describing it — the biblical word for that is the “flesh.” When the Bible talks about walking after the flesh, it’s not talking about the skin, these physical bodies. It’s can’t mean that. Paul said to one group, “You’re no longer in the flesh, but in the Spirit.” He didn’t mean they were ghosts. What he meant is, “You get it. You finally get it.”

“The flesh” is you or me trying to live for Christ instead of understanding that we can’t live for him. We weren’t called to live for him. Grace is the enablement, by virtue of his indwelling life for us, to live his life because he’s expressing it through us, not because we’re doing it for him, and there’s a big difference between the two. To experience that kind of outflow of grace from our lives, we’ve got to come to the point where we realize, “I can’t live the Christian life no matter how hard I try.”

It’s a great day for any of us when we discover that the Christian life is not hard for us to live, it’s *impossible* for us to live. There’s only one who can live the Christ-life, and that’s the Christ himself. And he will live it, if we come to the end of ourselves and abandon ourselves in total surrender to him. The gospel is not just the gospel for unbelievers, it’s the gospel for believers, too. We need his grace just like unbelievers need his grace.

MM: People tend to rely on their strengths — sometimes they call those spiritual gifts. How do we tell the difference between our fleshly strength and a spiritual gift?

SM: That's a good point, and there's a fine line sometimes, because the abilities that we have come from our Father. He's given us those abilities. The key distinguishing factor revolves around one question—what animates those abilities? What is it that I'm relying on to give expression to those abilities? Is it me? Is it my own know-how? Is it my own determination? My own willpower? My own intentionality? Or is it an attitude that says, Apart from him I can do nothing, so I rely upon him and by faith I trust him to be the one to animate those abilities.

For those first 17 years as a senior pastor, I tried to do things for the Lord. My heart was in the right place – it was my head that was messed up, not my heart. My heart was toward him. But when the Lord brought me to brokenness in 1990 and began to teach me this grace walk and what it means to let him live through me, I'll never forget the changes I began to see, because the most evident change is I began to see is that I didn't have to struggle anymore. I could simply rest in him knowing that he is in control of my life. It's not even my ministry. It's his ministry, and if I just yield myself to him, he will do through me what he wants to do.

He's done that in ways that exceeded anything I could have done or imagined. It's not like God has a favorite and he'll do for me what he won't do for somebody else. He doesn't pick folks like you and me and say, "I'm going to do something with their lives, but you guys on the margin, on the periphery, I won't use your life or I won't work for you." No, no, no. He wants to use all of us. Paul told the Corinthians that "You see your calling, that it's not many that are noble and mighty and strong..." You know the passage...but he goes on and says, "God chooses the weak."

So I would say to those who watch us that if they feel like, "I'm just not strong like that guy. I'm weak. I've never written books. I don't have the education or the abilities, or..." No, no, no. I'd say to them, "You're the *perfect* candidate for God to use you, because you know it has to be him that does it, and that's the kind of person he will use and takes delight in."

MM: But he doesn't necessarily use us in the way that we associate with success.

SM: Absolutely not. God's definition of success and ours is very different. It's not possible for us not to be successful as we depend on Jesus as our life source, because *he* is our success. Christ is our life. In him we live and move and exist, Paul said on Mars Hill, and he was speaking then to unbelievers. He said, "In him we live and move and exist."

Christ is our life, so success is our union with him. We can relax. It's

not about striving for success anymore. It's about just resting in Jesus and letting Jesus be who he is in us and through us. There's success right there, whatever it might look like.

MM: So I can be a success without doing anything, achieving anything.

SM: Absolutely. In fact, we don't achieve anything. We're not called to achieve anything. We are receivers, not achievers. The great Achiever lives inside us, and he will accomplish through us whatever he wants to do as we depend on him. We don't have to make something happen — as I said, we don't live for him, we don't have to do anything for him.

Now, for people who have been groomed in the legalistic mindset, they're thinking, "That guy's talking passivity." No, I'm not talking passivity. I can speak for all the people I have seen who have embraced grace in saying this: He will do more through us in a day than we can do for him in 25 lifetimes. We just need to stop the struggle.

Jesus said, "Come to me..." (I'm quoting the King James—it's the one I grew up on, so this is the way I memorized it.) "Come to me all ye who labor and are heavy-laden, and I'll give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and you shall find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Religion beats the daylight out of us. (Sound of whip cracking) "More, more, more!" That's what legalistic religion does. But grace is the voice of Jesus saying, "Come to me and I'll give you rest." Yet it's not passivity, because it's a life of active rest, where he lives his life through us and does more through us than we could ever do for him.

MM: What's the role of our decisions in that? How do we let Jesus live through us without us taking credit for the results?

SM: It's a mindset. Once we've failed enough to realize "I will mess it up every time I try," that's a good teacher. When we see God doing something through us, we begin to realize "This is not me. I couldn't have done this."

Can I give you one example? First time I saw this after I began to understand this... (to *begin* to understand, notice, because all of us are still growing in grace). The first example that I saw in my own life... I had been trying to make my mark for Jesus. I was a senior pastor. My secretary comes in and says, "Pastor, there's a guy here who would like to talk to you." I said, "What about?" She said, "About attending church." I said, "Okay."

The guy comes in; he was from Africa, from Cameroon. He begins to

talk to me about the church, and I quickly realized that he doesn't understand the gospel or anything about our faith. So I share the gospel with him and the guy believes. He trusts in Christ that very day. Every week he began coming for me to disciple him on Tuesday. I did that every week.

One week he comes in and says, "Pastor, have you noticed that every week when I come, I take notes of what you're saying? I said, "Yeah." He took copious notes every week when I was discipling him. He said, "Do you know why I do it?" I said, "I guess you take them back and study." He said, "No. I go over to the shipping place and I mail these notes to the chief in my village in Africa. Every week the chief is getting these notes, and he goes out and calls the village together. He's sharing with them what you're teaching me." He said, "A lot of people in my village are trusting Christ, and they're asking the chief questions that he doesn't know how to answer, and he's asking me, and I don't know how to answer, so I'm supposed to ask you. If I translate, will you answer the questions of the new Christians in my village?" All of sudden, it just washed over me. I thought, "Here I am sitting in Atlanta, Georgia, with one man across the desk from me, and I'm evangelizing and discipling a whole village of people in Africa."

MM: How strange is that? Pastoring them, too.

SM: Exactly. I couldn't make that happen in a million years. That's the point I make. When we strive to do things for God, all it results in, is what the Bible calls "dead works." It's just religious works. But if we give up on our struggle, and as the writer of Hebrews says, "enter into his rest." (I used to think that meant dying and going to heaven — that's how anemic my Christian life was. No — enter his rest.) I stopped struggling and striving, and I'm going to trust that God is my life and that he'll live through me.

If we'll do that, the kind of thing I just described, that one anecdote, that's just the tip of the iceberg. I've been on six continents sharing this message and seeing God do things that there's no way I could take credit for. How do I know it's him and not me? Because I'm not smart enough to do the things he's done through me. People might see his life expressed in different ways. It might not be something that they would consider on a grand scale, but it doesn't matter, because when Christ does something through us, we recognize, "That happened from a source beyond my own abilities. That was *him* through me." We see it, and that encourages us and motivates us to want to trust him more.

MM: That reminds me of Susanna Wesley, who had no idea that her role as a mother would turn out to be so influential. Just an ordinary station

in life, she thought, and yet the Lord was able to use what she had done.

SM: Perfect example. I wrote about her. I wrote a book called *Walking in the Will of God*, and I make the point toward the end of the book, that very point. I said, fulfilling God's will in your life doesn't mean that you have to see your name in lights or anything. I gave the example of Susanna Wesley. What greater contribution could somebody make than Susanna Wesley made by being a godly mother? Look at what Charles and John Wesley gave us – and continues to give us.

MM: You said your heart was in the right place, but your head was not. *What* about our head knowledge is going to make a difference, the kind of difference that you describe?

SM: Here's the big thing I see in the modern church: We think God has called us to himself because he needs us to do something for him. I've got good news and bad news. I'll start with the bad news: God doesn't need us. If we think God needs us, then we greatly underestimate him or we overestimate ourselves. You can take a blank sheet of paper and write down a list of everything you think you have to offer God on that paper, and stand up to the edge of eternity and hold that list up to the God who stood on the edge of nothingness and said "let there be" and there *was*, and tell him what it is you think you've got that he needs. No, he doesn't need us.

But the good news is, he *wants* us. He's not looking for a maid, he's looking for a bride. This is biblical, Acts 17. The Bible says, "Neither is he served by human hands as though he needed anything." I like the passage in the Old Testament where God told Isaiah, "If I were hungry, I wouldn't tell you." You know why? Because there's nothing we could do about it. God doesn't need us.

But the religious culture of the world today, even in the Christian world, somehow communicates, "God has shown you his grace by bringing salvation to you, and now you understand that he's forgiven your sin, you're one with him now, so now it's up to *you*... You've signed up for something and now it's up to you to accomplish something, to achieve something, to do something for him." It's a misguided, albeit sincere, intention, because it suggests the very contrary of what I've just shared from the Bible. God doesn't need us. We have been called to live in this union, this *perichoresis*, this inner penetration of inner love and harmony. We've been called to live in that group hug and then to live out of that group hug expressing the life of the Father, Son, and Spirit in our day-to-day activities.

That's a far cry from religion. Religion demands that we *do* things, but when we live out of the circle of the Father, Son, and Spirit, we find it's not demand, it's desire. It's not law, it's love. It's not responsibility, it's relationship, it's privilege that motivates us to want to express the divine life of the Father, Son, and Spirit to the world around us. That's a country mile, as we say down south, away from religious obligation.

MM: A lot of people have a picture of God that's austere, and not very inviting. But you're describing a more attractive God. Is that part of the head knowledge that makes a difference in our relationship?

SM: How we see God, our theology, is everything. That's the foundation. Sometimes people say to me, "What difference does theology make?" The answer is: it makes all the difference in the world, because our view of who God is, our understanding, our concept of who he is, will affect the way we see and do everything else in life. It will affect how we see ourselves, how we see others, how we see situations that we face.

If we grew up in the evangelical world, it was almost inevitable that we would come to the conclusion that we serve a God whose primary interest is in matters of right and wrong, that his primary focus is that once he's forgiven us of our sins, now he's going to teach us how to do the right thing.

MM: Sure. In the Bible we see all sorts of commands – do this, do that.

SM: Right. But we don't see those commands through an unfiltered lens. We read the Bible like we look at God, and that is through the skewed, tainted, blurred lens of our own making. All the way back in the garden, when Adam and Eve sinned and they...immediately they had this skewed sense of who God is. They began to see him through the distorted lens of their own guilt and shame. Ever since then, we've done that. Just because a person trusts Christ and says, "Thank you, Lord, for forgiving my sin, I'm a believer," don't think that that lens instantly goes away. It doesn't. There's this renewal of the mind that has to take place.

I've had two monumental paradigm shifts, radical changes in my life since the time I trusted Christ as a child. One was what I wrote about in this book, *Grace Walk*, when I began to understand my identity in Christ...that I don't have to try to live for him, but that I died *with* him and now he is my life. The other was when I began to understand the Trinitarian viewpoint. That is this idea of who the Father, Son, and Spirit are, and that our God is not a punitive, judgmental, harsh, demanding, exacting God who's looking down on us saying, "When are you going to ever learn to quit doing the wrong and start doing right?"

For God to do that would be a violation of what he had told Adam and Eve in the Garden when he said, “Don’t eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” But they did, and suddenly everything became about morality, and it became about issues of right and wrong. We lifted up that filtered clouded lens and we looked at the face of our God through that.

But sin didn’t change God – it only changed Adam and Eve. Our God never was, never has been, never will be, a God who’s preoccupied with issues of right and wrong. Our God is preoccupied with *us*. It’s about relationship, not rules.

If we read the Bible through a particular lens, we’re going to see a lot of demanding things in Scripture. Let me give an example, if I could, and excuse this kind of familiar example, a personal example. When I go home from California, back to my wife, if she says, “Get over here and kiss me now,” if she *commands* me to come kiss her, okay, her commandments are not burdensome, to quote Scripture (laughing).

You see what I’m saying? The commands of the Bible, when we understand the New Testament... First, we’re free from the Old Testament law. Paul said in Romans 7, “We are made to die to the law so that we might be joined to another, to him who was raised from the dead.” We’re out from under the law — we don’t live in that world anymore.

The commands in the New Testament, that’s like my wife saying, “Get over here and kiss me.” John said, “His commandments are not burdensome” (King James, “His commandments are not grievous.”). We *want* to do those things. God gives us a new motivation, and the motivation is desire. It’s not duty, it’s desire. For anyone who thinks the New Testament is filled with commands that they have to struggle to keep, I think it comes back to their concept of who their Father is. Because once we know that we’re totally accepted, that changes everything.

Life is not a test. Life is a *rest*. Jesus said, “Come to me and I’ll give you rest.” He didn’t say I’ll give you a test. There is no test. It’s a rest.

MM: There’s not a final exam.

SM: Right. We’ve passed, we’ve scored a perfect score with flying colors because the grade that we have is the grade of Jesus, because he is our life, we’re one with him. Paul said, “He who joins himself together to the Lord is one spirit with him.” It’s simple. No wonder Jesus said, you have to become like a little child. With our religious minds and our adult minds, and our Western-world minds, we tend to miss it. It’s so simple. If I could say it as simply as the Bible says it: Just believe it!

It’s called the gospel because it’s good news—if we could just believe

it. God in Christ Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, has made everything right. We're restored, we're reconciled, it's all good now. So all we can do, all we need to do, is just live out of the overflow, the celebration, of that *perichoresis*, the *koinonia*, that fellowship that we have with the Father, Son, and Spirit because of the cross. Sounds too good to be true, and when it does, it's probably the gospel – it's grace.

MM: Many people think that that's not very workable. They don't...

SM: It's *not* (laughing). It's not workable – you can only *trust* it. That's a good point. That was a little slip there, I like it. It's not *workable*. It's not of works, it's of faith. Sorry to interrupt, but I couldn't resist that. But you make a good point. A lot of us think that that we're forgiven our sin and now we're in Christ, but now we've got this *manual* here [the Bible] ...

MM: Yeah...isn't right and wrong found in there?

SM: It is, and we're told to avoid it. Here's the key: "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." You can do the right thing and it still be a sin. It's not about right and wrong – it's about trusting Christ in us to live his life through us. This is where the modern church misses it, in my mind. We're capable of more than doing right. You don't have to believe in Christ to do the right thing. Many people who renounce the gospel don't commit adultery and don't steal or kill, or we could go down the list. But we're capable of more than right – we're capable of more than morality. Morality is that system of right and wrong based on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the one God said stay away from. We're capable of more than moral living, we're capable of *miraculous* living. By that I mean that the deity, Father, Son, and Spirit, flows through us, out into this world like a river of living water from our innermost being.

MM: You say that we're capable of this, but yet in a way *we're* not doing it — it's Jesus working in us.

SM: That's right. We're capable because he has enabled us.

MM: Our role is to get out of the way?

SM: That's right. We are capable because he's made us capable. We are responsible, response-able. We're now able to respond to him and say, "OK, I get it, I don't have to struggle."

I wrote in *Grace Walk* an experience I've witnessed many times. When I was a pastor I'd visit hospitals. A guy might have had heart surgery, and he's on a breathing machine. Have you ever been in the room with somebody when they wake up on a breathing machine? They have to learn with that thing, because if they're not careful, it happens a lot of times when a person wakes up in a recovery room after surgery and they're on a

breathing machine, they try to breathe. And when they try to breathe, they're fighting against the machine, and alarms go off, and it's very uncomfortable for them. I've seen it again and again. My own dad had heart surgery, and I saw him on one. The nurse will come in and say, "Calm down, don't struggle...." Listen to this, "You don't have to try to breathe, just relax. The machine will breathe for you." Sure enough, I've watched it again and again. The people would just kind of let go and relax and quit struggling, and the machine takes over and begins to breathe for them.

Isn't it interesting that the word for Spirit is *breath*? When we rely on the Holy Spirit, we don't struggle to breathe. We just depend on the Spirit of Christ in us, the Spirit of Jesus that indwells us, and as we learn to just rest and realize, "I don't have to make it happen – I just trust him." As we learn that, then he does it through us. It's a rest.

It's one of those paradoxical statements. In Hebrews the Bible says... It's almost comical to me, "*Strive* to enter into that *rest*" (laughing). The reason we have to strive to enter into that rest is because it's not the default setting of the flesh to rest, so we have to be very intentional about that.

We have to say, "No, no, no, I'm not going to take my life or my circumstances, my will, I'm not going to try to take this back into my own hands – I've already proven I'm not capable. So I'm going to, by intentionality, which is the striving part, I'm going to choose, I'm going to decide, I'm going to go against the current of modern religion, I'm going to go against the current of my own fleshly inclinations, and I'm going to just trust and rest and let him be who he is in and through me." That's grace. It's the unilateral expression of his life and love in us and through us. He does it all. We're containers and we're conduits of his life, but we don't work it up.

MM: And that's the grace walk.

SM: Yes Him doing it in us and through us. It's not a passive lifestyle. It's a lifestyle where we actively rest in him, and he does it all.

WE WILL NEVER OVERESTIMATE GOD'S GRACE

MM: In an earlier interview, you talked about how you had a couple of theological transitions in your life and you gave a synopsis of the first one. Could you give an even briefer synopsis now, and then describe the second one?

SM: Sure. I understood the gospel as a young boy. I grew up in a Christian family and I believed in the Lord at a very early age, became a senior pastor at 19 years old, and for 17 years as a senior pastor I was sincere, but I was caught up in the typical, I'll call it traditional, religious legalism, and that is the mindset that says that God blesses me or approves of me because I'm doing all the right things that I need to be doing, reading my Bible, praying, involved in church, sharing the gospel, those kinds of things.

In 1990, the Lord brought me to a place of brokenness. I came to the end of myself and my struggle of trying to be the perfect Christian and trying to be a good pastor. He began to show me that it wasn't about me and what I could do for him, that he didn't call me for that, he didn't make me for that, but instead it was about him and what he wanted to do through me. I wrote about that in my first book, *Grace Walk*, in the early 90s. It came out in '95, and I wrote about that time in life.

That was the first monumental shift for me in my thinking. I realized that I was in union with Christ and that it wasn't Steve with a split personality, an evil twin living inside, a new nature and an old nature

combating, but I began to understand co-crucifixion — that the old Steve was crucified with Jesus and now Christ is my life. I began to understand what it means to walk in grace instead of religious legalism, instead of building my life around rules, to just relax and let him live his life through me. That was in 1990.

For another 15 years, I taught that message. It's what many have called the "exchanged life" message — "exchanged life" is a phrase that some missionary coined to describe this idea of biblical truth, that our old life died with Christ and that in its place he's given us a new life. I call it the grace walk, Hudson Taylor called it exchanged life, some have called it the higher life, the deeper life, I think Andrew Murray called it the abiding life, Watchmen Nee called it the normal Christian life. Whatever you want to call it, it means Jesus living his life through us, and understanding that our identity is in him.

The second, I'll call it a cataclysmic event, a revelation, if I can use that word, that came to me and I began to grow in, was about six years ago. I've been a Calvinist for about 27 years. I believed, and still believe, in the sovereignty of God. I found that attractive about Calvinism, and so I'm not trying to be disrespectful to those who hold a Reformed theological view or are Calvinist. But in my own teaching I had said for many years, "No matter how big you imagine God's love to be, it's bigger."

Then I began to think about it and I thought, wait a minute. Some of what I'm teaching about how big God's love is, is inconsistent with the tenets of what I have professed to believe, the five points of Calvinism (represented by the acrostic TULIP, total depravity, unconditional election, and it was that third one that I began to grapple with — limited atonement, and then there was irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints).

I began to think about that "limited atonement." Did God choose everybody, or not? I've said everywhere, God's love is bigger than you can imagine it to be. If God is love the way that I'm teaching, how could this God that I'm teaching and that the Bible says is love by essence, how could he choose the majority of his creation, his people, born to be reprobates, to never have the opportunity to know him? How can I say that's love? How can I say that a minority of us will go to heaven and celebrate forever how loving he is, when he chose not to elect the majority of people?

My theology, my concept of God, began to mess with my biblical

understanding. Some people might get rattled with me for this, but it wasn't that I looked at the Bible and said, wait a minute, my Calvinistic understanding won't line up with Scripture. That wasn't what precipitated the change in me. What precipitated the change was, I began to say, the Christ who lives in me, who is the exact representation of his Father, I know him. He's not somebody who would decide to never choose the majority of those that would ever be born and never include them in the finished work of the cross. My understanding of the Father through the Son who lives in me and the Spirit who illuminates truth caused me to say, I've got to go back and look at the Bible again. I began to study the Bible again with fresh eyes, if I can use that phrase — I hope that makes sense.

MM: With new lenses.

SM: A new lens. That's right. It was the lens that said my God is not a punitive judgmental God, but my God is love, pure and simple. That's not one of his characteristics. Love is not "one of his attributes" — love is the DNA of God. I began to go back into the Bible and study it again. You know how the Holy Spirit works. I began to see things in Scripture in a different light, through the different lens, that I had never seen. I began to realize that this God the Father did indeed express who he is through the Son in his earthly ministry. The Holy Spirit does give us revelation of his love. I began to see a shift.

As I began to see a biblical transition in my thinking, the Lord brought along folks that, lo and behold, had written on this very subject of what we know is a Trinitarian perspective. The Lord began to bring people across my path, guys like you here at Grace Communion International, and people like Baxter Kruger, Thomas Torrance, J.B. Torrance, and others, Robert Capon, and some of these others that have written from that perspective. It's like wow! All these years I've been teaching the grace of God as what I call the grace walk, and now I get it. The grace of God is even bigger than I had thought. I don't guess we'll ever overestimate God's grace, will we?

That's a long question for a short answer, but that at least sets us in the direction of where my thinking came from and where it is these days.

MM: So you examined the Bible from the perspective that God is like the Jesus you had been taught about, or the Jesus you had experienced. Was there previously a "disconnect" between what you thought of God and what you saw as Jesus?

SM: The problem with speaking of my experiences...it might sound to

somebody like I'm being critical of the evangelical world, and I'm not, but I will say I don't think my experience is unique. I had the idea that many do, that you have the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the Father, in my thinking at the time (this is not how I see it now), this Father was a *just* God who demanded that there be payment for sin, and he had this seething anger, and to get it out of his system and balance the books and satisfy his justice, somebody had to pay. That somebody was going to be me and you and everybody else. I had this concept of a judicial, punitive, harsh God who found everything in him screaming out that his justice be avenged.

Then I had the good cop (you know what I mean? Bad cop, good cop...) Jesus who says "Father, it's okay. How about if I go down... [and I'm using hyperbole, okay? I'm not being fair to the evangelical perspective I grew up with, sometimes I exaggerate things to make a point, so let me concede that at the start, but there's some truth in this]... It's like my mind said it was Jesus who said, "Father, how about this? I'll go down to the world, I'll live a sinless life, and I'll go to the cross and you can vent all this anger you have against sin toward me, so that you won't have to vent it toward Steve." God says, "Okay." So Jesus comes into this world, lives a sinless life, goes to the cross, and God kicks the daylights out of his own Son at the cross. He pours out his anger, he pours out his rage about sin onto Jesus and he gets it out of his system. And now I believe on Jesus, and so God won't pour out his rage on me, because he's poured it out on Jesus.

But even then, I had this idea that God still is this judicial God who's obsessed with right and wrong, so that even as a Christian, when I would sin, God still would have come at me, but Jesus was going, "Father, Father, the scars, the scars." God would say, "Oh yeah, you're right, the scars." I thought God saw me through his Son Jesus, and that's what protected me.

The fallacy in that, is that what we had was a schizophrenic God. And the Spirit, well, we don't even go there, because I didn't belong to a charismatic or Pentecostal denomination, so I knew the Spirit existed, but we didn't talk a lot about him. I knew the Spirit existed, but in my mind I had this harsh, judicial, judgmental God who had to have justice through punishment, and I had this loving Jesus.

But the fallacy in that view is that Jesus said, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father." There's the disconnect. How can I see loving Jesus and him say I've seen the Father, if the Father was angry and had some sort of justice (and that's a distorted sense of God's justice) that

necessitated that he vent anger against somebody about sin. No. Our triune God, three in one, all share the same heart, and all share the same love and the same passion. They, he, has lived in this *perichoresis*, in this circle-dance of love that has existed through eternity past, it will exist through eternity future.

One day God said (if I can take a little literary liberty, a little imagery here), “This love we share, Father, Son, and Spirit, it can’t be improved on. It’s perfect. It couldn’t be improved on, it’s already perfect. But you know what we could do that would intensify it? We could share it. We could widen the circle.” So the Father, Son, and Spirit said in Genesis, “Let us make man in our own image.” You know the story. It starts there in the garden, where God created mankind. The reason we’re here is so that we can be loved by the Father through the Son and the communion of the Holy Spirit. That’s what it’s all about. It wasn’t a good cop/bad cop. Even the fall of Adam didn’t change God. Adam hid because he thought God had now gone over the edge and was angry. No. God came for his walk in the evening just like he’d always done.

MM: Even though he *knew* what Adam had done.

SM: Exactly. Adam’s sin didn’t change God — it changed Adam’s perception of God, and it’s affected us and contaminated our view of God ever since, unless we see the truth in Scripture that we’re talking about today. So God came...and from the get-go he told him, “You don’t have to sweat it. His seed will bruise the heel of your offspring, but your offspring (speaking of Jesus) will bruise his head [Gen. 3:15]. One day the devil will be destroyed, and in the meantime I’m going to cover you with these animal skins, these bloody skins, to show that the remedy is on the way, don’t panic. I’m going to banish you from the Garden and keep you out, so you won’t eat from the tree of life and be doomed to this life of sin and distortion, forever living under the delusion and the lies.”

From the beginning it’s grace, grace, grace, grace, and when Jesus came to the cross, contrary to my old view (which as you understand, and some of the viewers will, is called the penal substitution view — the idea that Jesus took our punishment so that we wouldn’t have to take it)...

The apostle Paul said it this way in 2 Corinthians: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting those trespasses against them.” God the Father was in the Son. In Hebrews it said he offered himself by the eternal Spirit. We’ve got the whole Trinity. We’ve got our Triune God (Father, Son, and Spirit) on a rescue mission, not God the

Father punishing Jesus, but the Father and the Son and the Spirit in sync working together to rescue us from this destroying thing called sin that would, to use C.S. Lewis's kind of imagery, make us wither away into nothingness if he didn't come along. I get excited about this.

MM: So there was no change in God's attitude toward us because of the death of Jesus?

SM: Here's a verse some people know: "God says, I am God and I change not." God has never changed. God's always loved us. God's heart was toward us before the death of Jesus. That's why Jesus came. It's not that God the Father was against us and Jesus came to change God's mind about us — Jesus came to change *our* mind about God the Father, not to change the Father's mind about us. The Father, the Son, the Spirit had always loved us, and Jesus came to help us see that.

Who were his biggest critics when he tried to show and express that love? It wasn't the drunken cursing sailors. It wasn't the woman taken in adultery, it wasn't the harlot who washed his feet with her hair using the perfume from the alabaster box. No. The people who got all bent out of shape about Jesus saying let me show you the kind of loving Father you've got, the people that got bent out of shape by it were the religious people.

When I teach this message today and you teach it and everybody you have on this program teaches it, we find out the same thing still happens. It's not those "out there," so to speak. I hate to use that term in a dichotomy like that, but it's not those who don't believe, it's those who profess to believe who get mad as the devil about the love of God. They're the older brother in the story of the prodigal. I know — I'm a charter member of that club. I've lived there.

MM: But you, as the older brother, finally went in to the party.

SM: Which gives me hope. That's why I share this message of perichoresis now. Thank God, it speaks well of my Father that he stood out there in the darkness of my own religion, he stood out there in the darkness when I was saying, "God's not like that. It can't be that good. You can't tell me everybody gets off scot-free. You can't tell me everybody's included. You can't tell me that God loves us all. No, no." My Father didn't give up, but he kept pleading and appealing and showing and wooing (that's an old biblical word), and enticing me to see his love, until finally like that prodigal melted in his father's embrace and accepted it. The interesting thing about the older brother in the story in Luke 15 is we don't know if he went in or not, but one thing we do know, the father

didn't go in without him. He didn't go in, but neither did the Father. Our God doesn't give up on us.

This idea of perichoresis, this dancing with deity concept, this idea that we live in the communion of the Father, Son, and Spirit and we live out of that as our reality, that's enough to excite anybody. It's not just us, but the essence of this program that you guys have here, *You're Included*, points toward the good news of the gospel that God was in Christ reconciling the *world* to himself. Everybody was wrapped up in that big bear hug, that big group hug at the cross — not just the religious people. (That would be a sour party, wouldn't it?) Not just the people who believe, but we're all wrapped up in it.

Somebody's going to watch this and say, "Don't you think we have to believe?" Sure. Who wants to stand outside in the darkness of unbelief if you're missing the party? But let the record show: both sons had the same privileges. It's just one accepted his acceptance, and the other didn't.

MM: What are the consequences if we don't believe?

SM: You're going to stand out there in the cold and the dark and miss out on the party, but don't blame your father, because as the father in Luke 15 said, the accepting father in that story that we call the parable of the prodigal, he said to his older son, "Everything that I have is yours." The problem with unbelievers is that — unbelief. It's not like there's something left for God to do for them. God's done what he's going to do for all of us. He's done what he's going to do for humanity.

The problem that exists, and I'm speaking as a pastor, I've been preaching since I was 16 — for 40 years I've been preaching. I was pastor at traditional institutional churches for 21 years, and the problem in the modern church world (I don't intend to be mean, it's just a fact) is we don't preach the pure gospel. By and large, we preach a *potential* gospel, not the pure gospel. We say, here's what Jesus did for you, now *if* you will believe, then he'll forgive your sin. No. It's not *if* you believe, then you'll be reconciled to God. No. *If* you believe then he'll do this or that. No, no, no.

That's not the gospel. That's a *potential* gospel. The gospel is good news that he's already done it whether you believe it or not. If you don't believe it and want to stand out in the darkness, you're going to miss out on the party, but the *truth* is that the objective reality of what he did at the cross is real, whether you believe it or not, but by believing it we experience it. Experiencing it is where the abundance comes in that Jesus talked about in John 10:10 when he said, "I've come so that you might

have life and have it more abundantly.”

MM: You said earlier that Jesus didn’t die as a punishment. God didn’t punish Jesus on the cross. Then why did he die? What’s the connection between his death and our salvation?

SM: Because this thing called sin had infected all of humanity through Adam, and it’s a congenital disease that everybody’s born with, and it’s fatal — the wages of sin is death, and such sin was being passed down from person to person through the generations from Adam. Left to ourselves, we would be destroyed by sin, so God said “Sin shall not have the last word. Sin will not be the trump card. I didn’t create mankind to wither away into nothingness. I didn’t create humanity to die out.”

To use a literary imagery, it’s like the Father, Son, and Spirit said, “We’re going down there and we’re not coming back until this thing is done.” They came — Jesus the Son came empowered by the Spirit, superintended, if you will, by the sovereignty of the Father. He came into this world to finish a job. What did he come to finish? Daniel 9:24, prophesying about the Messiah, says, “He’ll make an end of sin.” He’ll make an end...he’ll finish the transgression. Centuries later, Jesus shows up on planet earth. The angel said, “Call him Jesus, because he’s going save his people from their sin.”

Come down the road another three decades or so and here’s John the Baptist saying, “Look, it’s the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” And before his crucifixion you’ve got Jesus holding up that cup saying, “This is the blood of the new covenant which is shed for the remission of sin.” We’re getting closer. He came on mission to finish a task. All the way from Daniel, he’ll finish the transgression (Daniel 9:24), make an end to sin. Here’s Jesus on the cross.

What does he do? He takes all the sin of the world and he draws it into himself. It’s not God the Father punishing Jesus. It’s *sin* punishing Jesus. Sin brings punishment. It’s not God who brings the punishment, it’s sin. The wages, the punishment, the penalty of sin is death. Jesus draws that into himself. It’s not God. I’ll give you an example. A poor diet and poor exercise habits will lead to the punishment of bad health. It’s not God that’s punishing you with bad health – it’s your own choices. Those habits are pregnant with punishment, with penalty. And so it is with sin. It wasn’t God punishing Jesus, it was sin punishing Jesus. He drew it all into himself. When he had drawn the sin of the world into himself, now that which had been started in the eternal circle of heaven before the beginning

of time comes to a climactic finish at the cross when Jesus said, “It’s finished.” He dealt with it, and that’s the gospel we proclaim.

Later on, John in his epistle would say, “He appeared to take away the sins of the world.” The writer of Hebrews would say, “He put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” The question I would ask the evangelical church (and myself included) is, Did he succeed, or not? Did he fail, or did he do what he came to do? We know he did what he came to do, and he did succeed, and it is finished, and it’s all over now except the celebrating. Those of us who believe it are celebrating.

MM: But yet we look at the world around us, we even look in ourselves and say, “the sin isn’t completely gone.”

SM: That’s right. We live in this little box called time/space, and the old Adamic race died with Jesus, and he did defeat sin. He conquered it, as the phrase goes, once and for all. We know the truth...people say the truth will set you free. The truth is, Jesus dealt with sin. No, no, no...the Bible doesn’t say the *truth* will set you free. The Bible says, “You shall *know* the truth and the truth will set you free.” It’s not just the truth that sets you free – it’s *knowing* the truth that sets you free. The truth is, he has dealt with sin. He’s conquered it. It has no power over us. But if you either don’t know or you don’t believe the truth, then a person will still live under the lie that befell Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. If they appropriate the lie, then guess what they’re going to live like? They’re going to live as if the lie is true. It’s not. They’re going to live in a counterfeit reality (which seems like an oxymoron, but you get my point), out of a delusion, they’re going to live as if Christ didn’t really do what he did, but he did.

Back to the 2 Corinthians 5 passage, verse 17, “If anyone is in Christ, he’s a new creation.” Most Christians know that one. But let’s come down to verse 19, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.” There’s the objective reality. That’s real whether anybody believes it or not. Then it says, “And he’s committed to us the message of reconciliation, therefore we’re ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” There’s the subjective reality. In other words, it is real whether you believe it or not, but we’re begging you, we’re appealing to you, believe it, so that it will be real to you.

MM: The verse said that he wasn’t counting people’s trespasses against them. Does that mean that I don’t need to ask for his forgiveness?

SM: Bingo. It insults the finished work of Christ when you ask for forgiveness. I'm glad you asked that because this is one of those things that are so misunderstood in the church world. How about Colossians 2? Let me turn there a minute. (You better be careful, you're going to put me in a preaching mode here in just a minute, because I do get excited about this.) How about this one? Colossians 2:13-14:

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees which was against us and hostile to us, he's taken that away and nailed it to the cross.

Do we believe this Bible or not? Colossians 2:13 says he's blotted out all our transgressions. Somebody says, "You mean my future sins?" Here's a question, how many of our sins were future when Jesus died? They were *all* future sins. Yes, he dealt with all of our sins at the cross. They were all future sins, and he's dealt with them all.

Let me quickly add, to *confess* my sin doesn't mean that I'm asking for forgiveness. Somebody's going to mention 1 John 1:9, that's what always pops out. That's not to say I won't confess, I won't admit. "Confess" means to agree, to say the same. I'm going to acknowledge it when I've sinned, but I don't do it to *get* forgiveness, I do it because I've *already gotten* forgiveness. There's a big difference between the two.

1 John 1:9, if I can give an amplified explanation or paraphrase, might read like this: Since it's the nature of the believer to constantly admit it when we've sinned, so is it the nature of God to constantly relate to us from a posture of forgiveness, keeping us cleansed of all unrighteousness. My part is that I admit it. What else am I going to do, lie? He knows. His part is to keep me in that state of constant forgiveness because of the work of the cross. What else is he going to do? It's finished.

MM: Often we try to repent and prove our repentance and show how sorry we are.

SM: That's idolatry. Do you know why it's idolatry? Because if I think I have to show my sorrow and I have to wallow in self-condemnation and I have to rededicate myself and promise God this or that, then what I'm really saying is, I don't believe the work of the cross was enough to deal with sin, there's a contribution *I* need to add to it, and what I add is going to put it over the top. Idolatry.

Let's relax. We're forgiven. Let's just believe in the finished work of Christ. Somebody says, "If you tell people that, they're going to go out and live like the devil." No, they won't. Authentic grace won't do that. Paul told Titus, "The grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all men, teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and how to live soberly, righteously, and just in this present age" [Titus 2:12]. Grace is divine enablement for us to live a godly lifestyle. It doesn't create a desire to sin – it creates an appetite for righteous living. That's what grace does, real grace. Anything else is disgrace.

THE FATHER GETS A BAD RAP

MM: Earlier, you commented that many people view the sacrifice of Jesus as God punishing Jesus. You objected strongly to that notion. Could you tell us why you think it's important for people to have an accurate understanding of what was going on in the crucifixion of Jesus?

SM: It is important because how we understand what happened at the cross will affect our view of the Father and who he is. Growing up for a long time in my tradition, I didn't have any problem connecting to the idea of being intimate with Jesus because of what Jesus did for me. But when it came to the Father, I had a different understanding, because of what my view was (and I think it's a common view): that Jesus took the punishment from the Father so that the Father wouldn't punish me. If that's our view, we're going to think that Jesus is like the loving one and the Father is the stern harsh one who is exacting, and who insists on the books being balanced. It's almost like an angry father, and a mother who's trying to keep the dad from getting onto the children. That's how I saw it, like Jesus was the loving one and the Father was the angry one.

When we look at the cross through the lens of penal substitution — that Jesus was the substitute who took our punishment from God the Father so the Father wouldn't punish us, how will we ever experience a sense of intimacy with the Father? That's out of line with what Jesus came for. Paul the apostle told us about Jesus, that he is the exact representation of the Father. So, just as Jesus the Son is loving, so is God the Father and God the Spirit are equally as loving. I'm not saying that there wasn't a

substitution there. Jesus did die on the cross in our place. He was our substitute. But he drew the penalty of sin into himself. The wages of sin is death.

Let me back up to the Garden of Eden. God didn't say to Adam and Eve, "If you eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, I'll kill you." He said, "If you eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you'll die." He didn't say "I'll kill you" – he said "you'll die." In the same way, coming to the New Testament, it wasn't God that punished Jesus, it was sin that punished Jesus. Another word for punishment is the word penalty. It's the same Greek word. It's punishment, it's penalty. The penalty for sin was death.

But what did Jesus do at the cross? God the Father was in the Son empowered by the Spirit, and our Triune God drew the penalty, the payment, the wages, the punishment that sin brings, into himself and away from us so that we wouldn't have to be punished by sin but that we would be delivered from sin's punishment. He took it into himself and died for us so that we could be free.

Why is it important to see it that way? It's important because if we think God the Father is angry, then Jesus didn't do a very good job of letting us know what he was like, because when Jesus came here he said, "If you've seen me you've seen the Father." Study the Gospels — you don't find Jesus portraying for us a God who's angry with us about our sin. To the contrary! Every time you see Jesus encountering people in sin, he extends grace, and mercy, and love, and forgiveness, because that's the Father.

Even in the story of the prodigal, the story that Jesus told... It's really not the story of the prodigal – it's a story of the father. That story wasn't told to show us something about sinning people, or for that matter, even self-righteous people (the older brother). That story was told to teach us something about our Father. What Jesus told us in that story is this: He told us through the illustration of the younger brother, the prodigal who came back with his decision to rededicate himself and promised his father that if he'd forgive him, he'd do better, he'd serve him more, he'd be a better...but the father didn't even let him give his speech. I spent my life rededicating myself to God the Father, promising him I'd do better, I'd try harder... In that story of the prodigal, the boy tries to give the speech, but the father interrupts him and doesn't let him give it.

Then you've got the older brother, who's self-righteous. You've got

the unrighteous on the one hand and the self-righteous on the other hand who says, “Look, all these many years I’ve served you and I’ve never violated and transgressed your commandments.” The father says, “Son, what do you mean, I won’t give you a party? All I have is yours.” Both of those boys missed the point, because the younger boy, the prodigal, thought that he would be rejected because of his misbehavior. The other thought he should be accepted and honored because of his good behavior. The father was trying to say to them both, “You don’t get it. It’s not about you and your behavior, it’s about me and how much I love you, independent of anything you do or don’t do. It’s about me.”

So it is with our heavenly Father. He wants to see (and that’s what Jesus came to reveal) that he loves us unconditionally, unilaterally, if need be. Those of us who are believers love him, but why do we love him? We love because he first loved us. That is a reciprocal response to his love for us. It’s all about our concept of God the Father. He’s got a bad rap because of the religious world. In spite of all Jesus did to give us clarity on it, the religious world has clouded it.

MM: For a long time my concept of God the Father was like Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial, sitting in this huge throne, stone, impassive, stern, and it wasn’t the sort of God that I wanted to spend eternity with.

SM: Exactly. Back to the story of the father in Luke 15. You don’t see some austere dignified father there. You see a father who sees his son in the distance and he’s wearing these long flowing dignified garments (that they wear still in that part of the world), and he pulls those garments up high so he can run, because he can’t run with them down at his feet. He pulls them up high above his knees so he can run, and he takes off running.

Nobody in that part of the world sees their dad’s naked legs. That’s a shame, it’s a disgrace. That father didn’t care. He pulled the robes up and he ran, acting in an undignified way, but he was acting out of passionate love, even willing for those who were witnessing that scene to cause them to look away from the boy covered in the filth of the pigpen and look to the father and say, “What is he doing? He’s running naked down the street,” because he had pulled his robes up above his legs and they’d never seen that.

The kind of love that father had for the boy — he was willing to take the shame off of the boy and bring it onto himself if need be, because he wasn’t interested in protecting his reputation — he was interested in embracing and receiving his son back. That, Jesus wanted us to see, is the

kind of Father you have. He's passionate, he'll run down the street with his robe pulled up above his knees. He'll take the shame on himself to rescue you from your shame — a different picture than the God sitting in the judge's chair that we imagined, huh? Totally different picture.

The beauty of it is, about this younger and older son in Luke 15 — and I didn't plan to say so much about this chapter, but another point comes to mind. The older boy, there's your religious church-going boy. There's your believer. The father says, "I love you, but I love this one the same." The privileges were extended to both equally. Both were missing out on experiencing the abundant life their father provided for them, one because of his unrighteousness, the other because of his self-righteousness. The story illustrates that sometimes it's easier for an unrighteous person to enter in and experience grace than it is a self-righteous person. Notice that self-righteous brother in Luke 15 — when the unbelieving son began to believe and accepted his father's acceptance and came into the party, the older boy got all bent out of shape about it. He didn't like that at all.

MM: The younger son had reached the bottom. He knew where his works had ended up.

SM: That's right. The religious son didn't want the younger one to be included, but he was. The church world today doesn't want everybody to be included, we just want *us* to be included. After all, *we* go to church. We read our Bible every day.

MM: We're the ones that have been "cleaned up."

SM: That's right. To quote that older brother, "Look, I've served you all these many years, I've never violated or transgressed your commandments in any way. What gives with you bringing this guy and telling me that he's as accepted as I am? I've behaved a lot better than he..."

The father is saying, "Are you beginning to get it? It's not about your behavior. I don't love because of how good you are. I love because of how good I am." We're all included. You can live in a pigpen, in the penitentiary of the pigpen, or like that older boy you can live in the penitentiary of your performance, but both live outside the pleasure of the grace of God.

We talked earlier about this shift in my own mind. It's what you guys here at Grace Communion are all about, and it's what this program is all about...one thing that's shifted in my own mind is the understanding that we are all included, that what Jesus did, he didn't do just for "good" boys,

so to speak. (I say that tongue in cheek, because that's how a lot of folks would see church-going leaders.) He did that for everybody.

We all stand on equal ground at the foot of the cross, and we all need his grace the same, and thank God it's been poured out on all of us the same. Those of us who believe it enjoy it — we're in the party dancing and eating barbeque. Those who don't are standing out in the dark, in the hell of their own choice. But don't act like they're out there in a hell because there's something left for God to do — he's done everything. They're out there because of their own pride and stubbornness.

MM: So you would say an atheist, even some of these militant atheists, their sins are already forgiven?

SM: Absolutely. That's the gospel. Let me tell you a story. I've told this story for 20 years, but I've used a different application. I want to tell it for the sake of those who are familiar with my ministry and for those who aren't. Those who have heard my ministry are going to go "woah...now he's telling that story differently now. He's making a different application."

This story started, I think, with Bill Bright — the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, the largest mission-sending agency in the world. Bill Bright used to tell about a guy named Mr. Yates out in Texas that had a farm. Mr. Yates was trying to eke out a living and the Depression struck and he fell behind on his farm payments. One day a representative from the mortgage company came to him and said, "You're behind on your payments. You've got to make your payment on the farm or we'll foreclose and evict you." Yates said, "I can't make my payment." The guy said, "You're going to have to pay, or you're going to be evicted." Yates said, "Well, I don't know what to do." The guy said, "In 30 days we're going to file a dispossessory notice and get you off the property."

The day started winding down and Yates didn't know what he was going to do. One day he heard a knock at the door and when he opened the door, it was a man from an oil company. The guy said, "We're doing some wildcat drilling out here and we wanted to see if you'd let us drill on your property. We have reason to think there may be oil here." Yates said, "Go ahead." He's thinking in his mind, "I've lost it all anyway, I don't have a penny." They come onto his property the next day and they sink a drill into the ground and bang, they hit a gusher, 80,000 barrels, 85,000 barrels of oil a day come gushing up out of that well. Bang! Instantly Mr. Yates has millions of dollars in cash accessible to him.

Here's the question: At what point did Mr. Yates become a millionaire? The answer is, he became a millionaire on the day he bought the farm. Why was he living like a pauper? Because he didn't know what he had.

The way I used to make that application is, I would say, "You have had riches in Jesus since the day you've been saved, since the day you trusted Christ, since the day you prayed and believed on him, but it's by believing it now that you experience it." But here's where that falls short, and here's where I've changed my story. I don't say anymore that we became millionaires on the day we trusted Christ. That was the day we struck oil. Rather, we became millionaires *on the day Jesus died*.

For whom did Jesus die? The Bible teaches he died for everybody. We're all included. So if everybody's included, then the benefits of the finished work of Christ at the cross belong to everybody. Then why is everybody not living out of that spiritual wealth? It's one of two reasons — either they don't know it, or they don't believe it, but it doesn't change the reality. The day they struck oil on Yate's property and he began to make withdraws, cash the checks so to speak, he began to live like a millionaire. But objectively, he'd been a millionaire all along. It only became a subjective experience when he cashed the check.

There you go — the objective work of Jesus for everybody. If he died for everybody, then what he did for everybody is true of everybody. Does it matter whether we believe or not believe? Of course! It makes all the difference in the world because it's by believing that we cash the check and live out of the wealth that's ours in him. But it doesn't change the reality of what he did, even if we don't believe. We're living like paupers if we don't believe, but we're not paupers, we just don't know.

MM: It could have been a story about the acres of diamonds. People had diamonds in their field and didn't know it. It was theirs, they just didn't know the value.

SM: That's right. I remember that book from years ago. What Jesus did he didn't do for just a few of us — he did it for everybody. So I don't say to an unbeliever, "If you will just pray and ask Jesus into your heart, he'll forgive your sin." That implies there's something left undone. That implies that what Jesus should have said at the cross was, "Okay, your move. I've done my part, now it's your move. What are you going to do? The game comes to a standstill until you make your move." No, no, no. Jesus said, "Game over. It's finished. You're in. Game over. Fold the board up, put it up. Now it's finished." If you don't want to believe it (and

I don't mean *you*), okay, live like a pauper then.

MM: We're telling a story of something that's already been done.

SM: That's the gospel. That's why it's good news. As I said in a previous program, it's not a potential gospel like God's done something and now he's waiting for you do something — he's done it and it's finished. There's nothing left. Now you can live in that reality or you can live under the lie, again back to the garden. You can live under the lie that befell Adam and Eve and hold on to all this distorted skewed thinking about your Father and who he is and what he's going to be like. You can get all this messed-up thinking in your head and live outside the pleasure of it, you can go into hell clinging to your lies if you want to, but there's nothing left for the Father to do — he's done it all.

MM: A hell of your own making.

SM: A hell of your own making and a hell of your own choosing. People said God's sending people to hell. You're already in hell if you're not believing this good news. Hell is not the absence of God...let's throw that snake on the table. Hell is not the absence of God, ask anybody in the Eastern Church. We in the Western world have the idea that hell means God's checked out and going home. No. Do we understand and believe where the Bible tells us that all things that exist consist by him? Everything that holds together holds together because he's there holding it together. So if hell was the absence of God, then hell would implode or explode, and would cease to exist. Hell itself is not the absence of God. This is another discussion and it may open a can of worms, but I believe hell is the inescapable presence of the love of God. Those who loathe and detest his love find it to be hellacious, but those of us who receive it find it to be heavenly. What did James say? He said if you love your enemy it seems to them like you're doing what? You're heaping coals of fire on their head.

MM: So it's the same reality, but a different perception.

SM: Absolutely. I'm not making this stuff up as I go. I'm not smart enough to do that. I've studied it and read it, and I can tell you outside our Western world, the Greek Church right now, the church in the Eastern part of the world, they get this. We, you and I, and the people watching us in this part of the world, we've been so influenced by Augustinian theology (and not just theologians, but even people like Dante and others) about what hell is and is not, that we've got it all scrambled in our brains.

I think the Eastern Church has a beat on this thing that God is love. So if I can say it this way — any and everything that can be understood about

God must come to love as its resting place, or we haven't gone far enough, because God is love. Everything and anything that we're going to connect to him has to be an expression of that love, or we're not going far enough in our understanding to get to the root of it.

MM: To get back to the crucifixion of Jesus. What was its role? What changed for all humanity? Was it just a forgiveness of sins or was there something deeper than that?

SM: Oh, so much changed. Forgiveness of sins wasn't even the main thing. Forgiveness of sins was the B Team. That was the secondary issue. There had to be forgiveness of sins so that the main event could take place. The main event that took place was *we received life*.

I'll give you an example, two verses. John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shouldn't perish but should have everlasting forgiveness [no, no – life]." John 10:10, "I've come so that you might have forgiveness and have it more abundantly [no, life!]." All the verses are about life. He's come so that we can have life — life, not forgiveness. That's what happened at the cross. I'm going to be succinct and people watching will have to dig this out for themselves ...look at all the other programs on *You're Included*. I learned a lot watching the archived programs right here. There's a lot of good stuff on here.

Here's what happened. What the first Adam did was wrap us all up into himself as the federal head and brought humanity down into this place of sin. We were doomed and damned. We were condemned — not by God, but by sin, as humanity. Jesus comes along — the Father, Son, and Spirit say, "That's not going to stand. We're not going to let Adam get the final say on all this." So here's the Incarnation — Jesus comes, the last Adam, and he did (in a sense like the first Adam did), he was our federal head, and he wrapped us all up in himself, all of us, everybody that had been in Adam.

Paul said that what Jesus did was much more than what Adam did. He uses that phrase more than once – "much more." He wrapped us all up into himself and then Adam's race went to the cross with Jesus, died with Jesus, was buried with Jesus, and then, and this is pivotal, this is the good news, when Jesus came up out of the grave a new species was raised up with him. Those in Christ, if anyone is in Christ he is a new creature, a new species.

Who do you think died with Jesus? As a Calvinist I used to say, only

the elect, only those who were chosen. But listen to this, 2 Corinthians 5:14, this is out of the Bible. Let me hold it up where people can see I'm reading. "The love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died." Who's the one that died for all? Jesus. Therefore, who did he die for? Everybody. He tasted death for every human. Therefore, all died. We all died with Jesus. We were all buried with Jesus.

But when Jesus came up out of the grave, a new species came into existence, something new. The gospel is...here's what the cross did: The cross provided forgiveness of sin. We don't have to tell people he'll forgive your sin. He *has*. Jesus is the elect man, the elect one. He is a man. There's a God-man in heaven today. He's the elect man in whom we all reside. Therefore we were all elect. We were all chosen. We were all made holy.

What does holy mean? The word means "set apart." In the evangelical church we think, if I say so and so over here is holy, people think that means he lives a squeaky clean life. No, no, no. They don't mind calling this book a Holy Bible. That Bible doesn't live any way. They don't mind calling God's temple the Holy Temple — it just means *set apart*. In that sense he's called us all, set us all apart. He made us holy.

Righteous — that's another one. You use the word *righteous*, and one understanding of the word has to do with living a certain lifestyle. But wait — if you look up, in Strong's dictionary for instance, the Greek word *righteous*, one definition is living your life based on a certain religious or moral code. That's not what the New Testament tells us our righteousness is. The other definition of righteousness is being made in a right standing with God. Ding ding ding ding! There's the one! There it is. It might be number 2 on the list, but it's the one we better go to.

We better go to that one because we know it's not about living a moral code. We've all been made right with God. We've been reconciled. So much happened on the cross. We've been joined in the union. There's the big one — we've been joined into union with him again. The question then people ask me sometimes is, "You sound like a universalist. Are you saying everybody drops dead and wakes up in heaven?" No. I'm not saying that.

MM: You've already talked about hell.

SM: That's right, I did. I've already talked about hell. If I can paraphrase him — and I hate to try to paraphrase someone as eloquent as

he is, but Robert Capon the theologian and author said, on the last day nobody goes to hell because of sin, because the sin issue has been dealt with. He said if you get to judgment day and face God and say “I won’t accept your acceptance,” then you can go to hell, he says, but don’t act like it’s because of sin, because sin has been dealt with in totality by the finished work of Jesus. I’m not saying everybody’s instantly in, whether they believe or not. I think that faith in Christ is essential — otherwise, back for the umpteenth time to the older brother, we’ll stand in the outer darkness if we don’t believe, but it’s not because God’s locked us outside or won’t let us in – it’s because of our own stubbornness and pride.

MM: You’ve described how Jesus dying on the cross...God was in Jesus reconciling us. But the scriptures say that Jesus on the cross said, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

SM: I’m glad you asked that, because that’s one of the biggest misunderstandings in the modern church. You said Jesus asked the question. What did God answer in that Gospel, in the Gospels? What was the answer God gave? He didn’t give an answer. So people looking at God through the wrong lens assume God the Father forsook his Son Jesus.

The answer is, he didn’t forsake his Son. That was the cry of Jesus when he became sin for us. If he had heard the answer right then and there, God would have said, “I haven’t forsaken you.”

How do I know? I’ll prove it. Psalm 22 is the Messianic Psalm from which that cry of Jesus came. Psalm 22:1 of the Messianic Psalm, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” You can read that Psalm, and bit by bit you see it’s talking about the cross right down to them casting lots for his garments — everything. It’s describing the cross. If you go to verse 24, you get the answer to the question. It’s not recorded in the Gospels, but it is in Psalms. Psalm 22:1, “Why have you forsaken me?” Verse 24, “He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted nor has he hidden his face for him. But when he cried to him for help, he heard.”

Now here’s the neat thing. All the Jews knew these Psalms. If I say to you, “Plop, plop, fizz, fizz,” you know the rest — what is it?

MM: Oh, is that Alka-Seltzer?

SM: Alka-Seltzer! Okay, what’s the rest of the jingle? “Oh what a...”

MM: “Relief it is.”

SM: All right, let’s try another one: “Winston tastes good like a...”

MM: “Cigarette should.”

SM: All right. It was the same way with the Psalms. When people standing around the cross heard the first line of that Psalm, they knew the rest of it. When Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” every self-respecting Jew there knew the rest of it, and the answer was he has *not* forsaken him or turned his face on him. But here we are 20 centuries later saying, he asked the question why did God forsake him — God must have forsook him. We’ve missed the point. No, he did not forsake him. He was right there in him and with him the whole time.

MM: We see in the resurrection that he didn’t forsake him.

SM: That’s right. The Father never forsook the Son. People say they were fragmented. Are you kidding? Deity being fragmented? The Godhead would have ceased to exist. Father, Son, and Spirit have always been in that perichoresis, in that circle of love. It’s never wavered for one moment, even at the cross, which is encouraging to us, because like Jesus, when we cry out, why have you forsaken me, we can know God says, “I haven’t. I’m with you.” He’ll never forsake us.

WHAT IS GOD'S WRATH?

MM: You talked before about the love of God, and I agree with you on that, but I wanted to ask you about the other side. Scripture talks about the *wrath* of God as well. How does this fit in with a God who is love?

SM: People often raise that question, and I will cut to the chase and give the bottom line and then we'll unpack it. The question suggests that there is a dichotomy between the wrath of God and the love of God, and that would be a mistaken notion, to think that somehow God's wrath stands apart from his love. Let's go back to the fundamental essence of God. John said God is love, not God loves, but God is love. Love, *agape*, is not one of the incidental characteristics of God's personality. Love is the foundational essence of who he is. If you could break down God's DNA, what you will find is love. Everything we understand about God has to be understood through the lens of his love, or else we've not studied it far enough ...

Let's use a syllogism here. God is pure love. Here's a certain act that is not an expression of pure love. This act then cannot be God. So let's take wrath. God is pure love. Pure love can only express pure love. Wrath cannot be an expression of anything less than love if it comes from God. In fact, the wrath of God is an expression of his love.

This is where we get back into this thing of our Western mindset and Augustinian views of theology and all of this. We have had our minds tainted about the subject of wrath through misguided teaching — some of it coming out of Augustinian thought, some of it coming from extra-

biblical sources like Dante. For a lot of people, their imagery of hell and the wrath of God is from Dante's *Inferno* and not from the Bible. Agreed?

MM: Yeah.

SM: So we've got to come back and say, no, wait a minute. Just like I've done with other things connected to God and who he is, I've had to come back to this subject of wrath and say wait a minute, wrath can't be God being mad, pouring out hate, because then he wouldn't be pure love. So I came back to that word *wrath* in the Bible. You're a seminary professor, so I'm sure you know this more than most of us. Let's start with the Greek word for wrath – what is it, teacher?

MM: *Orge*.

SM: Right. The Greek word *orge*, which is the biblical word for wrath in the New Testament, is an interesting word. Again, let me hit the pause button and say, the definition that we use with words sometimes depends on our preexisting concept of who God is. Words can have more than one definition. For instance, I say I love my wife. I love Mexican food. Nobody thinks I hold Mexican food in the same esteem that I hold my wife. The same is true with biblical words, words like wrath.

If you look in the Greek for the definition of the word, and for the average person who's not a seminary prof, we have to fall back on more simple things — thank the Lord for the internet, because we can go to places like Crosswalk.com or BibleGateway.com and we can click there on certain verses when we want to know a word. Let's take the word wrath. Go to Crosswalk.com and type in the word wrath and look for it in the New Testament, because we're going to go to the Greek now.

Find the word, let's say in Romans, where the word *wrath* is used a lot. Look it up in the New American Standard Version, or the King James Version, and [after clicking on the verse] when you look beneath that verse you have some options, and one of them is the interlinear version. So you click on "interlinear" and it will put up that verse with every English word with a link to the Greek. When you click on the link, it will take you to Strong's and it will define that Greek word.

Now we've done that, and so we've found the word wrath and we want to know what it means. One definition of wrath is going to be "anger." But if you look down at, I think it's the second or third definition, you're going to see that another definition of wrath is "any intense emotion."

Let's come back to the Greek word *orge*. *Orge* is an interesting word. It's [often] translated wrath, but it can mean any intense emotion. I'm using this example because I want to make a clear point here. I'm not using

it to be crude, but the word *orge* is the origin of our English words orgy or orgasm. Those are intense words. Those words in mixed company almost make you blush to use them. But I make that point because I want it to be clear that the word *orge*, which can yield the word orgasm or orgy, in that sense it has nothing to do with anger. It has to do with a very strong passion.

I'm going to come to a pause on this in a minute, but let me finish this train of thought. If you look at the word *orge* and you go back to the root of that word, because *orge* is the derivative of the root, and you go back to the root of the word *orge*, it means to reach out and to strain in a quivering violent way, a shaking way, for something that you long to possess. Having said all that, you know where I'm going.

So the wrath of God...let me put it as a question: What if (and I believe it) the wrath of God is not God pouring out contempt on people in hell, but what if the wrath of God is him pouring out violent love? Grasping, quivering, reaching, shaking, but those who reject it are so adverse and opposed to his love that to them it's torment. From his perspective it's not that at all. The love of God is wonderful to those of us who receive it.

It's like the gospel — it's a savor of life unto life. But to those who reject it, it's horrible. It's hell. It's the savor of death unto death. James said, "When you love your enemies, it is as if you were pouring out heaping coals of fire on their heads." I don't think that the wrath of God is an expression of contempt. I think the wrath of God is a violent expression of God's love, and people hate it unless they perceive that love.

MM: So God might intend it for good, but they perceive it as bad?

SM: Absolutely. If I can give an example, let's suppose I see my little grandson out in my back yard and he's holding a snake. I see that snake coiling, and love rushes up in my consciousness for my grandson. So I run as fast as I can toward him. He's holding the snake and he looks up and he sees on his granddad's face this look of horror and rage. He's going to interpret what he sees through the only paradigm he has. He may not understand the danger of the snake. He sees this expression of rage and anger in my face, and it strikes terror in him. I run over to my grandson, and imagine I pick him up and I shake him and shake him. That little boy is going to think he's never seen me so angry with him in his lifetime. But I'm not angry with him. I'm trying to shake something out of his hand.

Do you get the comparison I'm making? Daniel, I believe it's chapter 7:10, talks about a river of fire that flows out of the throne of God. I think that's the white-hot love of God. And as they say, the same sun that

hardens clay melts wax. Same with the love of God.

Can I give you a quote? I don't want to preach a sermon, but I brought a note here. I don't want to trust my memory on this. This is Saint Isaac the Syrian, one of the early church fathers. Here's what he said: "Paradise is the love of God wherein is the enjoyment of all blessedness." I've been going on about hell, here's what he says about it: "I also maintain that those who are punished in Gehenna are scourged by the scourge of love. Nay, what is so bitter and vehement as the torment of love?"

MM: In Romans 1:18, Paul writes (and this is the first use of wrath in Romans): "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of human beings who suppressed the truth by their wickedness." He's saying that the wrath of God is being revealed. Doesn't that sound like God's kind of irritated by their refusal to accept what he's doing?

SM: I have to give you credit. When you use the word *irritated* in connection with wrath, that's understating it. I think it's more than irritated. But again, it depends on the lens you use to interpret the scripture. If you start with the fundamental belief that God is love, again I'll come back and say we have to interpret the scripture in light of everything that comes from God as being an expression of love, or else there's an incongruence in God that can't be explained. There's a conflict. He's not pure love if something comes from him that is something other than love.

Some will say, "Well, then, love is just one of his characteristics, love is just *part* of what God is. He's part love, he's part wrath." Then I would say, "Are you suggesting that God is schizophrenic? He's love some of the time, he's hate some of the time?" No. Let's go back to the passage. I'm not suggesting that the wrath of God is not real. The wrath of God is very real. What I'm saying is it's possible, and in my opinion probable, that many of us have misunderstood what that wrath is, the nature of that wrath. Let's look at the passage you read. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven." Think of wrath there as an intense, violent expression of love is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness.

Back to the illustration I gave about charging up to my grandson holding the snake. That was wrath. It was an intense expression of love, and it came out as violence because of the contempt that I had in this imaginary story for the snake, but it was love for the child. But the child, if he doesn't clearly understand my heart, may think that what's he's seeing is anger against him, but that's not what it is.

Notice that Paul talks in Romans 1:18 about the unrighteousness of

men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. For them to suppress the truth, the truth is already in them, or they wouldn't be able to suppress it. To suppress means to push down something that's already there, and there can't be any disagreement about this, because the next verse elaborates: "Because that which is known about God is evident within them." Not outside them – within them – for God made it evident. God has put this intrinsic knowledge in us, and when we reject or suppress the truth of his love for us, then you know what he does? He expresses wrath. He turns up the fire of his love so that it becomes hotter. You're not going to beat God's love, so stop trying, is the way I might say it.

Can I read another quote from Saint Isaac the Syrian that we mentioned earlier? Can I read one more quote from him? I think he does a good job expressing the Orthodox tradition on this. Here's what he said: "The power of love works in two ways. It torments the sinners even as it happens here when a friend suffers from a friend, but it becomes a source of joy for those who have observed its duties. Therefore, the same love of God, the same energy will fall upon all men, but it will work differently." It's just what Paul said, the comparison, the parallel. It's what Paul the apostle said of the gospel. It's the savor of life unto life for those who believe, but it's the savor or stench of death for those who don't believe. [2 Cor. 2:16]

MM: Okay, suppose these people don't like God's love. Why does God insist on doing something that he knows that they'll find unpleasant?

SM: Because he's sovereign, and his love is agape, it's unconditional. He loves whether you love him back or not. He doesn't love because he anticipates a certain response from us. You see what I'm saying?

MM: He's going to love whether we like it or not.

SM: He's going to love because that's who he is. He's going to love whether we like it or not, and whether we receive it or not. That's who he is, he's God. God is love. For God to do something other than love would be a conflict of who he is. He'd cease to be who he is if he didn't love.

MM: And you can't just ignore it.

SM: Well, you can, but it's hell, buddy. Right? (laughing) It's hell if you ignore it, if you try to resist it. Let's play this out a minute. You're the seminary prof, but I want to play the devil's advocate, okay? I'm going to walk this out and I'm going to ask you the question that maybe the viewer would. Is God pure love, first of all? The obvious answer is yes.

MM: Yes.

SM: If he's pure love, could anything come from him that's not loving?

MM: No.

SM: No. Does wrath come from him?

MM: Yes.

SM: So is wrath an expression of his love?

MM: Somehow, it must be.

SM: It's got to be. You follow down that trail and there's no other way around it. If God is love, and he is, and if pure love can only do what's loving, and that's true, and wrath comes from God, and it does, then it has to be an expression of love or else God is not loving. People grapple with this: "oh, I don't believe that." Then what are you going to believe? How are we going to explain the wrath of God unless we say God is not....

Some say, "Well, love is just one characteristic of God." Really? What are the others? "Well, wrath." By wrath do you mean hate against sinners? That was the view I held. I thought God hated sinners, reprobates. That's the viewpoint many hold. "You're saying God is part love and part hate? At the least you'd have to admit [I'd say to this imaginary critic] that God is not pure love if he's part hate."

MM: You need to catch him on a good day.

SM: Exactly. What is agape? Let's back it up a step. Not only is God not pure love, but he's not even agape, unconditional love, because if it's unconditional, then what would make him hate? If this would make God hate instead of love, then the love that's left is not unconditional, because there was a condition that wasn't met that caused it to become hate. Am I talking in circles or does that make sense?

MM: It connects with a couple other ideas — but many people think that the wrath of God means that God desires to punish. And that ties in with what you had said earlier about God not punishing Jesus on the cross. God has no desire to punish us — he wants to rescue us.

SM: He has rescued us, in fact.

MM: Oh. Done deal.

SM: It is finished. I heard that line somewhere before. He has rescued us whether we acknowledge it or not.

MM: Continuing in Romans 1, I find it interesting that Paul describes what God does in his wrath. Paul is eloquent about how bad they are, and in verse 24, "Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity..." etcetera... In other words, he let them do what they wanted.

SM: Right. What's the rest of the verse? "So that their bodies would be degraded among them." What's sin going to do? Left to itself, what will sin do in a person? Those people or any of us, what will sin do?

MM: It hurts.

SM: It hurts. There's a penalty. We will spiral downward. The wages of sin is still death. But once we get down to that place of death, now we're in a great spot, because guess what? Our God's grace doesn't make *sick* men well, our God's grace makes *dead* people live. So for God to raise you up, you have to get dead enough. Does God call sin sinful behavior? No. But the grace of God is so big that sin won't get the last word. Our God says, let sin give its best shot, and when it's killed you, I will raise you up, because that's what I do. That's my thing — resurrection.

MM: In a way, Jesus has already killed sin.

SM: He has. You guys do a remarkable job here at Grace Communion International of helping folks understand the difference between union and communion, objective and subjective. There is the objective reality that exists, and it's real. Hebrews 9:26 says, "At the consummation of ages he's been manifest to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Jesus, in the objective sense, he's dealt with sin once and for all. Here's the wonderful thing. Sin is not an offense to God. It's not like sin does something to God. God defeated sin. He vanquished and defeated sin. Sin does nothing to God.

Somebody might say, then why does God care about sin? Does God not hate sin? Sure he hates it. Why? Because of what it does to you and me. We still live in this little box called time/space. The objective reality is he's dealt with sin, but in this little box we're living in, called time and space, in the experiential subjective sense, we can still experience the consequence, the penalty, the punishment of sin. God hates it for that reason, because he loves us and doesn't want to see us hurt. God doesn't say to us, "Don't sin because I hate it when people do that. It really just bugs me — I'm holy and righteous and I'm so squeaky clean it just disgusts me to see people do something nasty and dirty and sinful."

MM: Violating my rules.

SM: Exactly. "You're offending my sensitivities." No, that's ridiculous. God says that same thing he said to Adam and Eve about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: Don't do that because it's going to kill you. Don't do that, it's going to hurt you. I love you, and I hate sin not because of what it does to me, God says, but because of what it does to you. I love you and I don't want to see you hurt. That's God's thing with sin today, in this world we live in. It's not what it does to him, but what it does to us in the subjective world.

MM: That would explain why we should avoid sin even though we've

already been forgiven.

SM: Right. We avoid sin because sin is drinking poison and God loves us.

MM: What if we like the taste of that poison?

SM: That's a good question, and the one who would seriously ask that, would reveal that they don't know their identity in Christ. Because the truth is, we *don't* love the taste of that poison. Here's the thing — that apple tastes good until it gives you a stomachache, and then you realize yuck, the pleasure of sin is, as the Bible says, for a season. It's got a sweet taste coming in, but boy does it turn sour on my stomach in a hurry.

The picture I've given is a guy walking down the road and he looks over here, and here's the sin house. He hears music and there's a party going on, and it looks like they're having a fun time in there. The guy says, "I'd like to live in that place." He goes in there, and the minute he walks into the sin house with all kinds of things going on, the guy immediately says, "This is as wonderful and exhilarating and thrilling as I thought it would be," because there is pleasure in sin for a season. It's gratifying. Not satisfying, but gratifying.

He gets a rush out of it, but then after a while he's in the sin house and he starts thinking, "This is getting old. I don't know." But the thing of it is, he can't find his way out. The longer he's trapped in there, the more he hates it, until finally the place that he couldn't wait to get into, now that he's in it, he finally, in fact soon, reaches a place where (because it's not his nature to live in that house), from the depths of his being he finds his heart crying out, "God, get me out of here. I don't want to be in here." Why do we like the taste of sin? The answer is, we don't. We only *think* we do. It's got a momentary flavor that appeals to us, but it will quickly turn on you.

MM: The perception is the key element.

SM: It's not our nature to like sin. Sin is resident in us. Paul said in Romans 7, "So now if I'm doing the thing I don't want to do, I'm not doing it, but sin which dwells in me." He said that in two verses in Romans 7, within three verses apart. He was drawing a distinction between his authentic self, his true identity in Christ, and the power of indwelling sin, which he says again and again in Romans 7 is "in my members." It's not who I am.

I jokingly tell people the first time I went to London, England, I had a kidney stone, but I never asked anybody to call me Rocky. It was in me, but it didn't define me. In the same way, there's the power of indwelling

sin that's in our members, but that's not who we are. Let me tell you who we are. Who we are is that we're righteous, called, holy, set-apart people who, if we will get out from under the lie — and how do you do that? You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. The truth is a person named Jesus, and when we come to know him, we will understand we don't want to live a life of sin.

Back to the verse in Titus, “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires.” It doesn't teach us to sin. Grace doesn't make you want to sin – grace makes you want to glorify the Lord and say no to sin.

MM: Because of the grace, we desire the divine life more, and these other things aren't part of the divine life. There's no attractiveness there.

SM: Right. There's an inconsistency. There's a momentary appeal to it. Let's not talk as if there's *no* attraction to sin. But the fact that sin is pleasurable doesn't say something about our nature – it says something about the nature of sin. That speaks of the nature of sin, not our nature. It's not natural for us to live in sin because that's not our nature. I can teach your dog to walk on its back legs, but it will never be comfortable doing it, because it's not his nature to do it. Peter the apostle said in 2 Peter 1:4, “We've become a partaker of divine nature.” We sin, but there's always this internal conflict when we commit sins, because something deep within us, namely the Spirit, the new man knows that's not who I am. It might gratify, but it won't satisfy, because I'm not living out of my core. I'm not living out of my authentic self when I do that.

MM: I wanted to go back to your image of this person trapped in the house of sin. How real is it? They think they're trapped.

SM: It's an illusion. They're not trapped.

MM: It's a hologram.

SM: It's like the elephant at the circus. You come outside the circus tent and there's a two-ton elephant there with a chain this long and he's hooked to a little post in the ground. That elephant could drag a Greyhound bus down the road, but he thinks that thing's holding him there. Why does he think that? Because when he was a baby elephant, they put a big chain around his leg and put the other end on something he couldn't drag, and he lived that way day after day until he began to be conditioned, “I cannot move when this chain is on my leg.” So he becomes this huge elephant, and he could drag a bus down the road, but when they put the chain on his leg he stands there thinking he can't move.

What holds him in that spot? Is it the chain? No, what holds him there

is a lie. A faulty perception holds him there. That's what keeps people in this imaginary sin house. They think they're trapped. They believe the lie that they can't get out. But the truth is, sin has no power over us. When we understand the grace of God, we'll know what Paul meant when he said, "Sin shall no longer have dominion over you because you're not under law but under grace." We understand it when we lock in on what grace really is — unconditional love and acceptance, divine enablement for us to be all that we've been called to be and do all we've been called to do. Then we can walk out of that house just that quick. It's a mirage. It's not real.

MM: A lot of people walk out of that house and kind of want to go back in sometimes.

SM: Then they didn't stay long enough.

MM: (laughing).

SM: I'm serious. Martin Luther said this: "When thou sinnest, sin boldly." That green apple didn't give you a stomachache? Eat three more and watch what happens. They hadn't hit bottom, in other words. I'm not advocating sinful behavior, but I'm telling you, let sin run its course, and the wages of sin is death, and you won't want to go back there again.

MM: A little aversion therapy.

SM: Yeah. That's the good point. We found out that the new man, which is who we are in Christ, does have an aversion to sin. Read Romans 7, verses 16 through the end of the chapter where Paul says, "I don't understand myself at all. I'm doing the things I hate and the things I want to do I don't do." Does that sound like a man who wanted to sin? Not at all. It is our nature, when we understand who we are in Christ, to hate sin. We don't want to live that way. If we think people are going to do what they want, let them — they'll hit bottom. I think we're overly sin conscious in the modern church. If we were as Christ-conscious and taught others to be as Christ-conscious as the Bible says we can be, sin would become a moot point.

Here's a passage in Hebrews (I love talking about the Old Testament sacrifices). Hebrews 10, starting in verse 1, "The law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, it can never by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year make perfect those who draw near" [NASB]. The law cannot perfect, the sacrifices could not perfect people. Look at verse 2, "Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered?" Why? "Because the worshipers, having been once cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sin."

Paul, or whoever wrote Hebrews, says that if the old covenant sacrifice had been a perfect sacrifice and those people had been permanently cleansed, they wouldn't have even thought about sin anymore. He goes on and says in verse 3, "But in those sacrifices there's a reminder of sin year by year." The implication is, we come over to the new covenant and Jesus is the perfect sacrifice and we have been cleansed completely, past, present, and future, so we don't need to live with sin consciousness. We need to live with Jesus-consciousness.

MM: Focus on the positive.

SM: Focus on Jesus. I often tell about how I loved basketball when I was a teenager, and I played every weekend. On Fridays I played till late at night, because I didn't have to go to school. If you had said the Friday will come, the time will come you can't play basketball on Fridays, I would have said you're crazy. But one Sunday I went to church and on Sunday morning in Sunday School a girl came in that I had never seen, and when I met that girl I thought, "I want to ask her out." I ended up asking that girl to go out on a date, and I went out the next Friday night with her.

The next morning on Saturday my friends came over banging on my door and said, "Where were you? You know we play basketball every Friday night." I was a 16-year-old boy. I said, "I was with a chick. I didn't have time for basketball." I dated that girl every Friday for three years and I ended up marrying her, and I've been married to her now since 1973, and I cannot tell you when I played basketball on Friday night. Why? Not because I disciplined myself to give up Friday night basketball, but because I found something I wanted more. That's the thing about sin. We don't live with sin consciousness — we fall so in love with Jesus that sin loses its grip over us and we just walk out, because we're holding hands with Jesus and walk away from it without even thinking about it, without struggling against it.

MM: That is great.

SM: Isn't it great? I think of the old song we used to sing when I was a teenager — you're my age, I bet you remember the song we sang that said, turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full into his wonderful face. Do you remember the next part? No? You lived a sheltered life, didn't you?

MM: I did. I didn't have TV, didn't go to church.

SM: You were spared some things and you were deprived of others, and I won't say which is which, but I'll let you figure out which one you were deprived of and which one you were spared from, but there's the old

song that says, turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full into his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. And that's it.

God's not mad — God's delivered us from sin. Now we are back to what we started with — the wrath of God, even that is an expression of his love. Let's get it down in our minds once and for all — God is love. If you ever hear, read, see anything that seems to contradict that, then let's step back away from it a minute and say, wait a minute, I must be misinterpreting what I'm hearing, seeing, or reading, because God is love. Let's settle that once and for all. Let's not put God on trial every time something comes along we can't make sense of and say, is God really love? No. Let's settle that.

We may not have answers for everything. We won't, but that's okay. We don't have to have answers for everything. Our God is a mystery, so we push up to the edge of our understanding as far as we can push and then we stop and say okay, all I know is that in the fog there beyond what I can see, there's a God who is love, and we live with that assurance even when we can't make sense out of it — whether it's hell, wrath, the sin house, anything else.

THE GRACE WALK, REVISITED

J. Michael Feazell: Steve, it's great to have you with us again.

Steve McVey: Thank you – glad to be here, Mike.

JMF: You wrote *Grace Walk* back in the 1990s.

SM: The book came out in '95; I wrote it in '94.

JMF: Okay. Around 1990, you started to have a change in your understanding of what it meant to be a Christian, what it meant to trust in God. Can you talk about how that happened? What led to writing your first book, *Grace Walk*? Then we want to talk about where you've come since.

SM: There have been two really significant years in my life in terms of the development of my understanding of God, of myself, of other people, and salvation. The first was in 1990. I had been a senior pastor for 17 years. I had been a Christian for 29 years. I grew up in a Christian family; my parents took me to church as long as I can remember. I became a senior pastor at the age of 19. I was one of these go-getters who just wanted to build my church and reach people. For the most, I had felt very successful. I wrote about it in my first book, *Grace Walk*, that you just mentioned. Churches I served grew numerically and the members loved me and I loved the members and things went well.

To compress the story, in 1990 I went to a church in Atlanta, Georgia, thinking that I was going there to build a great mega-church. The church I'd left had been a growing church and by all the ways that I measured success back then, I considered myself successful, and the people there

didn't want me to leave. It was a small town in Alabama and I thought when I get to Atlanta, the potential there is so much greater, there's no telling what's going to happen there. I prayed for the Lord to really use my life in an unprecedented way for me. I believed that it was going to explode, and I'd ask God to do whatever he wanted to do in my life, to cause me to know him as intimately as I could.

Let me slow down there, because it's so important. Let me say it again, I prayed for God to do whatever he needed to do in my life to cause me to know him in as intimate a way as I could. I didn't really understand what I was praying, because when I moved to Atlanta, I thought I was going to go there and this church was going to grow, grow, grow. The church I went to had been declining in every measurable way for five years. Everywhere I'd been, that would reverse when I got there and pulled out my programs – church-growth programs and my home-run sermons and all of this.

But to my dismay, the church continued to decline in every way. I became frustrated, and that frustration turned into discouragement, and that discouragement turned into depression. If you read my book *Grace Walk*, the first sentence says, "It was October 6th 1990 and I was lying on my face in the middle of the night crying." The reason I was crying was because everything I'd done to cause that church to grow had failed. I was about to have to get up the next day (because I had told the church I would) and give a state of the church address where I was going to share with them how.... Typically I'd always used it as a time to share how we'd move forward and cast vision for the next year, but nothing had happened to celebrate in my first year there. It was lying on my face, October 6th 1990, that I came to the end of myself. I call it brokenness, giving up on my own ability to manage my own life and ministry.

Lying there, I poured out of my mind and my consciousness everything I'd been depending on to give me a sense of value, to make me feel that I was successful, that I was lovable, that I was significant. I said, "Lord, I've been depending on all these things to move me forward spiritually and in every way, but I quit. I give it up." I said, "If this is the Christian life, it's overrated." I said, "If this is what ministry is, I want out." Then in anger I hurled an accusation against God in prayer, lying on my face, I'll never forget, I said, "God, I've given my whole life to you, what do you want from me?"

The thought came into my mind—and I knew it didn't originate from me—the words came into my mind, "Steve, I just want you." That was

new to me, because when the Lord spoke that in my heart, it resonated up into my consciousness. I realized that God didn't want me so that I could build big churches or counsel people or even lead people to Christ or preach good sermons or any of that. I began to realize when he said that, he meant: "I don't need you as an employee. I'm not looking for a maid, I'm looking for a bride." In other words, "I'm looking for somebody in my church to pour my love into and for them to experience this intimacy with me." Over the weeks that followed, I began to study things like Romans 6 and Galatians, where Paul talks about our identity in Christ and what it means to live free from the law (I was very legalistic at the time).

My life began to transform as he revealed my identity to me and who I am. I began to understand what it meant when the Bible says, "We've been crucified with him." I began to understand what Paul meant in Galatians 2:20 when he said "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." That was a turning point in my life because I had given my whole lifetime to try and to perform for God, to do for him, to make sure that I made spiritual progress and gained his blessings based on what I could do. The Lord began to show me that that's not what grace is—that's the essence of legalism: thinking we can make progress or earn God's blessing based on what we do. The Lord began to show me that grace is the expression of his love toward us, so that we're blessed and we make progress not because of what we do but because of what he's done.

That was the greatest turning point in my life up till that time, from the time that I had begun to trust him as a young boy. Everything changed. The life I lived was what missionary Hudson Taylor called "the exchanged life," that was the phrase that I often used. When I wrote a book I called it the *Grace Walk*, but Hudson Taylor called it the exchanged life. Andrew Murray I believe called it the life, Ruth Paxton called it life on a higher plane, Watchman Nee called it the normal Christian life.

The bottom line, whatever you want to call it, is that life in which we understand that we're not our own source but we actually live by the life of another person. It's not grace in our walk, it's not us trying to do things for Christ, but to the contrary, it is Christ doing things through us. He's the source, and that makes all the difference. I've never been the same since the Lord began to show me that. I'm still growing in my knowledge of what that means.

JMF: You wrote a series of books starting around that time, you wrote *Grace Walk*...

SM: My second book was *Grace Rules*. My third book initially was called *Grace Land* and after some years the publisher changed the title to *Grace Amazing*. Those first three books that I wrote (I've written nine) specifically dealt with the topic of who we are in Jesus Christ and what it means to live in grace, because that is such a transformational message for people to understand.

JMF: So around '95, though, more things happened.

SM: 1995 is when *Grace Walk* came out, and for a number of years I taught and still teach what Hudson Taylor called exchanged life, I call the Grace Walk. Basically it's the teaching that we died with Jesus Christ, we were co-crucified with him, we were buried with him and when Jesus was raised we were raised to walk in the newness of life. That is the message that I have been teaching since 1990, and also teaching what it means to live in grace as opposed to living in legalistic religion, and there's a big difference between those two. From 1990 up through 2004, I taught what I called and many have called the believer's identity in Christ.

But in 2004, that was the second significant year in my life where a real radical paradigm shift came. That was when I began to be exposed to what I believe now to be the broader message of grace, or if you prefer the deeper message of grace. I like the way the apostle Paul referred to God's grace as the *manifold* grace of God. The word means multi-faceted. You look at a diamond from a certain angle and you see the beauty of it, but when you shift it, and a different facet is exposed and the light catches it in another way, now you see this diamond from another facet and you realize that it's more beautiful than you had initially known.

One of the things that the Lord began to show me in 2004, that I think is so important for all of us to understand is this: we never graduate with our advance degree in grace. In other words, we're always growing. Peter said, "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." The apostle Paul described the love of God as fathomless, we cannot fathom it. In 2004 I was first exposed to some Trinitarian writers. I think my first exposure was to Baxter Kruger and his book *The Great Dance*, and other things that he has written. I heard some of Baxter's podcasts and some of the interviews he did with you. Baxter put me onto the Torrance brothers, and I began to read Thomas Torrance and some of his things, and the circle widened. I began to watch *You're Included* and see some of these guys.

It's like I began to say, "I thought I hit the mother lode when I began to understand the Grace Walk, or the exchanged life," but I began to

realize, “I don’t have a degree in grace because we never graduate from that school, from that course of learning.” It was by the things that Torrance wrote, and it was by the understanding that this efficacy of the cross of Jesus Christ didn’t just apply to Christians but that the efficacy of the cross of Christ applied to all humanity. It’s as if Grace 101 now expanded to Grace 201 and I began to say, “That which was facilitated in the lives of mankind by Jesus is not a reality merely because I give it a thumbs up by walking down the aisle and shaking the pastor’s hand on Sunday morning, or with a profession of faith, or by praying a sinner’s prayer or by anything that I do.”

I began to understand, “The objective reality of what Jesus did is true for everybody, whether they believe it or not.” You won’t benefit from it if you don’t believe it, you won’t experience the reality of it, but I began to see “This is true for all of us.” That was 2004 as the Lord showed me that, and I didn’t talk about it for five years. It was only five years later that I began to publicly speak about this, because I thought, “This is off the charts. Grace can’t be this big. I know I’ve said God’s love is bigger than you can imagine, but I didn’t mean this.”

JMF: In our baptism we’ll say such language as “Do you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?”, and it’s as though our first exposure to grace is “I’m a sinner and I need salvation and I need Christ in my life.” I, I, I ... We go about focused on how do I walk with Christ and so on. It doesn’t occur to us yet that we are part of a humanity that has been rescued in total.

SM: That’s exactly the thing that shocked me, because like everybody that I’ve grown up and around (I suppose it’s true in the Western world; we have such an individualistic mentality), that it’s about me, and as you said, Jesus is my personal Lord and Savior. Nobody’s denying that we each have a personal relationship to God the Father through Jesus, but the key is that what Jesus did, he did for us all. I taught many times from Romans 5: “As through one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so in the same way through the obedience of the one the many are made righteous.” I would say, “Just like we were all utterly sinful to the core in Adam,” then I would say, “Those who believe are utterly righteous to the core now.”

But now I understand that my exegesis of that verse was not complete, because the Bible is saying that just as what Adam did had universal effect on humanity, so is it the case that what Christ did had universal effect on

humanity. As the program title here says *You're Included*, we're all included. We don't make it so by believing it; we believe it because it is so. That was a change for me. My appeal used to be, "Won't you believe on Jesus and be made right with God? Won't you believe on Jesus and be put in union with the Father? Won't you believe on Jesus and have your sins forgiven? He'll forgive you *if* you'll just ask him."

That negates the statement of Jesus when he said "It is finished." When Jesus said "It's finished," that's what he meant. As a guy who taught grace for many years, from 1990 till 2004, I was teaching the grace of God (and certainly I'll call it a level up from where I had been because at least I knew it was him more than I had) but I still found myself saying that it only becomes when *you* do it. It wasn't really finished at the cross, it's not finished until *you* do it. I often say these days, "Jesus' last words on the cross were not 'Your move.' His words were 'It's finished.'"

JMF: Now it's your turn, over to you.

SM: No, that's not it. It's finished. It's finished whether you believe it or not. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them." I always knew that part in the next verse: "So we go out like ambassadors, as though we were speaking on God's behalf, saying, be reconciled to God" but I zeroed in on that, and I neglected the first of that passage in 2 Corinthians 5 that says, "We have been reconciled." Everybody's been reconciled, so the authentic gospel is to go to people and say, "You've been reconciled through Jesus. Our triune God has made it right for everybody. Now, you believe it: make that objective reality your subjective experience by believing it." It amazes me how that rattles folks sometimes when we say that, but I'll be quick to say it thrills others.

JMF: Many people are afraid to believe the gospel because they don't believe it could apply to them because they think, "I'm so bad that I've got to get better before I can take that step."

SM: Isn't that the truth. Despite the fact that Jesus said that we all have need for the physician. The more desperate we think our situation is, in actuality we might say, the more suited we are to experience his grace. Because grace is experienced not by those who think they have it all together. Jesus came for us all and we realize none of us has it all together. None of us has dotted the I's and crossed the T's and got it all sorted out. We all need grace. We all need it equally. I've taught for many years on the topic of brokenness. Brokenness is that condition that exists when we've given up all confidence in our ability to manage life, when we come

to that point where it's "I just can't do it. I could never do it. I can't." That's the point where we experience grace.

Even a lot of believers will say "I want to rededicate myself to Christ and I'm going to try harder to do better." How many times do we have to do that before we realize it doesn't work? You know the old definition of insanity, but how many of us have done the same thing the same way over and over and over and yet, we'll find ourselves at the place where we say, "But this time I really mean it."

JMF: Yeah, and you feel like you do mean it. But you sin again, and then you're back where you started.

SM: That's right. I call it the motivation, condemnation, rededication cycle. Most of us have lived on that cycle, many of us for a long time.

JMF: Say the cycle again.

SM: The motivation is where you charge hell with a squirt gun, "I can do it all, I'm excited for Jesus." Condemnation is when you backed off and realize "I'm not doing all the things that I think I should be doing," and you wallow in self-condemnation. Rededication is where I say, "Lord, if you'll just please forgive me, I'm going to try harder to do better with your help. I'll do better this time." We rededicate ourselves and then move back to motivation. Mostly back to the rededication of ourselves.

The problem is self. That's the whole problem: self is the problem. We're not alive from the self life. The biblical word the apostle Paul used for that is *flesh*. "Walking after the flesh" is the phrase of the Bible, which means basically the self life. Me living out of my own resources and abilities. You can rededicate that and buy some time (many of us have), and you'll experience the same failure that you did last time. That's not the answer. No matter how sincere we are, it's coming to the end of self that's the answer. Not saying "It's hard for me to live the Christ life," but instead acknowledging the fact it's *impossible* for me to live the Christ life. There's only one who can live ...

JMF: We're saved by grace through faith. We turn faith into a work. We know it's by grace, but then we say it's through faith. I need faith, we say to ourselves, and it's been preached. That's what you're talking about, you've got to, when you believe, when you accept this, when you do your part to accept it, then God will change his mind towards you, apply the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ to you, when you take the step of faith. But we *do* need to believe, so how does that work?

SM: Let's start with a comparison of the new and the old covenant. We

know the new covenant is better—if you read the book of Hebrews, the word *better* is a commonly used word in that book. One thing Hebrews does is to compare the new and the old covenant and the sacrifices and the priest. In the old covenant, when the priest on the Day of Atonement offered up the sacrifice, what was it that caused that sacrifice to be efficacious? Was it the faith of the people? In other words, if some Jewish guy was out there and he didn't come to the temple that day and the high priest offers up the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, that guy out there, he's not expressing faith in the sacrifice, he's out there doing his thing.

Was that sacrifice efficacious for that man? The answer is yes. Because it wasn't the behavior, the belief, the faith of the guy out there that caused his sins to be covered under the old covenant for another year. It was the purity of the sacrifice. It was the sacrifice that God looked at, not the man and his performance or his belief. I think most people would agree with what I've just said, that guy out there in Israel, if he wasn't at the temple, he was covered by that sacrifice with or without faith.

Now we come to the new covenant. Are we going to say that under the new covenant, that somehow it's less than the old covenant? No. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for all humanity, and the efficacy of what he did on the cross applies to everybody whether they believe it or not. As you said, do we need faith? Yes. Why? Because the writer of Hebrews in chapter 2 verse 4 said, "The same gospel that was declared unto us was declared unto them [unbelievers] also but it profited them or benefited them nothing because they did not combine the truth with faith." The guy who doesn't believe in the sacrifice of Jesus, does the sacrifice apply and has it fulfilled its purpose for him? Yes, it has. But if he doesn't believe, he will not enter into the joy, the experience, the subjective reality of the benefits of the cross.

Let's talk about the faith. A lot of folks who talk about grace are quick to say "Jesus is my righteousness," and we'll say "Amen." They'll say, "Jesus is my peace"; we'll say "Amen." "Jesus is my wisdom" (Paul said that in 1 Corinthians 1:30, "It's by his doing that you've been put into Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom and righteousness," and he goes on). Some of those people that I'm speaking of now will say, "But you have to have faith. You have to generate faith"—as if faith is some currency that we spend with God to get what we need. The Bible teaches, no, Jesus is your faith, too. In Galatians Paul talked about "before faith came" and then "after faith came," and he personifies faith there, because

faith is Jesus himself.

To go back to the old King James Version I like, our newer translations sometimes don't nail this exactly because they'll talk about faith in Jesus so in Galatians 2:20 we'll talk about "The life that I now live I live by faith in the Son of God." But if you go back to some of the older translations, even the King James Version, Galatians 2:20 will read, "The life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith *of* the son of God." That's an important distinction. It's not even our faith – it's his faith in us, and all we do when we say "I don't have faith." Well, welcome to the world, if you think you can't generate faith on your own – you're right. What we do is we lean in, and we align ourselves, so to speak, with the faith of Jesus, and he's got plenty of faith for us. That's what enables us to experience the reality.

JMF: We wind up trusting in our faith.

SM: Faith in faith, that's right.

JMF: Then we question our faith. We know our faith is poor. Sometimes it's great and then sometimes, most of the time, it's kind of in the toilet. We struggle with "I need faith for salvation. I don't seem to have any faith; I'm lost." So we're back in depression again. But we're not trusting in our faith, we're trusting in the person, we're trusting in Jesus himself, who has faith for us. We can trust in his faith and in him in every way to cover all the bases that we can't cover, because we can't cover any of them. We're dead in sin. He's the one who raises us in righteousness. What a comforting and encouraging thing to get ahold of it and quit worrying so much.

SM: You've nailed it. If we could just get in our minds this reality: it's finished. "You who were once so far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ," Paul said.

JMF: "Have been"—past tense.

SM: "Have been brought near." When did that happen? It happened at the cross. It doesn't happen when we press the magic button saying the magic words — it happened at the cross. If we could just believe that. I'm speaking to me as well...

JMF: It applies at all times to all people going both directions.

SM: Right. It sweeps across time, it sweeps across forward and backward, because the cross is eternal. We think of the cross as being something that happened in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago, but in reality, the cross is eternal. The problem of man's sin was remedied before the first

molecule was created, because he is the lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If that truth really gets ahold of us, it would cause a sigh of relief. It would release us from thinking that we have to do something to either get in God's favor or stay in his favor, because we don't.

He has taken care of it all through the incarnation. He's identified himself as a man with us, and he's inseparably joined us together to his Father through the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. We're joined together in him, before the Father. "seated with Christ in the heavenlies," Paul says. We're not big enough to change that. We're not big enough to nullify what Jesus has done. If we just believed and understood it, can you imagine the kind of stress that would roll off of our minds and lives?

JMF: Isn't that a new creation?

SM: That's right, yeah.

JMF: Thanks for being here and going through this stuff. Great stuff.

SM: Thank you Mike, it's my pleasure to be here.

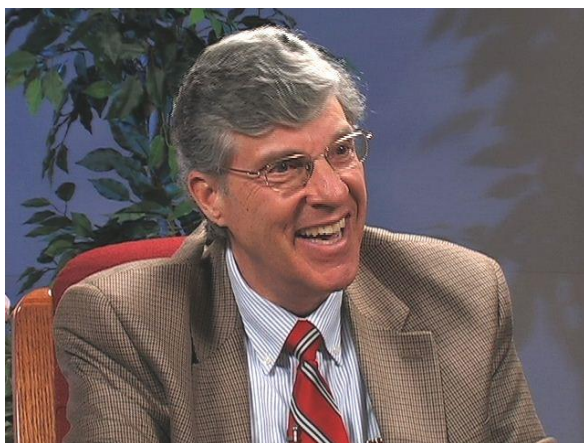
KEEPING CHRIST AT THE CENTER

J. Michael Feazell: Paul Molnar is a Catholic theologian and Professor of Systematic Theology at St. John's University in New York. He is author of

- *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity,*
- *Incarnation and Resurrection, and*
- *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialog with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology.*

Dr. Molnar is also editor of the Karl Barth Society of North America newsletter and [at the time of the interview] president of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship.

It's a pleasure to have you with us today.



Paul Molnar: My pleasure.

JMF: We wanted to begin by talking about your book, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity*. Tell us how you came to know Thomas Torrance and how you came to write the book.

PM: It started in the early 1980s when I read his book *Reality and Evangelical Theology* — that was my first exposure to Torrance’s writing, and I enjoyed it a lot. I was at a theological conference and someone asked who your favorite theologian was, and most people at the conference had Karl Rahner as their favorite theologian, so I said, “My favorite theologian is Thomas F. Torrance.” I had read that book, and then I had read a couple others besides, when I got that question. The person looked at me like I had three heads, because he had never heard of Thomas F. Torrance.

Subsequently I read most of his writings, and I was quite impressed. For good reason, Torrance is thought of as the most important British theologian of the 20th century. He taught for many years at the University of Edinburgh. He didn’t formally teach the doctrine of the Trinity for political reasons (because another professor was teaching that course), but he did work the doctrine into all of his lectures in Christology and so on. He didn’t write his books on the Trinity until after he retired — his two major works on the Trinity.

What impressed me the most about Torrance was his vast knowledge of patristic theology and his ability to not only demonstrate a clear understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, but to show how the doctrine of the Trinity functions, enlightening us in our knowledge of Christ, the Incarnation, atonement, redemption, ascension, resurrection, the church, and the sacraments.

The reason I came to write this book was to show that side of Torrance which I was most interested in — his dogmatic theology. Torrance is famous for doing work in theology and science, which is also very important and very good, but my special emphasis in this book was looking at his dogmatic theology, showing how Trinitarian thinking shaped all of his doctrines. That’s where I went with this book.

JMF: And you’ve met him a couple of times.

PM: I invited him to St. John’s University in 1997 with the help of his son, Iain, who introduced me to him and enabled me to bring him to St. John’s. He came to St. John’s to speak on Einstein and God. He gave that same lecture at Princeton and Yale in 1997, and while he was there I had lots of time to get to know him. We had dinner together, we had lunch together, we had quiet time together — driving in the car together, we talked theology. It was a great experience for me because by that point, I had been reading him for 15, 16 years, so I held him in awe, to be honest with you, just to be able to speak with him.

One morning when I went to pick him up at the hotel he said, “Call me Tom,” so my tongue nearly froze in my mouth when he said that. I couldn’t call him Tom — he’s Professor Torrance, the great theologian. When I introduced him to the audience at St. John’s — he had sent me a thick C.V., and he said just introduce me, I’m just a minister of the gospel. That wasn’t going to fly for me. Having had a C.V. this thick, I was going to say something. So I went through a long explanation of how important he was and the work he had done and so on. I’m not sure how well that pleased him, but he was polite about the whole thing.

He was in his 80s, though at that time he was quite young and we had good exchanges during the lecture and the question and answer session, and we took him to dinner afterwards and he had good exchanges with members of the theology department and the philosophy department. But he did indicate that that would probably be his last trip to the United States and that if I wanted to see him again, I would have to see him in Scotland, which, as it happened, I got to do two years later.

When I was lecturing at St. Andrews and at Aberdeen, I visited him at his house on Braid Farm Road in Edinburgh, and in his study we sat and chatted for three or four hours. It was quite an experience. I learned a great deal from him. We had many exchanges of emails and letters, and he would send papers to me that he had written, and I would send papers to him and he would write back to me with comments on them. So I got to know him quite well and I learned a great deal from him.

He’s affected my thinking a great deal. One of the major premises of my book *Divine Freedom* was that to think accurately about God, we would have to think from a center in God and not from a center in ourselves. I learned that from Tom Torrance. In my book on *Incarnation and Resurrection*, I learned the main thesis of the book from him, which is that you need to hold the incarnation and the resurrection together if you’re going to have a clear understanding of the meaning of the resurrection. To him that meant: If you tried to think about Jesus’ resurrection in abstraction from the incarnation, you would have what he called a docetic view of the resurrection.

A docetic view of the resurrection in his mind meant that you would undermine the fact that Jesus rose bodily from the dead. It would just be an ideal description of something that may simply describe the disciples’ reactions to Jesus, or it may describe some person’s idea of life after death, but it wouldn’t be an idea dictated by the fact that the resurrection was

really the completion of the incarnation, in that it was also the completion of our reconciliation with God, by the fact that Jesus was raised bodily from the dead. So his thinking had affected my thinking a great deal.

JMF: Many people have a sense that the incarnation ended at the resurrection. In other words, Jesus does not continue to be fully human for us. Even at prayer they're thinking of Jesus as being fully God, but no longer thinking of him as being fully human for us.

PM: Yes. Torrance spends a great deal in his life's work undermining that idea. Why would it be important for Torrance to undermine that idea? It would be important because if Christ is not risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, and continually mediating between us and the Father in his full divinity and full humanity, in Torrance's mind, we would then have no human connection with God. That's one way of putting it. Another way of putting it that we're not really saved humanly.

For Torrance, Jesus' continuing high priestly mediation is of the utmost importance, because if he is not the continuing mediator between us and God, then something else or someone else would have to be inserted into his place and would become for us the supposed mediation between us and God. We would be cut off from God by even thinking of such another mediator, because there is no such thing — it would compromise God's oneness and God's three-ness.

God mediates *himself* to us, the Father through the Son in the Spirit, and to even suppose that there could be some intermediary other than Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate who continues to mediate humanly and divinely, would compromise both his divinity and his humanity and the meaning of our salvation. So there's a lot at stake.

JMF: What are examples of other mediators that anyone has proposed?

PM: Some theologians tend to emphasize what they call a theocentric theology, so that they could have the world religions agree about God. In their theocentrism, they would want to avoid the Christocentrism that would see Christ as the exclusive revealer and exclusive Savior of the world. Such theologians might argue that Christians could believe in Jesus as their Savior, but not as the Savior for everyone else, because that would be a kind of exclusivism that imposed Christianity on other religions and would undermine a proper pluralism, in their estimation.

But for Torrance, you can't be theocentric at all unless you're Christocentric, because Christ is the one mediator who not only mediates God to us, but us to God, so that by sharing in his human knowledge of God, we

have true knowledge of God. For Torrance, that's not something you can have if you construct a theocentrism that bypasses Jesus Christ, because that's essentially unitarian theology.

JMF: That would be the idea that all roads lead to the same God, and that as long as you have a belief in God, then that's the main thing, as opposed to recognizing that Jesus is the revelation of the Father.

PM: Right. People who hold that sort of theocentrism as opposed to Christocentrism are basically thinking that Christocentrism is the product of the church's response to Jesus.

JMF: Christocentrism meaning Christ at the center?

PM: Putting Christ at the center, seeing Christ as the exclusive Savior, for example, or as the exclusive revealer. They argue against the notion of exclusivism because they want to sound more open in a pluralistic society to other religions. But in my mind, they've given up the truth of the Christian faith, because what makes Christ unique and exclusively the revealer and Savior of the world is his eternal being as the only begotten Son of the Father. It's not something that's grounded in the reaction of the community — not the Christian community, not any community.

This is why Torrance rejected what he called Ebionite Christology and Docetic Christology. When he did his Christology, he stated that he didn't want to begin from below, as in Ebionite Christology, or from above, as in Docetic Christology, and then he defined the terms. For him, Ebionite Christology would be any sort of Christology which saw Jesus as an ordinary human being who became the Son of God at some point in his life, or perhaps at the resurrection. Or it was a Christology that Jesus was an already existing human being into whom the Word descended.

For Torrance, the miracle of the virgin birth signifies that the eternally begotten Son mysteriously, miraculously became incarnate, took flesh from the Virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit. It's a miracle. It can't be explained, it can only be acknowledged. Therefore, Torrance would say, as he does in his book on the incarnation, that we must begin thinking Christologically with the fact of Jesus Christ. For him, the fact of Jesus Christ cannot be established historically from below, because if you just start with history, all your results theologically or conceptually would be historical results.

We must start in faith, recognizing and acknowledging who Jesus actually is. Torrance opposed that sort of Ebionite Christology which suggested that it was the community's response to Jesus, and that people

thought of him as a God; that made him unique, as an extraordinary human figure who people thought of as divine, but he wouldn't really be divine. In Torrance's mind, it's the deity of Christ that gives meaning to his human history because the hypostatic union, the second person or hypostasis of the Trinity becoming incarnate, is precisely the one who posits into existence his human history. There is no human history apart from his divine being. Docetic Christology is the idea that Jesus is just one particular historical embodiment of who God is, but not the *embodiment* of who God is. Torrance would reject both Christology from below and from above, arguing that we must begin by accepting history, humanity, and true divinity from the outset.

JMF: That raises a question... Jesus was perfect and obeyed his Father's commands and so on, and yet, as Torrance argues, he took our fallen nature on himself, that which is not assumed is not redeemed. How can both be true? How can he be perfect and yet take our fallen nature on himself?

PM: Let me give you what may at first sound like a perplexing answer to that question. Torrance would say we can't explain how that can be so, because if we could, we wouldn't need to acknowledge it and begin thinking about the reality in faith. But he would say it *can* be so, because in becoming human and assuming our fallen human nature into union with his divine being, God healed our self-will and therefore our sin, beginning with his becoming incarnate and continuing throughout his whole life of obedience through to his death on the cross and completely in the resurrection and ascension.

He would say that God never surrendered his divinity in becoming incarnate (so he could forgive our sins, because he was God incarnate), but he could also, from the human side, live our reconciliation subjectively in his perfect life of obedience. Unless the Word actually assumed our fully human nature, he wouldn't have come all the way to us within our human history. Redemption takes place within the personal being of the mediator, both so that when Jesus suffers God-forsakenness in obeying the Father, he lives out a human life in the midst of sin and temptation, in the midst of stresses and strains that would want to divide the unity that took place in the hypostatic union, but, in the end, did not do so.

JMF: Hypostatic union being ...

PM: The hypostatic union is the unique union of the divine Word and the human nature of Jesus. We participate in Jesus' humanity through faith

in him. The hypostatic union is unique — there is no analogy for it in experience or in any form of knowing. Torrance would say that Jesus is an ultimate — no, Jesus is the ultimate. By *ultimate*, he means that in any science you have to work with certain ultimates, without which the science wouldn't make any sense. Those ultimates cannot be proven or justified on any grounds other than the fact that they are what they are.

He would say that Jesus is who he is — the word of God incarnate. The hypostatic union is that unique event signifying that Jesus the Word was born of the Virgin Mary and that he was therefore truly divine and truly human throughout his entire life. Because Jesus is the ultimate, there is no ground for verifying who Jesus is outside of Jesus himself. That's why it's important to recognize that in the resurrection and ascension, Jesus continues to live and interact with us even now.

For Torrance to speak of the Holy Spirit is really to speak of the Holy Spirit uniting us to Christ. If you spoke of the Spirit and weren't speaking of our union with Christ through that Spirit and therefore through faith, you weren't speaking in, and by, and through, and about the Holy Spirit at all. That's crucially important — the fact that Jesus is the ultimate.

What it means to Torrance is: the first [group of] theologians, who try to verify who Jesus is in his uniqueness by a study of history or try to verify who Jesus is by some sort of *a priori* Christology, or what Karl Rahner calls a searching Christology, one that suggests that we can construct an understanding of what humanity is and what humanity is searching for, and in that search discover the true meaning of Jesus. Torrance would reject that sort of thinking because if that's the route we pursue, then it's our search that becomes determinative of who Jesus is — we no longer are absolutely in need of and rely on Jesus himself, who at present is disclosing to us who he is. That would be seriously problematic.

If I could give one example: I have it in my book on divine freedom, in chapter 6, where I contrast Torrance and Rahner on their interpretations of the resurrection. Rahner says that he's not going to begin with Jesus Christ, but with a transcendental experience. Rahner argues that wherever anyone hopes for some sort of life beyond death, that person already experiences the meaning of the resurrection, he says, perhaps anonymously, where Torrance would say you can't have an experience in the resurrection anonymously, because to have an experience of the resurrection is to know that Jesus Christ himself was raised from the dead and as such is the mediator who empowers us to know God conceptually.

He would say to Rahner, "You're holding what I would call a non-

conceptual understanding of God.” Rahner holds such an understanding when he argues that we have un-thematic, anonymous knowledge of God. Torrance would say there is no such thing as anonymous knowledge of God. Either you know God because your concepts are tied to the events depicted in the gospel story — his incarnation, resurrection, preaching, and ascension. Either you know God conceptually, or you don’t know God at all — you’re describing your own experience, symbolically interpreted. Torrance was dead set against that sort of thing.

JMF: What is the right explanation for the idea of a person who doesn’t know Christ and yet experiences good things and lives out good things and so on? Since Christ is the only source of what is good, isn’t there a sense in which there’s a participation in that which one doesn’t know what he’s participating in yet?

PM: In one sense, everybody is in relation with Jesus Christ. But theologically, to understand what that means, one would first have to understand who Jesus Christ was and what he did. Otherwise, the danger in the statement that you made to me is that one could argue that, as long as one is a good person, one is already a Christian.

I don’t think we would want to equate the idea of being good with being a Christian because in being good, we could then rely on our own goodness with the idea that by being good, God somehow owes us our righteousness. However, Torrance argues that when Christ died for the sins of the world, he died not just for the bad part of us, but for the good part of us. He means that just by being good, we’re not necessarily thereby Christians.

JMF: Yes. We’re talking about two different things, in a sense. We’re talking about what is the nature of the unbeliever, or the non-believer, or the not-yet-believer (or however we want to say it) in terms of their union with Christ by virtue of his incarnation on behalf of humanity, that on one side, and the nature of the relationship of the believer on the other. Not that the unbeliever is a Christian, but nevertheless, the non-believer is taken up into Christ in his incarnation.

PM: That’s right. Objectively.

JMF: Right. And there is, to that degree, a participation in Christ whether he knows it or not.

PM: True.

JMF: But the believer enters into a relationship that is personal and is knowing and is a fellowship, friendship, walking with God, and worshipful personal relationship that transcends the other.

PM: Yeah. Let me clarify something that I said a few minutes ago when I was talking about Rahner's statement to the effect that those who have an experience of hope have an experience of the resurrection whether they know it or not. What that tends to mean in his thought is that we can rely on our experiences of hope in order to explain the meaning of Christ's resurrection. The problem that I was pointing out was that for Torrance, you can't explain the resurrection by exploring people's experiences of hope, because the resurrection is its own explanation. We need to rely on the risen Lord himself to make sense of it to us.

When Rahner argued that you could have an anonymous experience of the resurrection just by having hope for eternal life, Torrance would say that is a docetic explanation of the resurrection, because it's equating the meaning of the resurrection with our hope for something beyond death. That's the point I was trying to get at. Christ died for the sins of the world so that everyone somehow is already included in his resurrection. The difference between Christians and others is that Christians recognize the meaning of that statement.

Any attempt to neutralize that statement by equating an experience of a knowledge of the resurrection with our experiences of hope for life beyond death subverts the need to believe in Christ's bodily resurrection and understand that as the meaning of eternal life. It could undermine the reality of eternal life, at least conceptually, because you would be equating it with something that's a universal experience instead of recognizing that it's something that can only be had and understood in faith by an actual union with the risen Lord — it loses specificity. Does that make better sense?

JMF: I think so. It would be the difference between recognizing that...to use an analogy, maybe not a very good one, but we all have a shadow if we're standing out in the sun. If you look at the shadow and then try to explain from the shadow what it means to be a human being, you wouldn't be able to get there from there. That doesn't mean that the shadow is not related in a very real and positive sense with a human being who is casting the shadow.

PM: In that sense, Christ's life to the resurrection casts a shadow over the entire human race, but only those who see the meaning of the events of his life understand the inner meaning.

JMF: It's an entry point for evangelism, it would seem, though, to be able to point out to someone that those things that are good in their nature,

their love for their children, for example, doesn't come from nowhere — it's a reflection of who Christ is in them and with them as a human being. It isn't something that springs out of them, nor does it come from nowhere. It's that Christ is already at work in you. Christ already is in you. Why not come, why not acknowledge what the source of this love is, and know that you are loved and accepted, and turn to him? Does that make sense?

PM: Well, yes, but the danger in that is that the focus would then be on people's experiences of love and not on the one who empowers it.

JMF: What I mean is that to help a person who thinks, which many do, that I'm worthless, God doesn't love me, how could he? If you knew me like I do, then you wouldn't be telling me that God could actually love me, so I need to get good before we have this discussion. But instead, we're able to say to them, God already loves you and accepts you. Where do you think this came from, or that came from? God has already done everything necessary for you. Why not acknowledge that and turn to him?

PM: That makes sense. I'd agree with that.

JMF: That's at the heart of where many people have difficulty in trying to comprehend Trinitarian theology, because they assume "You're saying that if Christ's union with humanity through the incarnation has actually made a difference already and he had made himself one with humanity in such a way that he will not let it go, and will not be who he is without humanity, then you're saying that everybody, even unbelievers, are saved."

That isn't the point. The point is that everyone is in union [with Christ], but not that everyone is a believer and is participating in the relationship in the way that a believer would, in the transformational way. But as an entry point for evangelism, you are able to say not that you have to do something in order to get God to like you, but that he already does. He's already taken you up and done everything necessary for you.

PM: That's right.

JMF: But the difficulty people have, again, is that they think, "You're teaching universalism. You're saying everyone is saved no matter what they do, because they're in union with Christ." But there's a difference between "in union with Christ" as an unbeliever and being in communion with Christ in the way that believers are.

PM: Of course. Torrance says that universalism is a form of rationalism. He rejects both universalism and the idea of conditional salvation because he wants to say just what you said — that by uniting

God and humanity in the history of Jesus Christ is, God has objectively unified us, overcome our self-will, our attempts to be independent of him, overcome our alienation, our suffering, and even death itself in the history of Jesus. That is taking place objectively, but also subjectively, in that Jesus was faithful to God in our place. That is the objective and subjective justification of the sinner, you might say.

As you said, we don't have to do anything in order for God to love us, and the very idea that we could, would miss the fact that he loves us while we're unlovable, because we're his enemies. But as you say, and Torrance says at one point... (well, you didn't quite say this, but it could be implied in what you say – help me if it's not the right thing! [laughing]) that none of us can say who is saved and who is not saved, because that's God's alone to do. It would be rationalism in the direction of universalism to make that statement. But on the other hand, to say that salvation is contingent on our response to the gospel, we throw salvation back on us and miss the point, the objective point that you were trying to make.

JMF: Exactly.

PM: He doesn't want to say either of those things, because he's leaving room for the grace of God, for God to act. God does will the salvation of all, and it is (in Torrance's mind) utterly inexplicable that people would reject the Savior, but it happened once on the cross, and even after his death and resurrection, it still can happen, because Christ does not force himself on people. Even though the goodness that people have comes from God through Christ, they may never acknowledge that. It's a possibility. Even when they do acknowledge that, I think Torrance would also say, even that's not under their control. That's the work of the Holy Spirit empowering them to see and to live subjectively what is objectively already a reality in the life of Christ.

JMF: By grace from beginning to end.

PM: Right.

GOD CHOSE TO ENTER OUR HUMANITY

Sin and salvation

JMF: There are a lot of ideas about salvation. I don't know if everybody wants to be saved, maybe not everyone thinks about it or cares, but those who do care want to be saved. What is the Bible driving at when it speaks of "salvation" and "being saved"? Is it being saved from sin, is it being saved from death, and that's it? Or what is salvation all about?

PM: It is being saved from sin *and* from death, because the consequences of sin and death are being cut off from God. I love the way C.S. Lewis puts it in his book *Mere Christianity*. He says, "The human machine was designed to run on God and there is no other possibility." The problem of sin is that we try to run on our own steam.

JMF: We're putting diesel in the gasoline engine.

PM: Exactly. Or sugar in the gas tank. So the human machine simply conks, and there's no way to solve that situation on our own, because we've created the problem by relying on ourselves (being in-turned upon ourselves, you might say), by being self-reliant, self-willed. Lewis argues that salvation means that we have to learn to un-train ourselves in what we've trained ourselves into for thousands of years, self-will, because it's self-will that cuts us off from our only source of happiness — God. Salvation is the overcoming of sin and death, but I agree with Torrance and Barth, who both argued that we don't even know the true meaning of

sin until we see God's grace, until we see what he looks like in light of God's love for us in Jesus Christ.

Barth said that there is such a thing as an unprofitable focus on sin. It can lead you to be morose. But when you see that sin and death mean that we as individuals try to live independently of God, when God did design, as Lewis said, the human machine to run on himself...then it makes a whole lot of sense to realize that salvation is an act of God for us that we cannot accomplish ourselves, and therefore free grace. It's also an act that includes us humanly because Jesus was fully human, and that act of God healed us humanly because the sinful human nature that was assumed in the Incarnation is now healed. Christ lived the life that is sinless. None of us can do that.

JMF: What's the problem with sin? Why does sin...other than the fact that it's destructive and hurts and ruins relationships... (I guess I'm answering the question myself). Isn't ruined relationships what makes sin, sin?

PM: Not necessarily, because you can speak about ruined relationships with psychologists...

JMF: But doesn't sin lie at the heart of that?

PM: No. Objectively, sin does lie at the heart of disrupted human relationships, but you can't simply equate the fact of disrupted human relationships with sin, because the real essence of sin is humans being self-willed, exercising their choices without trusting in God himself.

JMF: Isn't it being out of right relationship with God?

PM: Right.

JMF: And that results in bad human relationships.

PM: That's right. But you can't discover the meaning of sin by analyzing the human relationships, that's what I'm trying to say.

JMF: Right.

PM: Let me put it another way... Barth and Torrance say that we don't know the true meaning of sin except in and through Christ. The essence of sin was disclosed on the cross, in that even though we may claim that we want to live by grace, all of us are powerless to live by grace alone. Only God's grace, the love of God that comes to us in Jesus Christ, empowers our lives insofar as they are lived by God's gracious forgiveness of our sins in Christ. Therefore, seeing the true meaning of sin is not something that we can do for ourselves – it's something that comes to us as a disclosure from God when we see the events of the cross and the resurrection.

JMF: The separation or the alienation that we experience from God... sin lies at the heart of that.

PM: That's right.

JMF: You're saying God has acted from his side to forgive and...

PM: And also from the human side in Jesus Christ.

JMF: ...to a better way.

PM: Right. So that's the possibility of our salvation and the reality of our salvation.

JMF: The result of salvation, though, the product of salvation... maybe we could even say what salvation *is*, is to be back into the right relationship with God...

PM: Yes.

JMF: Not that we've ever been in the right relationship with God, but it's to become Christ's own relationship God.

PM: Through Christ...right. So in Christ, we are in right relationship.

JMF: So salvation is being drawn into his relationship with the Father.

PM: Correct. I also like the chapter in C.S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*, "The Perfect Penitent," where he says that nothing in God's nature corresponds to submission, suffering, and death. Because out of free love for us, Jesus here is perfect God; he also becomes the perfect penitent. He doesn't need to repent to believe, because he's already perfect, but out of love for us, he can repent perfectly because he's God, and he does it for us humanly and therefore when we share in his perfect obedience, we live the life that is ours in him. We can only do it because he enables us to do it.

JMF: And he didn't have to be baptized either, but he does it...

PM:...vicariously for us. Right. When he was baptized, it's not because he sinned, but because he assumed our sin for humanity and so his baptism was the beginning of his living a human life of perfect obedience, which culminated on the cross where he said, "Not my will, but thine be done," and then experienced God-forsakenness.

That raises a number of issues among contemporary theologians — can God suffer and die? C.S. Lewis said that nothing in God's nature corresponds to suffering, submission, and death. We have to live our salvation by submitting to Christ. Christ living for us as the Savior submits to God. There's nothing in God's nature that's like that, but he says by becoming incarnate, God can suffer, surrender, submit, and die, and he can do it as God and man. Unlike some of the fathers in the early church who would say that God cannot suffer and die because God is perfect, C.S. Lewis says that God can suffer, surrender, and die both as God and as

human in the incarnation.

Torrance is very good on this, too. He insists that God in Christ atones for our sins, bringing about repentance from within the person of the mediator. He would say that God both does suffer in our suffering, *and* he's not a God who moves from our suffering.

One of the great things that I like about Torrance is that he says that if Jesus was just a man dying on a cross, then Christianity would be immoral. When I first read that, I said, "What is he talking about?" When I went further, I realized that he was making sense, because if Jesus was just a man dying on a cross, then salvation would be the equivalent of human sacrifice or some human attempt at self-justification by placating God, and that would be an immoral...

JMF: Isn't that how a lot of people look at it? That God was very angry at humanity and...

PM: Something had to be done...

JMF: ...then Jesus comes along, and he's the one who loves humanity, so he says, if you're going to be that angry, then kill me and I'll take it on myself, that kind of thing, that he stands in the gap.

PM: Yes. I think that is common. To use a more popular image, C.S. Lewis's said, "I don't like thinking of atonement in the police court sense" because he thought that concept was immoral before he became a Christian. (He had been an atheist.) He said, "Because that would imply that Christ did something wrong and needed to be punished in our stead." He said, "I would rather think of the atonement as a kind friend helping us out of the hole that we've gotten ourselves into by doing something for us that we can't do for ourselves."

Torrance's view comes much closer to that second view. Torrance argues, if you put *God* on the cross, then not only is it *not* immoral, but now you see the depth of the love of God — that God was willing to sacrifice his own Son out of love for us while we were incapable of helping ourselves. God is not only not remote from us (as he could be if Jesus was just an innocent man trying to placate the deity), but he's actually the deity involved in the suffering of Jesus in an act that was geared to, and did in fact, overcome all suffering and death.

So you might ask, if he overcame all suffering and death, why is there still suffering and death? The answer is that our history is not *automatically* Christ's history, that Christ gives us the freedom to respond and to live within that history of faith. He gives us that interval between his first coming and his second coming as the time of freedom in which

we have that freedom, and we're given that freedom to live that life by faith now.

JMF: There's probably a lot more that could be said...

PM: Pages have been written on that, that's for sure.

Immanent and immutable

JMF: Let's talk about your book *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity*. What is the fundamental point you're getting across in this? (You alluded to this earlier.) You need to define "immanent Trinity" (it's not spelled imminent, like "just about to happen," but immanent, as "fully present"). [**PM:** Yes, with an A.] I want to read a comment on the back of the book that sets a tone. "Paul Molnar sets out a contemporary doctrine of the immanent Trinity and addresses the issue of how we can know God according to his true nature rather than create him in our own image."

PM: That opens a door to a discussion that I use when I introduce the topic of the doctrine of the God in class at St. John's. It's a story told by Colin Gunton, who had just had a conversation with a professor about a book that that professor had read, entitled *The God I Want*. The professor said to Colin Gunton that "I can't imagine a sillier enterprise than writing a book entitled "*The God I Want*," because it's not the God I *want*, but 'the God you're damn well going to get!'" I think that covers the point. In other words, God has his own existence in himself, and that is the doctrine of the immanent Trinity.

It's a doctrine that recognizes that God is God for us, because we would have no knowledge of God's eternal life, his immanent existence, his existence within himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, if it were not for God creating the world first, then revealing himself in history, reconciling us, and redeeming us, which is commonly referred to as the economic trinity — God's actions outside of himself. The Greek word is *oekonomia*, which literally means household, but was used as a term in the early church to refer to God's plan of salvation, and then his executing that plan within history as creator, reconciler, and redeemer.

I say in this book, that Barth says (and also Torrance, but Barth in this particular instance), that God is who he is – eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and that we know God through his revelation of himself in the economy, in history, but that we cannot reduce God to his revelation of himself in the economy. We have to make a clear distinction (but not separation, I argue in the book) between the immanent and the economic

trinity. If we do not make that distinction, then we would end up in our thinking reducing God to what he does for us, so that then all we have is a God who is present in history, but no God existing in himself.

Unfortunately, a number of theologians have what is called the purely economic doctrine of the trinity, reducing God to what God does for us. Writing a book entitled *The God I Want* has done that to the nth degree, you might say, because such thinking supposes that we can invent images of God and really be talking about God. In this book I argue that God has his own life and retains his own life. Even though he is in close union with us in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, he retains his own life. We can't confuse God's life with our life.

We don't want to say things like "God is not relational unless and until he relates with us." Some theologians hold that position. We don't want to say things that suggest that "God becomes the God he's going to be precisely by relating with us within history and working out his being within history." This is common in process theology. I'm not a big fan of process theology, because it misses the point of the doctrine of the immanent Trinity, which is that God has his life in himself, but that God is not a prisoner of his freedom. As one who loves, he loves us, but he remains God even as he loves us, so when he works outside of himself as our reconciler and redeemer, he doesn't abandon his own eternal existence.

I will say things in the book, following Barth and the early church, that God is eternally Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and would be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit even if he never decided to create, to reconcile, and redeem the world. Barth says something like that in Volume 1, Part 2 of the *Church Dogmatics*. Barth never abandoned that thinking throughout the *Church Dogmatics*, not because he believed that God is locked up within himself and had no relations with us (otherwise he never would have written 1000 plus pages of the *Church Dogmatics* telling us about how God is involved with us in creation), but because unless God has his life in himself, it becomes superfluous for us to talk about his life with us, it becomes projection, it becomes us working up our own images of God, and that's the huge difficulty that I address in that book.

JMF: The word immutable is often used in describing God, and we think of that as being unchangeable, which relates back to what you were talking about before — how some think of God as not doing anything in himself until such time as he creates the world and involves himself in the world. We have a couple passages in Scripture, "I change not" in Malachi,

and “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever,” but particularly “I change not” in the Old Testament. What is meant by “immutable”? How is God unchangeable? In what way?

PM: The answer is that in all his changes, God remains the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That’s the importance of the doctrine of the immanent Trinity. Let me explain. Torrance makes the statement that “God is always Father but not always creator. God was always Son but not always incarnate.” So in those two statements...

JMF: We already see that *immutable* does not mean absolutely no change whatsoever in God.

PM: Right.

JMF: So it means something else.

PM: Because if God was the absolute instance of changelessness, he would be a prisoner of his inability to change. He’d be a prisoner of his freedom. That’s not what Christians mean when they speak of divine freedom.

JMF: That’s not what Christians *should* mean when they speak of... (laughing).

PM: Well, I stand corrected (laughing). Right. Here Torrance and Barth are similar, because they’re both saying that God’s freedom has to be understood positively as his freedom to love according to his own will. So, not being a prisoner of his own freedom, God can choose to love us as creator. God can choose to become incarnate. Torrance says when God does choose to create us and to love us by becoming incarnate, these are new actions, and he says they’re new even for God. If you don’t say that, then you’ve got to embrace some notion of Origen’s idea (espoused very early in church history) that there’s no distinction between God’s internal relations and God’s external relations. In other words, you’re basically arguing that the world and God are co-eternal.

This was rejected in the early church, and Torrance is explicitly rejecting it. He says, and this is the import of the doctrine of the Trinity together with doctrines of Christology, that the Father-Son relation has priority over the creator-creature relationship. If we don’t see that, then we will end up collapsing the immanent into the economic Trinity, and one of the ways that that could show is with this rigid notion of unchangeability, because we’ll be projecting our ideas of immobility, of God as the unmoved mover, into God, but if God is unmoved and in that way he moves creation, then God doesn’t have any active, dynamic, relational freedom in himself. He’s, in a sense, a prisoner of being unmoved. That

would prohibit God from coming into space and time and enabling him to relate with us from within space and time. So there's a lot at stake in that question.

JMF: The passage in Malachi speaks to what it's talking about, because it says, "I am the Lord, I change not, therefore you sons of Jacob are not destroyed." His unchangeableness is specifically in reference to his covenant faithfulness to love them in spite of their rebellion.

PM: Exactly.

JMF: That's where we can have total confidence. I've heard people say, "If you're saying that God can change (after you explain how he became creator, that's a change, he became incarnate, that's a change), then how can I be sure that he will not change his mind about loving me and saving me?" That's exactly where there is no changeableness in God, in that covenant faithfulness, his steadfast love.

PM: That's because God is eternally the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the one God who loves in freedom. He's both loving and free, not one or the other — one *and* the other. That's crucial.

If God were not free in his loving... I think it was in volume 2:1 of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth attacked this person named Angelus Silesius who said, in explaining the doctrine of creation, "I know that without me God cannot for an instant be." Barth was really upset at that statement because it suggests just what we were talking about before — that God needs us in order to exist. Barth makes a few little remarks on the side saying, "When God creates us, it's not as though he needed a playmate, it's not as though he needed to satisfy some need of his. He creates us out of the free love that he is, but nothing compels him to do it. It's his free will to do it."

It's a crucially important insight. We have theologians today (I mention them in the book) who argue that because in human love *we* need others to love, therefore it's better to say that God needs us, because otherwise there wouldn't be true love, if he didn't need us. They missed the whole point of the Christian doctrine of God. God loves us with a divine love that's sovereign and free, that overflows to us without any need, and therefore can effectively overcome our self-love in a way that nothing else would.

JMF: It makes sense to me. And we're out of time. So if we need to expound on that, we'll have to do it next time we get together.

GOD'S WILL AND OUR DECISIONS

JMF: Many people have the idea that God is unchangeable, because he's perfect. If God were to do something different, or if he were to change his mind or answer a prayer from somebody, then that would mean that the way he was before the change wasn't perfect, and he had to become perfect, or he was perfect and if he changed he wasn't perfect before, so therefore, using that kind of logic, God never changes, and he therefore had to decide everything that would ever happen ahead of time, and everything plays itself out that way. If that were true, then how can we expect him to answer prayers and interact with us in a real and present way?

PM: We wouldn't.

JMF: So what's a better way of looking at that?

PM: A better way of looking at that is to say that God is free and knows events that will happen precisely as genuinely contingent historical events as he wills them to exist non-deterministically. Torrance is good on this, pointing out that in Greek thinking, the notion of logical necessity and determinism seems to be endemic to the way they think about creation, about reality. That leads to the ideas of fate and so on. Torrance would say, I think rightly, that Christianity Christianized Hellenism rather than the idea that Christianity was Hellenized.

JMF: Hellenism is Greek thought.

PM: Exactly. The epitome of Greek thought, projecting sensual images into the deity, was erroneous.

JMF: In other words, thinking of God as having the same kinds of passions and so on that human beings have...

PM: Correct. Thinking of God deterministically would be sort of an extension of that sort of fatalistic, necessitarian, logical thinking. Since the Christian God is a living God and is free and loving, when he acts toward creation, it's from the overflowing abundance of who he is. It's not out of need, it's not because of imperfection, it's not because he needs to fill something up in himself. When he creates the world he creates the world out of love according to his own wisdom for his own purpose. Sometimes that purpose may seem unclear to us, but he has a purpose, and it's not arbitrary, and it's not a deterministic sort of purpose that suggests that he's encumbered by his relation with us. The existence of the world as a distinct entity is not a threat to God's being.

JMF: Or to his sovereignty. So that would mean that there are any number of choices a person can make and any number of paths a person's life can take, without God determining that way ahead of time or before all time, and yet that is still under God's control, and it's still part of what he is working out for his redemptive purposes.

PM: Yes, with one proviso. I would like to remove the word *determined* from that, and say that God knows those events as free events that we will do, but he knows them precisely because he's not encumbered by the past or by the future. He's always the one he is, transcending time and within time, so that he's not losing part of his being when the past goes away and the present goes into the future....and he's not yet because there's a future. He's present to all times because he's God and eternal.

Torrance gets into some of this stuff and so does Barth... God has his own time, a unique time, in which he doesn't pass away, as we do. Our time is marked by its limitations and by the fall, so we don't really have time. We have no control over time. Created time must find its meaning always in God's eternal time. God's eternal time, however, is unique to him.

Both Barth and Torrance say that God has time, because he has time for us in Jesus Christ. That time is the healing of our time, so that we share in Christ's eternal humanity, because Christ, although he hasn't eternally existed (otherwise he wouldn't be truly human), now exists eternally as the risen and ascended Lord. When we share in that, we have eternal life — life without end. Since God is not encumbered by the limitations of past, present, and future as we are, he can know things that are future for us, precisely as events that are freely determined, contingently determined,

and not necessarily determined, in a deterministic sense.

JMF: “Contingently determined” means what?

PM: It means that they’re totally dependent on God’s purpose and will to be what they are. It means that they might not even *be* at all, or they might be differently, depending upon God’s will for them.

JMF: Sometimes a Christian will get the idea that in a given situation there’s only one right decision they could make, and that they must seek out what God’s will would be for them in this situation. They assume that there is only one possibility of what God’s will might be for them, and that if they make the wrong choice, that would be a disaster. They want to make sure their decision is God’s will, so they enter into whatever regimen that they think might help, whether it be prayer and fasting or seeking counsel or whatever. Often they end up, regardless of the counsel they seek, doing what they want anyway.

Is there only one right decision, and is God’s will always a specific thing that we must do, and a specific decision, that there’s only one will of God and then everything else would be wrong? How does God work with us, in other words? How does he interact with us on a day-to-day basis?

PM: It’s not an easy question. I’m thinking back to Barth’s ethics that he develops in Volume 2, Part 2 of the *Church Dogmatics* and then in 3 and 4 where he talks about the divine command. It’s been a long time since I’ve read that material, but if I remember, he argues that God’s command infallibly reaches each person in their particular circumstances and makes itself known to them as his will because it is a permission, it’s a freedom to serve him, which enables that person to be what God wants them to be.

One of the marks of coming up against the legitimate divine command is the fact that it’s a freedom, not an enslavement. It never says to the person, “If you do this, this, and this, then you will get that, that, and that.” It’s always a freedom to obey God himself. So there is only one possibility – but not in a legalistic sense that you have four possibilities there and you choose one, and if you get the right one, then things go well for you and if you choose one of the other three, then you’re in trouble. That would be the wrong way to think about this sort of interaction.

We really do interact with God, but we’re not set in a position...(Barth would often say, and I think Torrance would follow him in this)...like Hercules at the crossroads, we choose between two possibilities, and if we choose the right one, then everything’s good, and if we choose the wrong one, everything’s not good – partly because our wills are enslaved to sin and are freed by God in Christ for service of God.

Love of God and love of neighbor in Barth's thinking means that the divine command reaches each individual in different circumstances and at different times in each person's life...that's why prayer is necessary, to discern precisely what that is, and then to obey. It's not, as it were, a test, where if you get this point right then you're okay, and if you don't... It's really a freedom, a freeing of a person from the illusion that they could determine God's will by their choices, because they can't, they can only obey. Let's say you were called to do a Christian act at a given moment – you either do it or you don't do it. You either obey or you don't. It's not a question of trying to figure out which is the right way to go.

JMF: Some people struggle over whether they should buy this car or that car. They want to get the whole church to pray for them to make the right decision. It's as though they think there's only one right choice they can make. Sometimes the pastors of certain churches will enter into that and presume to speak for God and tell them, you should get the white car because that's... We can bring some almost-superstition to every decision, assuming that we have to be careful that we stay within the will of God, but pretending that we know or struggling over the fact that we don't know.

PM: That doesn't sound very freeing, does it?

JMF: No, it sounds so...

PM: It's kind of unnerving, you might say. In such circumstances we can entrust our decisions to the care of God and to God's forgiving grace, so if we made what turns out to be a bad decision, a year from now sell the car, get another one, don't worry about it. I think we can trust in God's loving care and in the fact that he will bring good even out of bad decisions.

JMF: More of a lifestyle of trusting God to help us through the decisions we make.

PM: Correct. And trust in his forgiving grace when things don't go exactly the way they should.

JMF: There are certain principles anybody can use in trying to make a wise decision. You want to weigh the pros and cons. You want to get wise counsel, and you want to listen to good judgment about it and so on. But at some point you have to make a decision.

PM: An informed decision. Especially with regard to cars. If I'm going to buy a new car, I want to know every detail about that car.

JMF: There are many things we could obsess over. But when it boils down to it, we want to bring our Christian life, our walk with Christ, into

whatever circumstance or decision we might make. Sometimes we make poor decisions and we still bring with that our faith that God will help us through. Sometimes we make a good decision, and we still bring with that our faith that God will bless us, help us to use it rightly, not foolishly.

PM: One of the good things in that is that we don't have to worry about whether our decisions in the last analysis were right or wrong, because Christ promises to make good for us. He's responsible for us. We are responsible to him and to God, but because he has made himself responsible for us, we don't have to make a final judgment about what we're doing. We leave that to him, to his care.

JMF: But at the same time we realize that decisions have consequences. If we do a foolish thing, then it's going to have consequences.

PM: Which we do at least once a day, maybe twice a day.

JMF: Perhaps most of the time. Yeah. That raises opportunities to trust God to have mercy on us.

PM: That's the whole point of prayer. Some of the botched decisions that we make point us once again to our utter need to rely on God's forgiving grace. That's not something we can control by plotting and planning every little detail of our lives and getting the whole church to pray for it, you know, that it's not raining on Thursday morning.

JMF: When I leave for our vacation.

PM: That sort of thing.

JMF: These are the kinds of requests that sometimes come in.

PM: People might conclude from that, that since it is raining, therefore God doesn't love me. So that concept of God is all too human a concept.

JMF: To what degree does God interact with us on a personal level with our daily life? Is it a matter of how much we bring him in, or is it that he's always present but he lets us make our own decisions and make mistakes and live with the consequences, or is it hands-off, he's out there watching us, for whatever reason? How does that work?

PM: The God that we know in Jesus Christ is not a hands-off deity, because he has loved us while we were still sinners and powerless to love him. He continues to love us in exactly the same way in Jesus Christ. There's no limit to his approach to us. We can only love because God empowers us to love at any given moment. God is deeply involved in each moment of our lives, but sometimes we're so busy that we don't see that and we don't pay attention to that, or we look right past it toward our own agenda, which, when put into effect, will enable us to sort of redefine who

God is and what revelation is and what salvation should mean, to make ourselves feel comfortable.

God is not a distant deistic deity — that's the dualism that Torrance always refers to as problematic — because the God who meets us in Jesus Christ meets us in a myriad of different forms experiences. He is never far off but is sometimes hidden to us in our own experience because we're not paying attention or not really trusting God. We're sort of reinventing the God we want instead of trusting in God as he is.

JMF: Isn't another form of reinventing the God we want, to take the approach of... you hear in some conversations, the Lord told me to take this job or the Lord told me that we should move to Kenya and be a missionary. Sometimes the whole church knows it's a foolish decision, and yet the person is convinced that the Lord told them that, and in their own mind, they bring God into every decision they make, as though this is what the will of God is for me. It's as though I don't have to take responsibility for my own decisions because God told me to do this. So for you to tell me that this was foolish...

PM: That could just as easily be a manipulation of God's will. That's a problem. For example, God told me this morning I should be a chemical engineer. I don't know a thing about chemical engineering, but God told me to do it, so I'm going to go and do that. If you get such a revelation supposedly, you should have to then look at the abilities that you have, the talents, where your life has been to this point, and ask yourself seriously whether that is something that God is asking you to do. I don't think God is actually telling you to do that at all.

JMF: God is telling me that you're supposed to do that.

PM: I should be a chemical engineer because I utterly failed at the arts, so I might as well be a chemical engineer. Barth once said, I think to someone who was asking about whether they should be a theologian, you have to look at whether you have the temperament, the qualities that would lead to someone being a good theologian. You might have none of those things. If that's true, then that's a sign of God's interacting with you. You have to use common sense.

JMF: I think this happens too often with people who take up a missionary plan. They come to the conclusion that God is calling them to some sort of missionary service, and they will pluck their family up without regard to the effect on the children of moving to a new country, a new culture and so on, without really understanding what they're getting into, when they have heard a presentation or they have heard of a need and

they feel some twinge of conscience or something, and so they assume that God is moving them to make this huge life-changing decision. Sometimes it becomes a major mistake for the family, but they're convinced that this is what God wants them to do. I don't know that there's any solution to that, because we all stand prey to that in one way or another.

PM: It's true. That's an extremely difficult decision, but the point that you made about that person needing to look at the overall effect on the entire family should weigh heavily in such a decision.

JMF: Getting good counsel from not just the person and people who want them to go, but from people who have been there, done that, and from their pastors, from other counselors, and are listening to the suggestions and ideas from more than one point of view on the topic.

PM: No question. I'm thinking of Tom Torrance's own life when he was asked by Barth to follow him in [the University of] Basel, and he stated that was one of the hardest decisions of his life. He decided not to go because he didn't want to uproot his children from school and bring them into a setting where they would have to speak and learn in German and so on. He was never sorry that he made that decision, but it was difficult. He had to weigh all of his family issues and so on, and in retrospect I think it was a good decision.

JMF: Just because a thing might seem spiritual or holy doesn't mean that you can't continue to serve God effectively in any other way.

PM: Absolutely.

JMF: But we sometimes substitute going out and doing some kind of a seemingly spiritual thing, trying to make up for all the other problems in our life, to feel better about our walk with God.

PM: Very true. We have an amazing ability to deceive ourselves.

JMF: Isn't that part of what we learn from Trinitarian theology, in the fact that Christ is already everything for us, and our trust is in him to be everything we need to be?

PM: That's why when Barth talked about Christian vocation, he said the Christian preacher and teacher should point vigorously toward Christ as the one who calls us toward his purposes, and not point toward Christian experience as the way forward in these matters. I think he was right.

JMF: It's often hard to face the fact that maybe the best place for us is right where we are, being who we should be in Christ, as opposed to finding a new and exciting place somewhere else that promises...

PM: But may not deliver. I couldn't agree more.

THE GIVER AND THE GIFT

JMF: You've written about grace being identical with its giver. What is the significance of that?

PM: It's extremely significant. Jesus Christ *is* God's grace, present among us. That means that in Jesus Christ, God actively loves us, binds us to himself, reveals himself to us, and that means therefore that you cannot detach that act of God (because God's being and God's act are one) from what God is doing in that particular history.

If you did that, you might then think of God's grace as a detachable quality that adheres in human nature, and you might come up with such ideas as creative grace and different types of grace. Your focus then would be off the reality of grace, which is identical with Christ himself and, more importantly, your focus would be on the gifts of the Christian life and living the Christian life in abstraction from the one who empowers you to live it.

It's enormously important not to separate the gifts that we receive in Christ, living as part of the new creation — faith, love of God, love of neighbor. It's enormously important that we do not detach those from the giver, because if we do, then we no longer *need* Christ, and to the extent that we don't need Christ, we become self-reliant once again. We can become self-reliant under the guise of speaking about grace.

Torrance is great in pointing out the subtle dangers of Pelagianism in the human heart — our constant attempt to turn back on ourselves, even using Christian concepts in order to validate such a turn. He is dead against

that, rightly so. It's a disaster to separate the gift from the giver. If you separate the gift of atonement from the giver, then the atonement becomes something we do.

Some theologians today (you may be aware of some of them) argue that if we reconceived salvation today as us trying to create a better world, then we have to realize that we need more than one savior of the world — we need many hearts, hands, and feet to make the world a better place.

Yes, we need many people working for a better world, that's true. But you can't equate salvation with people working for a better world. That's what happens, though, if you detach grace, the gift, from the giver. Where there is grace, where there is the freedom of love, to love God and to love neighbor by working for a better world, there we are bound to Christ and totally dependent on Christ and not on us trying to make a better world and therefore reconstructing a notion of salvation by saying we need more saviors. That sort of thinking is the ultimate proof that we're attempting to save ourselves, then we've missed grace, we've bypassed it.

God's actions and being

JMF: It seems to tie in with the concept of separating God's being from his acts. What does that mean, and how does that relate?

PM: Torrance and Barth were big on stressing that God's being and acts are one. When dealing with the Trinity, Barth used to say that God is one being in three modes of existence — he preferred “modes of existence” to “person” — it did not make him a modalist, as some have suggested.

JMF: He's using “mode” in a different way.

PM: Right. He's allowing God — the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit — to dictate his meaning of “mode,” so he's not trying to conform the Trinity to a prior idea of “mode.” He would say that God is eternally one being in his act as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When God decides to and then acts as creator — the Father through his word and in the Spirit, and then again as reconciler and redeemer — we need God in Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's act, but you can't separate that act from the being of God, so that as God's act in Jesus Christ, we're actually meeting Jesus Christ.

Barth would then argue that if in your thinking you ignore Jesus Christ or don't begin thinking about God with Jesus Christ, then, in effect, you bypass the one possibility for a knowledge of God that comes to us from God. We can't bypass God and then attempt to know God, because that's a recipe for idolatry. Torrance makes statements such as, “We must think

from the center in God and not from a center in ourselves, because God's being and act are one."

The act of God in Jesus Christ in the incarnation is God coming to us, approaching us, empowering us to know him. You could never say, as some have, that "Jesus is our historical choice, is our foundational figure for our Christian religion," because who he is is utterly dependent upon God's act and thus upon God, because you can't separate God's act from his being.

Both Barth and Torrance would say that God's act is the Holy Spirit empowering us to believe in Jesus Christ. They both cite 1 Corinthians 12:3, which says, "No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit." They take that seriously. Barth will make statements such as this, "Knowledge of God is an event enclosed in the mystery of the divine Trinity." He means that God himself in the Holy Spirit, uniting us to Christ and thus to the Father, begins, upholds, and completes our knowledge of God.

Such knowledge can never be traced back to anything in our thinking or anything within our experience. Our thinking and experience would be real enough, and they would be real knowledge of God and they would really describe God, because they would be faithful descriptions of God's act and being, but none of that is under our control, and all that is a miracle, because it goes against the grain of our natural attempts to create God in our own image.

Both theologians take the problem of sin, the problem of our human limitations seriously. Barth was speaking about God's hiddenness, even in revelation. That is, that nothing in history in and of itself can disclose God to us. We need God to act, and God does act in his Holy Spirit and in his word. When we hear his word by the power of the Holy Spirit through God's acting, we're already united to God's being, because you can't separate being and act. The fact that God's being and act are one is crucial. For Barth, they annihilated the whole need for natural theology.

JMF: What is natural theology?

PM: It's the attempt to know God by relying on nature, reason, conscience, or history. It's the attempt to reason to God's existence without relying on God's revelation as attested in Scripture. It's the attempt to know God without biblical faith. What one of us doesn't have some knowledge of God or some natural goodness in us? The presumption is that we have *some* knowledge of God, but when we know God in Jesus Christ, we can't rely on *any* of that — to know God with certainty. All of

that is called into question and comes under judgment. We must give up any attempt to rely on our natural goodness or our natural knowledge, and take up our cross and follow him, Torrance would argue (and I think he's right). We don't want to take that away from people, because that's the last hope of the person who refuses to hear the word of God in Jesus Christ — that's all they have to cling to, is their attempts to build a knowledge of God on themselves.

Barth has a long section in *Dogmatics* volume 2.1 where he talks about natural theology. He doesn't want to disprove it or argue, because in the act of disproving it, he would be engaging in natural theology. He simply wants to say that because of the Fall and because God has approached us in Jesus Christ and made himself known as the reconciler and redeemer, if we bypass those particular activities of God, then we will be constructing an image of God that's in variance with who God actually is. That's the problem of sin and the problem of natural theology. When we really know God, it's by the miracle of grace and not by anything we did. Even when we know God, it's not by means of any twist or turn in our usage of concepts. It's only when our concepts are commandeered, so to speak, by God, that we actually know him.

In both Barth and Torrance, following Hilary of Poitiers (Barth put it more forcefully than Torrance, although Torrance could be pretty forceful), Barth said that “words are subject to realities, not realities to words.” He said, “Anybody who does not accept that axiom as their working axiom as a theologian is no theologian and never will be.” Torrance adopted that axiom himself and used it as part of his repertoire.

So, natural theology is an attempt to make the reality of God acting in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit subject to our words, our ideas of God, rather than allowing God to define who God is to us. In the one instance, it's understanding seeking faith, which can't lead anywhere, theologically speaking. In the other instance, it's faith in the word of God being led by the Holy Spirit seeking understanding. But again, faith itself comes from the Holy Spirit; it's not something that we invented. It's grounded in God.

Law, sin, and repentance

JMF: What is the relationship between a believer and what the Bible calls the law of God? How does the believer relate to the law of God in the sense of both the Old Testament and New Testament?

PM: Torrance says something to the effect that our entire lives have to be recreated ethically, morally, and legally speaking, because people can

use morality and the law to hide behind them, in the sense that they wall themselves up by trying to obey the law and thus not having to obey God — legalism and moralism, you might say. When we hear the word of God in Jesus Christ, all of that changes. When we really hear the word of God, God frees us to live in harmony with his will for us. We will then be living according to his law, because the point of the law is to direct us to our total reliance on God — God’s love and God’s grace.

Nobody ever quite lives that or has lived that, except Christ himself. That’s why we were saved outside of and apart from the law. Christ didn’t come to destroy the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them. He gave them their true meaning, put them on a true footing, so to speak. In Christ we see that the law is not an end in itself, and neither is morality an end in itself, because we can use both to try to justify ourselves and save ourselves, and we can use both to hide behind them, making it seem as though we’re really good and law-abiding when all the while we’re not honestly relying on God. So there’s sort of a suspension Torrance talks about.

Barth talks about the fact that when we really know God through revelation, the law won’t make any difference, it won’t matter, because we will simply be trusting in God and doing God’s will. We will be obeying the law, but not because we are trying to obey the law, but simply because it’s not even a question for us. Trusting in God, we’ll really be loving God and loving our neighbor and doing those things that would signify that.

JMF: It’s like Paul said in Romans 13: “Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.” Jump from verse 8 to verse 10: “Love does no harm to its neighbor, therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” The law gets taken care of when you’re walking in the gospel.

PM: Right. That’s what Barth meant when he said that you won’t be worrying about the law and its fulfillment when you love God, because you’ve been loved by God first and empowered to love God. You will spontaneously love your neighbor ... fulfill the law, in effect.

JMF: I’ve known people who were so focused on the law that they are the opposite. If you think of loving your neighbor, you wouldn’t think of them, because they’re so austere and they’re so judgmental, both against themselves and everybody else, because of their focus on the law (as an end in itself, practically) — they think it’s the stepping stone to God, as opposed to a focus on the grace of God in Christ.

PM: Dealing with those sorts of people is difficult.

JMF: It is. God pity the poor group, nation, church, or whoever might be under the authority of such a person.

PM: I agree. I think of C.S. Lewis saying you can tell the people who are behaving in such ways by the haunted look of those whom they are trying to love. Trying to fulfill that law of love can become a legalistic activity.

JMF: You talk about the love of God being “unconditional.” What does that mean?

PM: Barth quotes from John, where it says that “God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son that those who should believe in him would have eternal life.” The love of God is identical with the sending of Jesus Christ to love us while we were enemies of God. The gist of that statement is captured in Barth’s response. It’s a crucial statement.

JMF: As Paul says in Romans, “Christ died for us while we were yet sinners and he demonstrates his love for us in that.”

PM: I think that’s crucial. It demonstrates to us that any attempt to love God, without recognizing God’s love of us first, is a replication of the predicament of self-will and sin, isolating ourselves more and more from God. That isolation can take place even under the guise of Christian categories, which makes the situation more difficult. That’s an important point.

JMF: It comes home for people, if they could embrace it, the most when they find themselves — I’m talking about believers or Christians who find themselves embroiled in sin. They’ve failed in some habitual sin or they have done something that is outrageous, and their first response is typically, “How can God still love me after this?” There’s a depression that sets in and a sense of being cut off from God. It’s renewing and helpful (and it’s not easy to do, because it seems so unreal at the time) to remember that Christ died for you while you’re still a sinner, while you were still enemies. He doesn’t feel any differently about you today than he did yesterday, before you did that, or than he will tomorrow, after you have gotten through your emotional grieving and repentance process.

PM: That’s a great point.

JMF: But we have to remember always that this love of God is not something that’s going to go away, and it’s not something that’s going to change, and it’s not something we can move beyond its limits.

PM: We shouldn’t really want to.

JMF: Not that we want to, but we can’t. Whatever state we find ourselves in, we can go back to the arms of the prodigal father.

PM: I was also thinking of the parable of the prodigal son. It’s without

conditions. If somebody took the inheritance and I was the father, would I really welcome that person back without conditions or would I say, “You can come back, but I’m controlling all the money from here on out”?

JMF: I would have all sorts of conditions.

PM: I would have all sorts of conditions, but God has none. The fact that he loves us in Christ gives a permission, a freedom, for us to live that new life, so we can trust in God’s forgiving grace. Torrance (and Barth, too) was vociferous in speaking against any idea of conditional salvation. The notion of conditional salvation destroys the unconditionally of God’s love, because if salvation is conditional on anything we do, then we’re thrown back upon ourselves to try to make good something that we can’t make good. We can’t possibly make good, because God loved us while we were still sinners. It turns into a vicious circle at that point.

JMF: I can hardly think of the parable of the prodigal son without thinking of Henri Nouwen’s book, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, where he takes Rembrandt’s painting and analyzes each part of it in connection with the story of the parable. It’s such a moving and reassuring rehearsal of the unconditional love that God has for us.

PM: I was thinking a moment ago of C.S. Lewis, where he says, “Repentance is not something that God demands of you before he takes you back – it’s simply a description of what going back to God is like.” We can’t go back to God without it, but it’s not a condition of God’s loving us, it’s rather the thing you do when you recognize what God has done on the cross and in the resurrection (and recognizing that is not under our control either). But if you say that you’re going to turn back to God and you’re not submitting to God and therefore repenting, you haven’t returned to God; you’ve just returned to an idea of God and you’re once more trying to save yourself conditionally, you might say.

JMF: Don’t we sometimes turn repentance into some kind of a work or some kind of a chore or duty? Instead of freely trusting that we can simply return to God who loves us, we project ourselves onto God as being somebody who is going to require a certain amount of penance or a certain number of deeds (or whatever we have in our head) before he’s going to accept us back. We think that repentance needs to be tooth-grinding and fist-clenching and begging and sackcloth and ashes.

PM: And hair shirts, and so on. I think that’s disastrous. That would not be living by grace. Living by grace means that we can trust in Christ and turn to him, as you said.

JMF: In the prodigal son, this son’s repentance was not a great

repentance at all, because he really was...

PM: He realized that he was feeding pigs.

JMF: ...and he just wanted a decent meal among the servants who he knew were living better than he was. He didn't expect the kind of reception that he got.

PM: That's right.

JMF: All he knew was, that's where I need to go to stay alive. And so he went back.

PM: There's a moral in that, right? Those who are searching for the perfect form of repentance before they repent are going to have a problem, because even our repentance is the repentance of unprofitable servants, you might say. Even in our repentance, we're dependent on the heavenly Father taking us back.

JMF: In one sense we could forget about our repentance and simply trust God to love us and go back to him trusting that he will accept us, love us, help us.

PM: That is the nature of God's unconditional love.

JMF: Thought of that way, repentance and trust or faith are the same thing.

PM: I think so.

JMF: What's your next book?

PM: I'm working on a sequel to my book *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity*, and it's going to come out with InterVarsity Press. I'm working with Gary Deddo on that. I'm going to put some real time into that this summer. I haven't put as much time into it as I should have.

JMF: Is there a potential title or a working title?

PM: The title is *Faith, Freedom, and the Spirit*. In the first book I focused on the need to acknowledge God's freedom in himself so as to recognize the way God was acting within history — it was really God and not just our using theological language to describe ourselves in place of God. So in this book I focus on Barth and Torrance again, but I'm going to look at the way the Holy Spirit works in connection with reconciliation and redemption, and then talk about how God works in the economy empowering us and enabling us to know him and participate in life, without blurring the distinction between creator and creature, but actually affirming the two and therefore engendering human freedom. I'm going to focus on the work of the Holy Spirit and knowing God through the Holy Spirit and reconciliation and the work of the Holy Spirit in redemption.

JMF: There hasn't been a lot of work specifically on the Holy Spirit in regard to Trinitarian theology...

PM: No, there hasn't. So that's the direction I would like to move. For all who might have thought that I was maintaining the divine freedom in terms of the doctrine of the immanent Trinity... (Some people have interpreted my book to mean that I was separating God from his actions, but I wasn't, because I wouldn't have written the book if God was separate from us. The only reason I wrote the book was to say that God who is active in history is free and acts free in love within history.)

So I would like to clear up some of those misunderstandings by focusing on the Holy Spirit and showing how, when the Spirit unites us to Christ, there are genuine human actions of those who are reconciled, but you can't read off reconciliation from those who are acting, any more than you can read off what it means to be a Christian by looking at what a Christian does, because sometimes there are Christians who behave well and sometimes there Christians who behave badly.

JMF: The same Christian.

PM: That's right. I would argue against those who say that you can judge the truth of Christology by the ethical fruits of those who live the Christian life. You can't. The truth of Christology is judged by who Jesus is as God's action among us, actively reconciling us to himself even now. And the only way to know that is through the Holy Spirit.

So that's where I'm hoping to proceed with my next work. It's been a while since I've looked at the chapters as I've fleshed them out, and I might have to make revisions as I go and as I learn different things. But I think it's going to be about nine chapters. Hopefully it will be interesting. I'll deal with questions that are raised about my first book, and then I'll focus on God's acting within history, all the while making sure that I'm speaking about God acting within history and then human beings being freed by God to know and love him.

JMF: Is there a tentative publication date yet?

PM: [The book was published in 2015.] I teach full time at the moment, and I don't have any research leaves coming up, so I am mainly working during the summers and during the year as well. Next year I'm going to be preparing some lectures to give as well, so hopefully those lectures will work out as chapters within that new book.

JMF: We'll look forward to seeing it.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN?

JMF: Our guest today is Dr. Cherith Fee Nordling, [now Associate Professor of Theology at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, in Lombard, Illinois]. An ordained minister, preacher and popular lecturer, Dr. Nordling is author of numerous articles including, “Being Saved as a New Creation,” “Karl Barth and the Pietists,” and “Becoming Who We Are: Incarnation, Identity and Vocation.” Her first book [is *Knowing God by Name: A Conversation between Elizabeth A. Johnson and Karl Barth*, published by Peter Lang in 2010].

Thanks for joining us today.

CFN: Thank you for having me.

JMF: Would you begin by telling us how you came to be involved with Trinitarian theology?



CFN: Trinitarian theology (without having that name, and especially the fact that those two words feel very loaded and hard to understand) has been part of my way of knowing and loving and thinking about God for my whole life.

Having come up through the tradition that I did, the person of the Holy Spirit was very present, clear and active. My understanding of Jesus as God who had come among us and as Savior was something from my childhood that I've always known and loved, and God as Father.

I was raised in a family where I was invited into the love of God as my Father through my father and my parents. This was the way that we spoke about God: as Father, Son, and Spirit – that was always part of how I knew God. It was much later, in my mid-to-late 20s, where the term *Trinitarian* began to take root as a way of being part of our worship life in our Presbyterian church.

I came into that Reformed tradition in my 20s and I loved being in these creedal traditions where you got to say the Nicene Creed and you got to say the Apostles' Creed like bullet points or shorthand, or sort of PowerPoint presentation of the gospel. To affirm these things would get deep in my soul. Finally, one day a dear friend was worshipping and praying to God as triune, as the triune one who she exalted and loved and was loved by. The penny dropped – I thought, that's a beautiful term that isn't in the Bible but all of its content is in the Bible – this beautiful way of speaking about God as the one God who is God this way – as three persons in communion.

The theology side (I'd always been a little nervous about theology) is very ivory tower and distant from the way that we're trying to live day-to-day as faithful believers in the market place. Yet I started to recognize that as a general term for saying, "How do we think about God, and how do we think about everything else in relation to God – to let that word be this covering. I thought, "There is a lot at stake whether we get this theology accurate or not." I don't mean *right*, because theology is deep and rich, and God's way of giving himself to us is clear, in terms of who he is as Father, Son, and Spirit. But the ways that he lets us reflect on him are many and good. *Right* and *wrong* always feels like there is only one way, and everything else is wrong. One of the beauties of being in the Trinitarian theology conversation is to go, "It's sort of like this, and when we think about this..." There are many angles that we as creatures can try to glimpse, and love and worship out of.

All of that life in the church made those terms less frightening to me when it came time to actually doing study, which I hadn't anticipated falling into but ended up in my mid-30s. I went back to school and realized that the deep questions I had – what does it mean to be truly human, what does it mean to be human in relation to God – were going to be answered

only out of the only true human who has ever pulled it off – Jesus.

JMF: So you started to pursue some work in psychology at first...

CFN: I did. We were noticing a lot of amazing things in our congregation. People were coming in through radical encounters with the Lord. Lives were deeply changed, but they were coming in out of horrendous situations, with lots of brokenness and psychological baggage – sometimes deeply disordered. We had a counseling center as part of the church, and we were in good relationships with counselors in the San Francisco area – there were times when counselors would say, “Could we gather to pray?” ... because what we’re doing in our therapy session, sometimes we need to discern whether this is something of the Spirit, or something of the evil one, whether this is demonic, whether this is psychological, what is it? I wanted to understand what we were doing.

Whatever we are doing, are we caring well, and loving well? So I went back to school and started a Masters in Psychology. Someone caught me in the middle of that experience and said, “Cherith, none of your questions sound psychological – they always sound theological – they’re always of a much bigger picture, a much bigger arena in which all these things come to matter.” That became a moment where I thought, theology is not so much a frightening word – it’s a nice term for the arena in which we as the people of God get to think about the things of God. He encouraged me to think about doing theology instead of psychology. So I changed course and I’ve become what I never thought I would be, which is what people call a *theologian*.

JMF: You started at Regent College?

CFN: I started my first Masters at the College of Notre Dame in Northern California, did my Masters in Christian Studies and Theology at Regent College, and then we moved to England. I had two sons who were 9 and 11 at the time. That was a big move for us, and my husband gave up his ministry and career so I could go back to school for five years there, and I ended up in London and then in St. Andrew’s, as my supervisor took a post up there. That was a wonderful experience for us. We’ve been back in the States for about seven years and I’ve been trying to do this thing called theology professionally in the academy and in the church ever since.

JMF: A lot of people would be wondering, how did the kids do? Apparently it was a good experience for them.

CFN: It was a great experience for them. It was incredibly stretching. They thought they knew what English was, but discovered that England English and ours are different languages, but it was a gift to all of us. One

of the most beautiful parts of that experience was to live in a little town far away from my school. I wasn't in a university setting. I wasn't surrounded by fellow students. I was surrounded by people who, by and large, had grown up in that little town – walking twice a week to a little church that had been there for a thousand years. We were part of this Anglican communion that had a deeply Trinitarian liturgy, and we took the Eucharist and participated in that communion on a weekly basis with wonderful people. They gathered around and helped me type parts of my dissertation and basically we were adopted into this amazing little fellowship of believers in England. They have continued to be part of our faithful family ever since, and that radically shaped not just my sons' lives but my husband's and mine.

JMF: You're asked to do a lot of lecturing. What sort of topics are people usually looking for when they ask you to come?

CFN: My father (Gordon Fee) was born and raised, as was my mother, in the Pentecostal tradition, but I lived in Reformed worlds that are curious about how to have conversations about what does it mean to live the life of a Pentecostal... I grew up as a person who deeply loved the biblical text, watched my father who deeply loved the Lord, and then love the biblical text (and not in the reverse order). I used to go with my dad when he would teach, or go on retreats to do these kinds of things. I couldn't get enough of the story and it never occurred to me that I should be like him, because I thought, this is equipping me to get out into the marketplace. So I was a paralegal for 15 years and loved being just a Trinitarian believer in the work that God had called me to do at that time.

I came from a background that made life in the Holy Spirit normal or natural to me. I did not see a lot of excess, I did not see a lot of things that were confusing or frightening (I hear a lot of horror stories from people's experiences). So I'm asked to speak about that.

I'm also asked to talk about how and why the life of the Triune God matters to us, and what it means to actually being a Christian. I say, "There is only one kind of Christian and that's the Trinitarian Christian – the only life that you are invited into, is to know this God. This is how he's made himself known to you and this is the impact that it has."

Then, to talk about Jesus' life, which is a challenge, because his life is a mystery that I can't describe any better than I can describe the Trinity. But at this point in my life, I take very seriously the incarnation in the sense that God has taken on my humanity and restored my humanity permanently, and he holds in his current and on-going humanity the life

that I will have as Cherith, female human image-bearer of God, and that is a permanent reality that God has made for me.

There is no splitting of my body and my soul, even if following Jesus has a thing I do with my head, or my heart. I think part of it is being around college students who are deeply ambivalent or confused or have a million messages about their embodied life and their sexuality, and then watching in my life in the church how those kinds of things get set in place, either very early or in those later years when they start becoming aware, whether they feel free to let the Lord be the Lord of that part of their life as well, so just trying to think how do we understand ourselves because of who Jesus is.

Not just who he was, but who he is, and what he's presently doing that helps inform our own understanding of getting up in the morning saying, "What are we doing today, Jesus? What are you doing today and what, by the Spirit do I get to participate in that continues to bring glory to the Father, in a way that you take my human life seriously and mediate my human life and pray for my human life today, and intercede that I would not be led into temptation but to walk in the way that looks like the kingdom come on earth, so as in heaven." And to pay attention to what that would mean and not get my belief system locked in, but to function as somebody who is supposed to look like Jesus in a way that I'm going to look for. That raises a new wonderful dynamic about how to follow the Lord. That has become a deeply incarnational conversation that I didn't see coming, but just sort of developed over time over the last ten years.

JMF: Let's talk about your first book, with Peter Lang Publishing group. How did that come about, and what led you into that topic?

CFN: I was at Regent at that time. I knew in my heart of hearts (although I kept taking as much Bible as I could instead of theology, because I was afraid that systematic theology would become dry, categorized and compartmentalized) I loved theology emerging from the text. It took me a while to trust the theology classes that I was taking would reinforce that, and they did, beautifully.

It was later in my time at Regent, that I had a professor named Stan Grenz, who said, "Cherith, I know you're interested in doing something in your final thesis on the Triune life of God and how that influences our life as a community who participates in God. Here's this book called *She Who Is*, by a Catholic feminist theologian, who has re-constructed the doctrine of God, the Triune doctrine of God, in female form. She believes that she has permission to do this from her Catholic tradition and her understanding

of analogy, and that being a way of talking about God. So would you mind reading this book and doing your thesis around this, because we are all curious whether she has a leg to stand on in this argument.”

Naively, I said, “Yes.” **JMF:** You don’t even have to think of the topic.] Exactly, except that I had no idea that I just jumped off the deep end of the swimming pool into 19th and 20th-century liberal theology, which I’ve never read, feminist theology, which I hadn’t read, and Catholic theology, which I hadn’t read.

So it threw me into a variety of new worlds. Instead of trying to sit back and observe, I was trying to get in. I was trained to understand this from the inside out, to ask, “Why did she want to write this book, why is this important to her?” She, very straightforwardly, said, “I do this because my tradition, as I have experienced it, feels like God is this solitary male figure, this ego who’s unrelated to the world, who doesn’t care about the world.” She used the term “classical theism” for this old way of talking about God out there.

JMF: That’s the way most people think about God.

CFN: They think about God singularly... kind of, there’s God and us, as if there are two subjects, and that’s it...

JMF: The popular movies about God, as good and as interesting as they are, present this solitary picture.

CFN: Solitary picture, that’s right, and always a male picture. She was of the conviction that the people who suffer most, including at the hands of the church, because of the way theology is either spoken or enacted, are women, and usually women of color with children. She had spent a lot of years caring for the poor and the oppressed in Central America, in South Africa... Over time, she felt that if we could talk about God as a female, then men would not use God as their alter ego and have God function in these ways that she perceived as distant. If we could have God be female, then it would be hard to see God that way and then hurt or harm women. I’m not convinced that that’s true – not because it’s not an interesting idea, but because we’re so broken that no matter how we perceive God, we’re still going to harm each other, and need to forgive one another.

I was curious about why she thought it was important to come up with a new way of thinking about God in order to get what she thought God was doing, which was loving people... What was it about the gospel that didn’t sound like good news to her? What was it about Jesus that hurt her, that wasn’t life-giving to her own life, or to the lives of women? I wanted to understand what drove her and her colleagues (who are dialogue

partners in her book) to write what they did. I felt like I needed to sit with some humility and listen to that, and say, “Where has the church not stepped up? Why do they think they need to do what they’re doing, because they see a big hole, a big empty space where the church should be bearing the image of God and being for the other, and especially the other who cannot be for themselves in the current world?”

My challenge in writing that book was to say, “There’s a very different thing going on when you call the church to account” and say “Who are we really, and what are we called to in our obedience, and where have we really blown it, that we need to rethink God?” What does Trinitarian theology – as the church has understood its life lived in the presence of the Father because of Jesus by the Spirit – have to say that is the good news as it has been given to us, and where do we go back and listen to it in a way that calls us to account to change our ways of behaving. So I have a deep respect for them. But I also have a challenge...

JMF: You’re seeing the same problem, same ways to meet the same roles...

CFN: I answer it with, I think, the conversation that God has given us over a very long time without needing to completely change that conversation. But one of the fascinating things that’s come out of writing that book is that this vein of modern theology that her book is part of, does, in one way, take Jesus’ humanity seriously. They’re nervous about a sort of divine Jesus who doesn’t really touch the human condition. But what you end up with, in a lot of that theology, is you have a Jesus who never gets to be God made flesh. It’s never really the Word who has come present to us. It’s God who has adopted this man to be a divinely appointed or anointed or Spirit-filled man in a unique way. That changes the story completely – because you don’t have God being present to us enacting, suffering with, dying, atoning – you don’t have the things that are the reconciling acts that only God can do.

I have to think, “What does it mean to look at Jesus’ humanity that says, ‘the one who is present to me is God as this person, one person, Jesus Christ, God and man’?” How is his life completely unlike mine in that there will never will be and ever would be another incarnation, because there is only the Son who has become permanently part of his own creation as the Creator. That is unique to Jesus and to no one else in the world, and yet his having become human is to take on everything that belongs to my humanity. Yet to pull it off, to be one who walks in obedience to the Father, who does not sin but who takes all the brokenness that is tempted toward

that, and challenged by that, and think, “that means he lives his life everyday, all day long, having to obey – having to say, ‘Ok, who gets this moment – me or the Father?’”

What does it mean for him to say, “I only do what I hear the Father tell me to do, I only do what I see the Father doing, I enact by the power of the Holy Spirit what God is doing in the world. [That is what a true human being is about – to bear the image of God for the good creation and for its flourishing, and for its life to be restored and for its healing and for its recreational restoration.] ...to be faithfully what I am supposed to be and what I am going to be, as well as being God who is present to me, is ...” I don’t have words to explain the mystery and the beauty like that.

I’ve started to take his humanity seriously, because without his ongoing life, then it feels like he sort of dipped into the human story for 33 years, did a saving kind of thing for three of those years by talking about what life by grace is and what life in the kingdom is about, and then dying on the cross to make sure that we all get that life someday, and then being resurrected and ascending and popping off the scene and dropping his body somewhere and going back to being the eternal Word or this Son and his pre-existent “whatever.”

JMF: In a sense that still leaves us alone.

CFN: It does. Suddenly there is not God with us. What I grew up assuming, without ever knowing it, I thought Jesus dropped his body somewhere and was back to being the Son and was glad that he was done with that. I’ve read John 17 and I’d hear in that, “I can’t wait to get out of this situation.” The outpouring of the Spirit was my way of thinking, “I understand that God is still with us, and God is present to us, that the Spirit is Immanuel in this time. Because I didn’t understand, fully, that it was not just the Spirit but it is actually Jesus who continues to mediate my presence before God as the firstborn of the new human race, the firstborn from among the dead or the firstborn of the new humanity.

In Hebrews 2 where it says (I always think like Jesus was having his arms around me) “both the one who is holy and the one who makes them holy, have the same Father. So he’s not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters because we have the same Father.” I think, “that’s right, he is in that position – high priesting for me, mediating my life, saying, ‘we’re in this together,’ we belong and we stand.” Not only that he stands in that place for me before the Father, he really gets my life. Hebrews says he’s tempted in every way except without sin. Well, that’s every way, weariness trying to pull away, watching through the Gospels – where does

Jesus, where do you get this where the sense of the Spirit is going? No, this is what we're doing.

I think of Jesus getting in the boat after being weary from teaching and healing and going away. It says he looked back and saw these people on the shore and had compassion. He says, "turn the boat around," and he begins to teach the next day, empowered by the Spirit to do this hard thing. In that day he feeds the multitude. Did he wake up that morning saying, "I'm God, so I think I'll do a miracle and that will convince them"? Or is he really living a life that is like mine, which would mean that he would have to be listening to the Father and listening to the Spirit? I'm curious as I listen to that story thinking, "When did you have this sense that this is what was going to happen, that is what the Father was inviting you into, that this is what the Spirit was empowering you to do? Was it when you prayed? I don't know, he doesn't tell us that, but to realize that this is not Jesus in his divine brain saying, "I think it's time for a miracle, I'd better do something holy or God-like."

When he was tired in the boat, this was his humanness coming out? What does it mean for him to be God who has become like me and relinquishing the privileges that come with acting divine without being human – which is what Philippians 2 says, that he relinquishes these divine prerogatives, to enact them in a way that is a faithful human and image-bearer of the divine.

I watched his life through the Gospels and think, "how did he do that?" He said, "by the Spirit, and what have I invited you into, Cherith? Life in the Spirit – so what about your life? Do you think I don't understand? What about my life do you think you're not supposed to be doing?" That's Paul's language in Ephesians 1 and 2: "this is the one who's ascended to this place and sits in this place of power and authority under which everything has been set. By the way, you, in Christ, have already been seated in this place of power and authority." That's what human image bearers are to do, to manifest the power and authority and the love for the other which is God in the world. "So you too should be getting on and being part of what Jesus is doing from that position." That makes me wake up differently and say, "What would you invite me into today that isn't what I would do by myself?"

WHAT WILL THE RESURRECTED BODY BE LIKE?

JMF: You've done work on the need to see Jesus not only in the past as fully God and fully human, but even *now* as fully God and fully human.

CFN: Yes, and the important thing to remember as we have this conversation is that we speak about mysteries that we haven't seen, and yet we need to speak about them as loudly, happily and wonderfully as we can, because blessed are those who haven't seen, but there are plenty who did. The 40 days of Jesus' resurrection life shows up as a sort of a preview that says, "This is really me. I'm not here as a ghost, I'm not here as a spirit being who can walk through a wall just to say some last things before I kick off and leave. This is what it looks like for you to get your life back."

That is what the gospel is about. That is what salvation is: that *you*, who have been beloved before the foundations of the earth, you, who the Father and Son and Spirit never needed (because they are eternally happy in themselves (as Jonathan Edwards says, "Their love for each other is perfect.)) For us to *be* at all is an incredible overflow of the love of the triune Persons for one another, saying, "Let's let others share in and participate in that. We aren't finished in our joy and our extension of that joy until we have Mike, until we have Cherith, precisely because it delights us that they bear the image of God in and for the world and that they are in relationship to us and to one another."

For Jesus' life to be so particular to say, this is the life that you have. We have God (one and three) because before the foundations of the earth,

he predestined that you would become children of God, and once you have been predestined to become that, and you become that, you never stop being that. The only way to be children of God is to be human children of God.

For Jesus, it was 40 days of life, new-creation life, to say, this is what's coming. This is what you can anticipate. This is what it is like for you to see a body fit for the age of come which can eat a meal with you and walk through a wall, a body that is not dimensionally challenged for how time and eternity meet one another as heaven and earth join, and creation is restored into the fullness of all that it gets to be. It doesn't mean that you stop being who you are and have to turn into something else called a soul or an angel or something else (as if your humanity wasn't good, it was just sort of good, or it was a good first attempt), but when it comes to eternal life, your eternal life will be *you* as something else.

That has nothing to do with the gospel, but it's the way that as a child, I heard that. I don't think I ever heard it preached to me except that it's the language of "when our souls go to heaven." It's falling into the language of our hymns, where we sing "then sings my soul" as if there is a different way of praising God in this deeper spiritual way of being, that if I can just ignore my body and not even have to deal with the shame that comes with being this embodied person, and just get into that spiritual place, then this is what I have to look forward to, is to shed this skin and be in a disembodied new way of being. I didn't realize this then, but this is called Gnosticism.

When I was 21, I was about to get married, and my husband said something to me that was very loving and adoring about me, loving me and my body. I reacted strongly, feeling betrayed by him that somehow he had seen me as this embodied woman without seeing the real me, who I thought he really loved. I was confused trying to explain to him why that was hurting me or upsetting me, because he was confused about what was disturbing me.

I called my dad. I said, "Dad, I'm caught. I can't get Robert to understand why this feels awful, that he focused on my femaleness and not the real me." My dad listened to me very kindly and finally quietly said, "Cherith, when did you become a Gnostic?" I had to stop and think about what a Gnostic is. Oh, that's somebody who believes that the material world or anything that's created, or has physicality to it, or a being to it, is bad, and that only the soul is good and only the spiritual realm is good.

So I stopped and said, "Am I a Gnostic?" He says, "Well, honey, based

on what you just said to me, I think you need to get saved! You seem to think that Jesus saved your soul or something. He's the incarnate one who celebrates your whole person, and you can't be you without being you, Cherith, in your female body. Who do you think it is that he loves? Just your soul?" I was taken aback. I knew that mentally I should be able to say what he said to me, but deep in my heart, I did not know that.

So I started, in these last years, looking at what I was not seeing over and over in the New Testament text, that let me keep splitting out Jesus' divinity from his humanity, kept splitting out my soul from my embodied life. One day I came across the conversation that Jesus gets pulled into between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They're all good Jews and they're all well-trained, but the Sadducees are trained more in Greek thought and they have no time for or belief in the resurrection of the body, because who would ever resurrect a body? It's no good!

The Pharisees are still holding to the Old Testament promises through Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Isaiah and all of these deep new covenant promises that when the new creation is restored, when life comes back, it will be the flourishing of all creation and you will get your life back. So, here these two groups are arguing and pulling Jesus in, and so they set it up with the woman marries the husband who dies, and then marries the many brothers that he has, and so who is she going to be married to in the resurrection? I had been reading this because I had had a few friends of mine, men (in theological studies, they are mostly men), and we were talking about Jesus' human life and his ongoing embodiment and how that matters. They said, "I don't understand... as you're doing this work and challenging this feminist theology, etcetera, why these women feel like they need God to look like them when in heaven there will be no male or female, so it doesn't matter?"

I looked at them thinking, where do you get that? They said, "You know that debate that Jesus is in with the Sadducees and the Pharisees. We will be like the angels and there will be no marriage and giving in marriage in heaven." I went back to that and thought, really? Is he going to turn me into something else? I'm not going to be human, and I'm not going to be a soul, I'm going to be like an angel? This conversation and that text came up in the course of two weeks, completely different conversations, unrelated to one another, and I thought, there is something serious going on here.

In that story, I noticed Jesus' way of coming into that conversation: oh children of the resurrection, you will be, in a sense, like the angels. It doesn't matter who she marries, because your question is all about who

she will procreate with. Who will she carry the family line along with? Who gets to have her to bear the name? The fact is, you're not going to die, so this need to procreate and to create this ongoing lineage, this is a conversation which doesn't fit resurrection life, which is eternal life. You children of the resurrection have started to shift the plot into a different debate than what is authentic, which is that you will get your human life back.

I watched Jesus' life and the promise of his resurrection, which he kept instilling as their only hope (that he too had to trust that the Father would raise him from the dead), because he wasn't going to raise himself and he wasn't saying, "I'll be back in three days, I'm just going to die and I'll be back." He agonizes in this place of trusting, that he is doing something that the Father will make an atoning eternity-changing reality and that he would, by the Spirit, bring him back to live in this whole new way that he has never died and hasn't experienced and doesn't know.

So I began then to listen and watch his 40 days of life and his insistence that his followers do not move until they too receive the Spirit, because there is no way that they are going to be able to begin to participate in the life that he has now guaranteed in his new humanity by the Spirit, in the same way that he was already beginning to enact prior to his death and resurrection, without the same Spirit that raised him from the dead. Paul uses that term over and over. Peter uses that term. John uses that term, "the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead," and "this Jesus whom you killed, God raised him from the dead and has seated him at the right hand of the Father, and with the Father has now poured out the Holy Spirit whom you see in here."

I then started reading Acts. Every time these apostles are held before the Sanhedrin, before Roman leadership, before Hebrew (Jewish) leadership, they are professing that the one who you killed who you thought was just this carpenter from Nazareth and an imposter, was truly God incarnate, and how we know that this was God present to us and what our future looks like is that he is resurrected. He is the firstborn from among the dead. He is the firstborn of a new humanity. He is, in Paul's words, the new Adam, the progenitor of a new race of human beings that aren't broken anymore, that are restored to their beauty that God has held before the foundation of the earth and guaranteed by entering into his creation and becoming one with us and bearing that image perfectly. Not with a divine credit card. Not with access to secret God powers that make it easy for him so that his humanity isn't really something I should take

seriously, but to say, “I will enter into your condition completely, Cherith. I will take on the DNA of a mom. I’ll have the nose of my uncle. I’ll do the family business. People will have my furniture in their house. I will have to grow up as a teenage boy and obey in terms of my budding sexuality, my awareness of other people, my obedience to my parents, my trying to hear why it is that I am not getting betrothed when everybody else is,” and trying to understand his story and obey his story both as a true human, but as one who has submitted to and is listening to the Father all the time.

Something in his baptism is unique up to that mold. He is functioning and living as a young man who knows how to pray for me because he really gets my life because he had entered into any kind of experience. A lot of people push back and say, maybe he didn’t do that, or maybe he wasn’t this. He doesn’t have to experience every single human experience in particular.

JMF: No human does.

CFN: Exactly. I haven’t experienced many of those things.

JMF: He would be abnormal if he did.

CFN: Exactly. It’s doing a crazy thing to his humanity, which we also do to his divinity. What we’re talking about is, does he understand what it means to be tempted, to choose for himself instead of someone else? Does he understand what it means to be tempted to let someone become an object for his gratification instead to let them be a true person, a person he is for, and loves. Does he understand all the kinds of ways that my life every day is begged to question, Cherith are you going to do this out of your brokenness or are you going to do this in conformity to what God really looks like, which is what you are, an image bearer of God.

I think he gets it. He says, “So you don’t get off the hook and look at my life and say, ‘yeah, but you were God; it was easy for you to do all that cool stuff.’ I want you to see that my baptism is when the Father names me and claims me and says, ‘This is my son, whom I love and in whom I am well pleased.’” But this isn’t necessarily divine language that comes down and says, oh, that’s the pre-existent Son who came to you. That language comes way back from the Exodus. It comes from Deuteronomy. That’s the language God uses whenever he names his image-bearers, whenever he calls a people for himself. He says, “You are my Israel, my true son, the one who bears my image for the world. So look like me, and love the widow and the orphan and extend yourself to the alien and be for the other who does not have anyone to be for them, because that is how I

am God for you. So look like me. Listen to what I would do, and speak for me the way that I would speak, enact in power what is rightfully my power to give you because I am the Creator who can do what I would love to do for the flourishing of creation.”

It is simple to isolate Moses or Jeremiah or Jesus and say, well, there is something special about them. The only special thing about Moses and Jeremiah is that, very begrudgingly, they obeyed and let the Spirit’s anointing upon them free, let the Holy Spirit do what he wanted to do, to call the world to attention to Yahweh.

JMF: For most, in fact for everybody, we look back over our personal history, at the things we’ve been through and the things we do, and we wonder, how can this possibly apply to me? I agree with it in principle and I can see how this is God’s will and God’s purpose, and I can imagine it being theoretically possible, but it’s really not talking about me. I can’t identify with it because I know what I’m really like.

CFN: And what I’m really like is messed up and with a past that feels like it’s never going to leave me, and generally feeling disempowered to change any of that.

JMF: Exactly. That’s where most of us live.

CFN: I think so. The radicality of the gospel is that there is so much more – it would require that we don’t change our thinking of what the gospel means, but that we just let it *take* at every conceivable level. Our salvation in Christ is not simply assent to this amazing thing that God has come and done for us that we couldn’t possibly do anything about or for on our own, to make the possibility of being in a relationship with the triune God happen.

Everything that we are comes out of response to the fact that this is who God is to us. He doesn’t just show up as an idea of the three Persons in one to invite us into this idea of communal love, but to say, “look, right here, in the way that God has chosen to be God, there is now a human being permanently present.” So you are never without the ability to say, so what *is* my life about and where is it going? And what have you done with my past? Because the one who stands in for me is not only this perfect human who I can’t relate to because he’s perfect, but this human who bears the marks of a deeply broken and imperfect humanity who had entered into every kind of condition that humanity has, yet without falling and breaking in the process, without sinning into that process. His life bears the effects of being betrayed by his best friends. His life bears the effects of being isolated and alone. His life bears the effects of being unjustly and

horribly, horribly executed. His life bears the effects of systemic sin, of personal sin, hitting him and influencing him all the time.

So how do I look at his life and say, “Then what is our response within the midst of sin and brokenness that shows me what a real human being looks like who doesn’t live above all of that, who lives bombarded by and in it all the time?” He says, “Cherith, the place where you see me, who sits on the throne looking like a slain lamb, who bears the effects of the fact that I know your humanity inside and out as my own, means that there is nothing about your human life that I have not always known, and you are the one I’ve always loved.” There isn’t the, “oh, if she shapes up and follows me or just believes all that stuff and starts assenting to this right theology or something, then we love her so much better.” Rather, it’s “while you were a mess I came into the mess and said, she is broken and she will never get out of this by herself. But we plan to love her forever, and we plan to have her with us forever and in communion with us forever, which means that we, I, God, will have to enter into the human condition and take what belongs to her and restore it for her, and in the process restore her.”

The thing that is so life-changing is to realize there is no human being that the Father, Son, and Spirit see and love apart from me, who is always the healed broken person, who is always the saved guilty person, who is always the restored alienated person, who always has the whole story held together, and the fact that the Father doesn’t see me just as a before and after. He *always* sees me in the company of the Son. He always sees me with Jesus of Nazareth, Galilean Jewish male, forever as God’s way of taking on humanity and keeping it, so that it doesn’t dip down and go, “well now I can like you or now I can love you, or now we can relate to you.”

“How could I possibly be more for you, Cherith, than to become like you, as a choice of freedom and love? And to become like you and take that into my way of being God permanently, so that you are never without somebody who is also your permanent advocate. So, you can’t make me love you more, you can’t make me love you less. Nothing you do, height, depth, powers, principalities, your brokenness, your horrible past, your attempts to try to be good in your own strength. Nothing can separate you from the love that has now been guaranteed to you in Christ Jesus, who holds you in that communion with the Father by the Spirit and stands as God for you, having received and accepted and loved you, and stands as the new human.” He says, “Father, when you see her, see her as she will be finished. Because this is what she will look like.”

JMF: And already do.

CFN: Yes. So my Christian life is, I need to get on board because the kingdom has already come.

JMF: The starting place is the belonging. You already belong. You always will belong, therefore....

CM: And out of that relationship, what does it look like to be part of bringing the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven? If the life that Jesus is living has already determined where my life is headed, it also determines who I am, because this is my identity now. So the invitation is, “Cherith, do you want to start looking like who you’re going to permanently be? Do you want to start doing the stuff that looks like a restored human being?”

You can’t do that by yourself. You can only do that by the power of the Third Person of the Trinity happily taking up residence in you and saying, “This has been how the story was from the beginning, is that the Ruach of the Spirit of the living God would rest upon and dwell within his image-bearer. *That* has been what we’ve been about. It’s what Jesus’ life looks like, as this anointing as the new and true image bearer, and now you, Cherith and Mike, beloved image-bearing children of the Father, who are conformed to the image of the Son, your brother and your Lord, who happens to also be the King over all kings and the one who is reigning.”

How do you stand with him and participate with him today by the power of the Spirit to be part of what he’s doing? How do you ask him and not feel frustrated by what he invites you into, but to say, “If I let you, you could empower me to be more of who I actually am.” Then salvation becomes not a getting in or an entry point or just a conversion moment – it becomes this deep, permanent conversion into the person that I will forever be. My life becomes the *living into* my savedness, the *living into* my restoration.

JMF: The living out the reality of what already is.

CFN: The living out the promise that I don’t only have in the future, but the fact that the future has dramatically impeded the present and has altered the course of everything from this forward. I think that is a very different thing than just to say, “I believe those things, but now I’m just going to try to gut it out to the best of my ability.”

JMF: Muddle on through it.

CFN: Well, we can do that, but that’s not the richest plot that we’re in, and it doesn’t have the greatest joy and the most amazing possibility. The place in the New Testament that talks about grieving the heart of God is when we inhibit the Holy Spirit. Because, he says, “how else could you bear my image in the world? How else can you participate in what I’m

doing, when you block me there and say no and stick the stopper into the bottle and say, ‘I’m only going to do what I can do instead of finding out what it would look like to do what God would do with me.’”

He says, “It grieves me, because you love me, but you are unempowered to love me well or to love those who I love. You are disempowered to do the things you want to do.” It changes the story. We become people who believe things about God, and then we become religious people. Everybody who believes anything about God is a religious person, but that’s very different than being a child of the triune God who has been asked to manifest the presence and power of God in the world.

JMF: The good thing is he doesn’t give up.

CFN: Amen. And it’s a good thing because if I muddle or stop this bottle or whatever else, he is still the Lord of the church and the King of all things and he’ll invite you back again tomorrow when you wake up. Because he’s already sealed the deal. He’s already doing what he is doing, and nothing that I can do can also stop that grace from flowing.

IMAGE BEARERS FOR GOD

JMF: One objection we often hear about Trinitarian theology, and the idea that God loves everyone, goes along this line: If God hates one person, then he doesn't love everyone, and Scripture specifically says that God hated Esau. He loved Jacob and he hated Esau. How do we respond to that?

CFN: The first thing we do is to take the words of Jesus seriously, instead of going to a place where we can't figure out what the Hebrew idiom might mean. If Jesus says that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, then we trust him that *that* is the overriding narrative. When we watch the entire biblical narrative with its moments of tremendous suffering, pain, injustice and often horror, it's to trust that overarching reality — that God so loves this world despite the broken image-bearers' attempt to take it down by not knowing how to do anything else, and in our brokenness he will not let us be left to our devices. He loves us too much to let the story turn out the way that it would turn out on our own.

If that is the way that the whole overarching narrative is held, by the way that God is God, and not by the way that we are in response to God or to one another or to anything else, then it's to look at the way that the biblical narrative is structured and given, and what these incredibly important terms and echoes are that come through the Old Testament. So when Jesus starts saying these things and attributing them to God, attributing all the back story of humanity in relation to God in his own human life and where human life for everybody is going, then it's to make

sure that we're clear about what those identity markers are. So we can hear a text like "and God hated Esau" and ask what in the world is going on there? It's probably one of so many moments where an idiom is used to speak an idea that is not to be taken literally, and not to throw everything else out that doesn't agree with that one term.

How do we recognize it? As English-speakers, part of what we suffer from is that we are getting a translation of something that is an ancient language – a multi-layered and a beautiful language – so that when a pronouncement like that is made, there is deep meaning to that, that is not just the opposite of love and hate. We want to go to that deeper meaning, to look at those original echoes, and then to see what then does Jesus' incarnate life mean for us, pulling us into the life of the Trinity. We can't but not go there.

It's worth a little rabbit trail for a minute to look at how the New Testament, which...at the time that it is becoming what it is...at the time that these Gospels are being proclaimed, these letters are being written and read aloud to communities (so that nobody's picking up the letter to the Ephesians and reading it privately and ever hearing the word "you" and thinking that means me and my privatized Christianity and I need to behave these ways) —these letters were taken and read to everybody in the entire community sitting there next to each other squirming about the reality that they're being called to, because the only way to live this out is corporately, that each one individually matters.

Jesus gives those kinds of parables — that the Father seeks every one of us and adores every one of us and will pursue us until he pulls us into that fellowship. To go after the lamb or to go after the lost coin or to be the son that is longed for...in every one of those parables, they're brought home, they're brought back to something that is bigger than them. The son comes home, the coin is joined, the lamb is brought back to the flock, not set up in a little dyad with a shepherd out there in the middle of nowhere. It's trying to recognize that that salvation... throughout, individual life is priceless to God because we exist out of his pleasure and joy... we are his delight and his image and he will not let anything deter his good outcome for that. Our life when lived in a way that really reflects God, is lived together.

As these communities are hearing this, and the New Testament world is trying to reorient itself because of the reality of Jesus having come among them and risen in their midst...the only Scripture they know is the

Old Testament. That's the only Bible, as far as they're concerned, because none of them are anticipating that their letters are going to end up in a canon that we are reading thousands of years later.

So when these terms—like Paul in Colossians using things like “he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn from the dead.” Or the fact that the Father uses the language of Jesus’ baptism to say, “You are my Son whom I love and in whom I am well-pleased.”—when this community hears those kinds of terms, there are layers and layers of echoes that sound. It's like hitting a gong and all of this history gets played out, and they're thinking, “oh my goodness, he's what?” Because they have deep resonant meaning to those things.

Starting from the beginning, every one of these ancient cultures has a creation narrative that has some kind of battle that usually takes place over water – the water is the place of chaos, and who knows what danger is lurking there? Creation usually is the fallout or the byproduct of the negative side of some kind of cosmic battle. Once this thing gets played out, then it's like, “Then what do we do with this stuff?” If we've got those gods or that god who ended up with all this stuff, how do we relate to that god to keep him appeased, or her, making sure that we're fertile, or whatever their relationship to these ancient gods is.

They all have a narrative that has this description of who God is in relation to them, life coming out of water and chaos, a description of life as sort of this temple-palace garden, and then there's this setting up of the image of the God in the temple-palace garden. In all of these, whether it's ancient Egyptian or later Mesopotamian Babylonian, these ancient cultures would have this period where if they were constructing a new temple palace for the god, they would, in the construction of the temple-palace garden, narrate the story of what this God is doing with them, and the priests would come in and undergo what they would call a spiration ceremony or a breathing ceremony.

The assumption was, that once they breathed this ritual over this idol or image of the god, then the god would take up residence there — that the presence of the god was there. It didn't mean that the god was only that statue, but it meant that where that statue was, that god was present. In the midst of that, whether it's Egypt and maybe Babylon, but if it's Egypt out of which God's people come, and they begin to tell their own creation narrative in response to the polytheism of Egypt or the way that gods are laid out in Genesis 1. “In the beginning God created...and the Spirit

hovered over the water...and then God said..." There's only ever one.

Everything that is a god in Egypt is just creation to God. After six days of ordering and setting, and creating time, purpose, meaning, dimensionality and everything else, it's on the sixth day that God says, you're not going to create an image for me, I am going to create my own image-bearer. I will do my own spiration ceremony. We will create them, male and female, to bear our image. It requires them to be together to be truly human, because we are the Triune God, and there is no such thing as a single image-bearer that can bear the image of God without bearing that image in relation.

The Genesis 2 retelling of what it says in Genesis 1 — that here is God who chooses Adam from the earth and breathes his life into him, breathes his Spirit, *ruach*, into him. Then he becomes the one who literally is for creation. He is to name it, he is to tend it and flourish it, he is to have "the one who completes him as an image-bearer with the other." She is called the *ezer* to him, God's strong helper, which is the language that God uses of himself in the Old Testament. You know, "Woe to Egypt who doesn't have Yahweh as their *ezer*." She's not his right-hand support system — she, with him, bears the character and image of God in the world.

Genesis 3 then turns around and says, here's what happens when the story goes bust, when the image-bearer fails to be the one who sees with the eyes of God, fails to see what God sees, which is good in the world, and fails to act in power what God would do, to speak for God and make these things be what they are, and have this divine human communion, not just about humanity in relation to God, but God who loves his world, everything in his cosmos, and who claims the entire creation as his temple-palace garden, who says, the heaven is my canopy and the earth is my footstool...and takes this reigning image of a throne room and says, "It's all mine. I love it all, and you get to be the one who is for it even as you are for me, and I will be for you, so that I can be for all things."

Genesis 3 says, when this goes awry, when the image-bearer forgets who he and she are and...and they become ones who try to assume that being like God is something that gives them equality with God, which is not something to be grasped, if we take Jesus' life seriously, but by grasping something that doesn't belong to them, they break and lose the image. The Old Testament then becomes this ongoing story of well, how does God restore them? How does he lead them out of that broken place and into the promise of new life, of new creation? They come out of this

Eden and into not just barrenness, but a new Edenic situation.

Noah becomes another story where you have water and God whose Spirit hovers as a dove over the water, which shows up again at Jesus' baptism. You have God who takes this person and his family and says, "I again will make a people for my name. They will look like me, and bear my name and presence in the world and my power, so that when they are present, nobody wonders if Yahweh is present — that is precisely who they are and what they do." His judgment, even prior to Noah, is: these were my children, but they don't look anything like me. They're abusing and destroying, which has nothing to do with the character of the Triune living God. He says, "That is false to the core. My image-bearer cannot bear my name falsely in the world, because no one will know who I am. So I'll call a people for my name again."

You get it primarily in the Exodus, where God says, "Out of this people I will call a people for my name again." He says crazy stuff to Moses. In Exodus 3 and 4 he says things like, When you go before Pharaoh, who happens to think out of the entire planet that he is the only living divine image-bearer of Ra, the sun-god or whoever he's instantiating, you will go to him and you will be like God to him. You will speak the words of God to him. When I give you Aaron, you will be like a God to Aaron, and Aaron will be like God to him as he speaks for you."

This re-anointing and image-bearing says, "I will breathe my Spirit into you. You will begin to function again in a way that looks like me and not the power and the oppression of Pharaoh and the rulership, but the releasing of humanity to start functioning as what it really is in relation to me." It's a crossing through water again, and light, and those kinds of images.

You get it with the Jordan, and you get it over and over again, until finally in Ezekiel there comes this tragic moment where after so many of these faithful re-gatherings of his people and recalling them and renaming them and reclaiming them, he says, "This is it. You look like the idols you worship. You've forgotten who you are, which is (in the technical sense of the term in that day), you are my idol. The reason you're not allowed to have any idols is because you're my idol. People are supposed to look at you to know what Yahweh looks like. But you have started to look like these things that you have constructed. You act out of that, you abuse, oppress, defame, hurt, destroy and choose against the other instead of for."

He says, "I won't have it, because it's unfaithful to what's true. It's

unfaithful to the heart of love that is what allows everything to be what it is.” So the image that Ezekiel gets is to watch the Spirit of God hovering over the ark and saying, “Am I leaving?” He comes to the threshold and says, “Am I going to stay or are we going to go?” The tragedy of the image is that the Spirit goes. “And now you will wait.” So then the promise becomes, “I will take away from them their heart of stone, their law, and I will give to them a heart of flesh and I will breathe my Spirit on them and they will live.”

To look specifically at the Esau question... Here is God who has not only named himself but the un-nameable Yahweh of the sort of transcendent glory that’s so not his creation, which is them...however the Triune language gets put there. This is the God who has no shame, no hesitancy to name himself as the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, who are a mess, all three of them. He goes, “I’m happy to be associated with them. Their storyline has become my storyline. I have called them to myself, I’ve loved them in the midst of their brokenness and the things that they’ve done disobediently. I am for them, as I have made them for me.”

For Jacob’s brother, Esau, to be the one who of these twins is the firstborn, the true rightful image-bearer, the true firstborn son who should carry that name forward, that is Isaac, the son who came from nowhere in terms of God’s mercy. When Esau begins to look like the idolatrous people with whom he marries into and begins to...instead of what Yahweh looks like, God says, “No. I refuse to put my name on that. I refuse to say that that is what I look like in the world. I will stand against that, but I will do that by being for it, by coming back around and restoring these people to myself.”

You finally have Jesus, who becomes this messianic promise... All through those Major and Minor Prophets it says, “There will finally be one like the son of man, who is going to come, who God will anoint, who will actually be the one true human image-bearer.” “I have finally chosen my last and only son to bear my name and presence in the world, and it all rests on him to get it right, and to do it like I would have to do it — not dipping in as God, but to take my humanity.”

From the entire human race down to this people of Israel, down to this priesthood, to this king, to these prophets...it gets smaller and smaller to this funnel where you finally have it rest on this one person who is God and man. His life set the entire thing in order and released it from that point forward...from the apostolic fellowship of the believers to become this

Gentile mission, to become the whole world... That is way back up here when he promised Abraham, when I call you as a people for my name, this is like the promise to the whole deal...so that Mike and Cherith who are not Jews and they aren't circumcised will be in on this story thousands of years from now. I will be faithful to this and release it through my Son.

So all of us who are busy trying to figure out if we are okay in relation to God tend to forget when we get caught... (The enemy would love to cause us to look at our own image as it reflects back upon us, instead of to look at the one in whose image we've been made and who stands as the perfect image-bearer for us...) we need to keep remembering this isn't about how well I'm bearing the image apart from Jesus. The only way I get to be in on this story, the only way I get to play, and the only way I get to stand well, even with all of the marks of my woes and shame all over me, is to have that washed, because the person who stands in for me as my high priest...who can only be my high priest if he's like me. He cannot be my high priest if he's not like me, because the high priest is the one human being who stands in for the entire people before God. So God becomes his own high priest, in a sense, on behalf of humanity.

If that's my high priest, that's also what he's doing – constantly, permanently priesting for me, permanently standing in for me and offering perfect sacrifice of his life in the perfect human obedience of his life. I am always, as an image-bearer, joined to him. The Father always holds the two of us — holds me and God's people — but always holds us with his Son — to participate in something. It isn't about how well I pull it off, it's the fact that it's already been pulled off.

JMF: So in Jesus you have the rejected Esau and the accepted Jacob who failed as well...

CFN: That's right.

JMF: ...healed and redeemed.

CFN: Right. God will go to any length to make sure that no matter how far Esau wants to walk away, God will say no, so that his character and love for his world is not compromised. But at the same time, to say every time God says 'no,' it's so that his 'yes' can be what it is. To say *no* to that about Esau is so that he can say *yes* to what is really true. He's going to say *yes* finally ...

JMF: Which is the point and conclusion of Romans 11.

CFN: Exactly.

JMF: And then Paul brings it up.

CFN: And how do you thank God for that?

JMF: Yeah.

CFN: Which is beyond our comprehension.

JMF: Yeah, it's fascinating.

CFN: It's tempting to say "but what about this? What about that?" Just stand back a little and say, "What would that mean in the context of this larger, incredible story that I'm in — that I'm not the primary character in? It's not my private drama, it's that I've been invited into this amazing story that is God's story of his unfathomable and irresistible love for that which is not him — that he's chosen to share it with them. Nothing can stop it, so how does that thing that I'm reading, that God hated Esau or whatever we might be fixating on...how would that fit into this larger narrative to understand? What is the *yes* of God in Jesus that would say *no* to these other kinds of things?

This suffering of the world (that seems so beyond our comprehension) becomes a "no" precisely by the fact that the story doesn't end with the crucifixion — God's "no" to suffering having the last word has to be passed through in order to have a "yes" of resurrection. There's always going to be these beautiful mysteries of *yes* and *no* held in tension, but as followers of Jesus we have to be committed to the whole story, and keep seeing where we are in that big story, instead of just checking our checklist of beliefs and seeing whether we feel like they contradict each other sometimes.

JMF: In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul speaks of looking at a poor reflection in a mirror. In the mirror, we see ourselves, and it's the broken image-bearer we're seeing. But he's saying that there is something better than that, that's already real, that we're not seeing most of the time — we're not seeing Christ as the one who has taken up our cause and made it his own.

CFN: Paul is writing a letter to a church he knows well and loves very much, who are trying to dehumanize Jesus and to super-spiritualize themselves in a way that stops them taking their own embodied humanities seriously. He won't let them. From the beginning of the letter, we are going to preach Jesus Christ crucified. For Paul there is no such thing as Jesus Christ crucified — there's only Jesus Christ crucified who is the risen one, which is why we can hold this crazy thing, because Jesus Christ is the risen anointed one who was crucified. Often we stop at the cross, forgetting that the cross would be very bad news if he is not the resurrected

and ascended one...

Paul set that up and says, “now let’s talk about life in the church.” What am I hearing? I’m hearing that there’s this division around leadership as if somebody has more value in the community of faith, in the community of the saints, one over the other, when the one who we’re supposed to look like has laid his life down. He, who was entitled to be over us, became one for us and submitted to whatever the Father would do for us. I’m hearing that you are having incredible sexual distortion between you marrying your stepmother (or whatever it is) and he doesn’t even address those people directly. He says, “I hear among you that this has happened and that you’re allowing this as a community.”

All these people are hearing this together. He’s saying, “Not even the pagans do that.” “I’m hearing that you’re tootling down to some pagan law court because you’ve got some grievance against your brother, and you want somebody who does not have the power and authority or the presence of the Holy Spirit to usher in true justice in the kingdom of God to settle a dispute for you, when you whose lives are conditioned to be for the other have now been given the power and authority to enact justice, and more than justice, mercy for the other.”

“I hear that there are some of you who aren’t sleeping together. I hear there’s some of you having sex with temple prostitutes — probably because you’re not sleeping together as husband and wife.” “What are you doing that thinks that somehow this isn’t about your embodied life?” “I hear that some of you are eating food from temples and some of you think that’s...” Paul just keeps pressing in, pressing in, pressing in. “I hear you’re disrespecting the table and one another at the table.”

He finally gets to this point: “It’s really all about the fact that you belong to each other, that you are this communal life enjoined to the Triune God together. There’s only *allelon* (it’s a Greek word that means ‘one another’). There’s only one another. You love one another, you forgive one another, you care for one another.” If the story plot of Corinth was looking at you, you wouldn’t know whose image you’re being conformed into. He finally says, “It’s all about looking like the character of God. It’s loving. It’s being patient and enduring and suffering long for the other, and believing and hoping and trusting.” We can’t see where this is all going, but at the same time we can, because we see him.

When he finally calls them to their worship life and he pushes them through their behaviors that they’re forgetting even in their worship life,

it's all driving to chapter 15, where he's going, "How can I say this to you? Because we serve one who is resurrected and is a new human. Over 500 people saw him, and the apostles saw him, and even I saw him as one...reborn. And because he is who he is, and already holds our new humanity and has this body fit for the age to come, a spiritual body (which is like an oxymoron) but he's got that body fit for the new creation.

Because Christ is like that, we already know who we are (you know where this is going) and we know that by the power of the Spirit, we're to be enacting our future reality right smack dab here in Corinth in a way that nobody wonders what the image of God looks like in the world, because they see slaves and free people loving each other, who should have nothing to do with each other. They see women preaching who should have no mouths to bear witness or say anything in the fellowship. They see prophetic gifts running all these directions. They see forgiveness where nobody anticipated it. They see something that they can't see anywhere else in the world, by how this odd crazy fellowship of Jews, non-Jews, men, women, slaves, every socioeconomic, racial, gender boundary comes together as a new people of God and says "we are going to live 'the life that's coming' right here, because the life that's coming has already become present to us in Jesus, and we are in on it."

It's impossible to do this without the Spirit. Jesus said, "Don't leave Jerusalem, because you new image-bearers, new creation, you need the *ruach* of the Spirit, which was promised in Ezekiel 37, in Jeremiah. You need that heart of flesh to be anointed by the Spirit to become this new people of this new age, which hasn't yet come to completion but has already begun.

It is that mystery, as you said, of seeing in part, but when I think it's all too hard to figure out, Jesus says, "Just look here, Cherith, take my life seriously, look here, the gospel witnesses to me, and you can't over-divinize me, you can't make me too much God and get yourself off the hook that I don't understand you or you can't be like me. I also don't want you to take my humanity so seriously that you somehow separate out that this is God who is present to you, so that everything I do really does restore your life." That's the beautiful tension that we get to walk in.

WHAT JESUS' HUMANITY MEANS FOR US

JMF: You're working on two books in the final stages of production. Could you tell us about the second one?

CFN: Yes. It's less than final as far as the publisher is concerned, but I would love to tell you about it. The book has come into being because of the kinds of conversations that I've had with students over the last seven or eight years. I began to discover some concerns that were deeply problematic in my own receiving the life of Jesus for me. It was always this "idea" that I kept trying to cling to, instead of someone that I really knew, who I could see as a person standing for me.

The book is emerging out of some lively conversations, and maybe that's a good way for books to be written. Sometimes I'm wondering why theologians ever write books. It seems like we've already said everything. This book won't be anything new, but it will be revisiting why the humanity of Jesus actually matters. That has come out of conversations with students where either they have such a deeply held sense of Jesus' divinity, that the idea that he truly is like us (let alone continues to be like us as we will be) is hard for them to believe and to trust, let alone try to get their heads around.

The opposite extreme is that his humanity becomes something that they keep trying to generalize so that he just becomes the person that we can kind of retrofit into all of our own experience, instead of his life being what it is, which is that my life isn't your life, and your life isn't my life, and his life isn't my life either. It really is *his* life that he has lived.

The conversation that started to generate some of this came around the recognition of students realizing that they had a deep ambivalence about their own humanity. As we would discuss God being one who was saving their whole person, they were quick to discover that they weren't sure that they wanted their whole person saved.

JMF: And by whole person you mean...

CFN: It's like the fun phrase that Karl Barth uses when he tries to talk about us as embodied souls. The very next sentence he'll use the term ensouled bodies or souled bodies, because he doesn't want us to see one prioritizing the other. To be a person is somebody who is constituted this way. There is no way for us to be the deep inner-core soul person that we are, that does not have its physical male or female manifestation. This is what it means to be Cherith. There is no other Cherith who is trapped in this body or currently taking up residence in this body. Embodied Cherith, at her deepest, is all there is. I'm not just my body. There's something that is deeply *core* that remains in terms of who I am with my new body. We're landing in territory that's hard to describe, so Barth plays those terms off of one another.

I discovered that like myself when I was younger and then through the course of having to deal with illness in my life and other ways of not taking my own body seriously—the limitations that it had, the struggles that I have, taking my femininity and femaleness seriously in relation to men and women, realizing that I had spent a lot of my life growing up in the church sort of neutering myself because I grew up in a household of all boys and had a mother who grew up in a household of all boys, so it was “try to be one of the boys.”

I was in worlds (in my many years in the law firm or in the church or the academy) that are mostly male-dominated worlds. To not use my femaleness in an inappropriate way, I always pretended I didn't have any. “This is just my shell, but the real me is this person who you want to know.” That was unfaithful to the gospel, let alone unfaithful to real human relationships, and it forced me to not take responsibility for myself and what my sons were learning about how to honor women and men well, and how to help them talk through some of those kinds of things.

I had students who were saying, “I'm not sure that I can get past the shame of my embodied life” or, “I'm 20 and a healthy male and I don't know how to think about women in an embodied sense that doesn't trip me up or get me caught.” And, “I can't wait to get to heaven and not have

a body and not have to worry about how to think about stuff like this.”

I started to realize, “Instead of people who follow an incarnate Lord in freedom, we are quietly Gnostic in a way that tries to negate our humanity.” Then we let Jesus be a lot more docetic, or the Jesus who shows up in human form, or fills a human body—whatever these ancient heresies are (whether it’s Apollinarianism, or these different kinds of terms that came from people in the church trying to relieve the tension of saying that this one is the God-man, that this one is Yahweh in the flesh).

Because those things were so hard to hold together, these heresies (which always happen inside the community of faith—outside they are just something completely other), but it’s people within the community of faith saying, “Let’s make him a little more human and a little less divine, so we can trust that what he did, he did as an authentic human being, because otherwise it’s God just taking over his will and his mind.”

Or on this side, people are saying, “We know that the material world isn’t very good and God would never taint himself to really be like me, so I think he just poured himself into that human form and then got rid of it as soon as he could.” Most of us don’t get walked through the heresies that were lively debates in the life of the church in the early first centuries. They were always trying to figure out how...we’re trying to say this thing—have we said it faithfully enough without locking it down? Because we can’t lock this thing down and really get our heads around it, but we know that we must say that he is God and that he is truly a man.

I would sit in class, and watch and study these things, and ask my students, “Go back to your church background and tell me which of these heresies is the most common in your youth group, which is the most common that you think happens in the worship life, or your hymnody—where do we tell the story about Jesus in a way that releases the tension and causes us to see him as two people—so he’s the divine Son and then he’s Jesus of Nazareth, and somehow they got crazy-glued together (well, that’s another heresy!) ...and all the ways that the church was trying to say, “What can we actually say?”

If we give even the slightest bit on either side of those, the story falls apart, we don’t have God present to us, and I can’t really trust that my humanity is redeemed and whole and kept in the presence of God by somebody who knows my story intimately and is *for me* in that story.

JMF: In spite of that story.

CFN: In spite of it. He actually heals that story – becomes the person

who enters the human condition and becomes my lived healing by his very life. Lots of “on the ground” questions you deal with, with young adults, and they are trying to sort it out. It’s like, “How do you not fantasize sexually about somebody, as somebody who’s really trying to follow Jesus and who would take a lead from Jesus on this, and to trust him about ‘what does it mean to let this man or woman become a *person* again?’ How would you do that instead of let them be an object (which is what your culture is constantly asking you to do, is to objectify them and to de-personalize them for your gratification or for them to sell you something or whatever else is going on). How do you become one who is the image-bearer of God, who restores their personhood, without pretending you’re not a man who is aroused by them or a woman who’s aroused by that man?” How do you become obedient in your humanity – which is very different than pretending you don’t have any.

We would engage in some of these deep questions. In the process of doing that, I asked them to begin to hand in assignments that became reflections that were not prose. They weren’t written papers. They had to be things that showed me in some other form—I don’t give any restrictions around what it had to be—both their own body map and a God map. Not that you can completely categorize either, yourself or God, but how, through a tiny lens, how do you see yourself right now? What is your sense of your embodied person, and how do you see God? These were deeply far apart, because the incarnation wasn’t the way that they saw God first. God was the big far-away God, or the wrath of God, or the confusing God, or the God that you hoped liked you most of the time.

One student handed in her God map as a bottle of oil and balsamic vinegar. The instructions were to shake it up as hard as I could, and for that one instant that it looks like these things are held together, she said the oil represents the goodness of God, and the vinegar represents the wrath of God. “I can’t figure out how to hold those things together and trust that he really loves me, because I have this deep sense of his wrath.” She says, “I can hold it for just about as long as those things look like they’re mixed.”

To look at her way of perceiving herself by the kinds of things that she would draw or paint or construct, I realized that our poor sense of Jesus’ embodied life for us had deep ramifications, for these students would confess within their works – they would do their addictions, their self-mutilation, their sexual abuse that became part of their past story that they never felt like they could be released from, all kinds of issues that they felt

like they carried with them, and they had no idea how to be that embodied human and trust that that was good news—that God loved that person, and that one, and pulls that person, me, this way—into the divine fellowship.

In the process of doing the word of acceptance and receiving me, is a word of reconciling, restoring and healing. Already before God, all that's broken, it's me who bears the effects of my brokenness, who has not yet seen what I look like when I'm finished. But *he* does. The parts that I don't know what to do with in my brokenness, he also sees through his Son, and his Son mediates as my high priest, and the Spirit intercedes for me that anguish of being caught in "the already and the not yet." The empowerment, the worship, and the joy that Jesus offers on my behalf and that the Spirit offers on my behalf....

This book is trying to get to the core of why Jesus' humanity matters every day, so that issues of justice do not become "topics of interest," if I happen to be somebody who's all about social justice or I'm all about creation care, or I'm all about immigrant issues, or I'm about this, or I'm about that. You are a human image-bearer who is already being called to enact the future that's coming, where God's justice and reign, and the flourishing of creation is finally the way it is, where you finally get your life back, and so does everything else (referring to Romans 8 – that you are already the person that creation is holding on by its fingertips waiting for the glory of the children of God to be revealed, because once we get our lives back, so does everything else).

When Paul keeps going with that metaphor, he says, "What is the redemption, what is this glory, what is this thing that you anticipate? It's the redemption of your body." You're going to get your life back, and you're going to be whole! We're not going to be broken and screwed up anymore! Imagine relating to your husband and loving him the way you want to, instead of the way you do, Cherith. Those are my biggest dreams and joys, to think, I will love people the way I really want to. I will stop defending and hiding for fear that people will not love me if they really knew me. There will be a transparency in relationship that I cannot wait for.

We have been called as a people to begin to practice resurrection...we are called to begin to enact for the sake of the world, the story that we're in, so they see what's already going on and where this finally ends up as a new beginning in this final restoration of all things. It has a very practical aspect, and it allows the chance to go into some of these fascinating and

wonderful lively church conversations.

These heresies or creedal constructs were in academic conversations. These were... “What do people say when they get baptized? What do we mean when we invite people into the life of God and to be followers of Jesus and to this new creation? What are we actually saying?” One side would find themselves saying one thing, and somebody else over here is saying another... When we say these things, we are trying to articulate in short form in a little confession or a creed that somebody will say... “I believe this whole big narrative story, and here are the bullet points.”

Those became life-and-death conversations. If you change that one word by this letter, it means something completely different, and it’s an iota of difference, and you’re saying either Jesus *is* God, or he is just sort of *like* God but not really God. These were deep conversations with deep ramifications in the everyday life of the community of the saints back then. They still are; we are unpracticed and unlearned at thinking through the implications of who Jesus really is. I speak for myself and my own church traditions—it’s easy to keep going back to the familiar and just seeing what we know, without going into the part that’s harder to say. We know what we need to profess, what we’re called to be witness to, what we’re called to say in worship.

At this stage I fall into doxology and worship and praise because I can’t explain it as a creature-child – I just have to celebrate it, because it defines everything about my life. I look forward to seeing how this book finally comes into its final stages. It’s also a book about “What does it mean to walk by the power of the Holy Spirit?” What does it mean to walk as people who are not just to model (which is never the word...to look at Jesus as some figure that I’m supposed to try to copy, which is impossible in my own strength and impossible to understand)...but to say “What would it mean to really be joined to what he’s doing?” – which is always about justice, about the restoration of creation, about the care for the poor and the alien and the stranger, always for the other, always on the side of all these things, because all these things are already under his reign and his rule.

If they’re already all-mattering to him and he would like to have something to say and do about them, where would he look but his human image-bearers, where he would say, “This is what I’d like to do about this today, Cherith, would you like to participate with me, would you like to play?” Or he’d say, “You know, Mike, this is what I’d like to do.”

Sometimes it will look astounding because healing will break in, new creation will already break through... Anytime he talks about it, breaking through the concrete of the old creation comes this grass of new life. It will look like that sometimes. Other times it's that constant sense in Paul and Peter and John where it's the call to be filled with the Spirit in order to walk this incredibly challenging witness, to walk in these places where God wants to go, which is in the place of suffering—to talk into the places that he has claimed as his own, which is to stand with people in their pain and to make their need my need and to endure the suffering that's part of my own life instead of rail against God or run away from it.

He promised that I would participate in the fellowship of his glory, but glory for him, according to John 12, starts when he turns his face to Jerusalem and begins that final week of his life. It says, "And then Jesus was glorified." The glory and participation in his fellowship is suffering...so our participation in the fellowship of his suffering. These things are not one or the other. It's not "I want some glory, so I'm going to have to have a little suffering because Jesus suffered."

Jesus has been trying to turn this around for me and say, "Cherith, I suffered because you do. I've entered into your situation. I knew what was coming for you. I know the human condition. I knew you would have this. And the only way for your story to turn out with a different ending than having that suffering be the final word, is to enter into your suffering and take it and heal it and redeem it, so that when you are in the midst of it, you see it as a participation in the fellowship of mine and you know the outcome, and you know that I can empower you to endure that, just as the Father by the Spirit empowered me all the way to and through the cross." It's become an earthy conversation in some wonderful ways. I am hoping by getting the book out there, that it will also create a lot more dialogue on some of these issues.

JMF: The sense of belonging and of being accepted from the beginning, and knowing that that comes before your life in the Spirit and before measuring up to anything (as though we could measure up to anything) seems to give a sense of freedom. We are able to enter into this suffering knowing that it isn't a matter of a pass/fail, it's a matter of you're already belonging, you're already accepted, and you're entering into a life that is real and will work out right because it's already been claimed and healed and redeemed. It makes all the difference. Many people fear, as you said, "I don't know if I can measure up. I don't want to embark on a journey I know I can't finish or don't believe I can finish."

CFN: Or see failure at the end of every day.

JMF: Right.

CFN: That's part of the challenge that gets addressed in Romans 7-8. Romans 7 is never Paul's description of the Christian life. Let's talk about three laws... If we're going to use the term *law* (because we get that term, because we all used to be under that law...) how about naming sin and death a law, because it always turns out that way? This is the way it goes. So we have this law of Torah-keeping, we have this law of sin and death that absolutely cannot be...and we have this new law of the Spirit, as Jeremiah called it (or Ezekiel or Isaiah calls it). He says that to walk under this new law is to be set free from this condemnation that comes with... "I thought I would be able to pull it off, and yet again I blew it. Who will deliver me from this?"

Paul is saying, "Nothing from those two laws will ever deliver you from that, but in the Spirit, every day, by continuing to trust and release and invite God." You don't have to *invite* him to be present – it's almost just letting him loose. It's letting him have the moment. To say, "Lord, I won't constrict you. I will listen when you talk to me and stop, and when I've prayed earlier today, 'Lead me not into temptation but deliver me from evil,' when you try to do that for me, I will listen to you and not go into my default setting or not go the easiest place of my kind of bent-ness."

Over time, God begins to take that bent-ness and straighten it into conformity with his Son, which is an obedient submission, which is a "What are we doing today, and how do I be a part of that?" I'll have things all through every day that need forgiving, but the Lord already knows that before I woke up, and he isn't inviting me or not inviting me in based on how well I'm going to do today, I'm just in.

He says, as my dad used to say, and still does, "God has never been about the business of fitting individuals for heaven. He has been about the business of making a people for his name and presence." He has done that through his Son, and nobody can alter that outcome, nobody can alter that reality. Either we can participate in it more and more and get on board with what the possibilities are by our life in the Spirit for the other...and realize it's not a triumphalism of, "I get more and more power to see things look easier or amazing."

Sometimes what looks amazing and gets easier is to just keep loving the person who makes you crazy, to love the person who is the most painful person in your life, to love yourself when you're that person who is the most unlovable person. And to watch the power of God begin to

enter in as a choice of love again and again, and it becomes the radical participation in the life of the Holy Spirit that will sometimes look like healing and sometimes look like endurance. It will look like suffering long, which is the character of God for those that he loves no matter what they do, whether they even recognize that.

The beauty of the gospel that comes in Triune form is that when Jesus shows up and says, "I'd like to introduce you to the Father and I'd like to give you the life that we have together by the Spirit." The minute that offering is laid out there, there is nothing anyone has done or could possibly do to have earned that invitation. When he is offers that through his own life, there is also nothing anyone can do to run out the warranty on that offering. There's nothing where that eternal-life insurance policy gets cancelled. There's nothing that can stop that from being the way it is, because it's grounded in God, not me, and my humanity is completely grounded in that, because Jesus holds my humanity in his own.

I know how this turns out because he's right there with me and he's saying, "Cherith, you don't have to wait for the future, would you like to be part of what I am doing today in my reigning, in my standing in as a priest for the sake of the other before the Lord? Would you like to be an intercessor on behalf of... Would you like to go minister to the needs of... Would you like to stand for justice because I am the ruler over all things?" That means you have to stop and take the time to say, "That is not okay" instead of saying "well, that's sort of inconvenient for me, or as an American I feel entitled to it," or whatever it is.

He is saying, "I am Prophet, Cherith, which means that if you want to participate in that, then you need to tell the truth, and you need to be the first person who hears the truth as you tell it, which means that your life has to be conformed to the things that I am telling you. You can be a proclaimer of the gospel because that's what I am doing, is giving out the good news. You can be an enactor of justice because that's what I'm doing, is restoring all things for life and for good. I am being your high priest, and if you would like to be among the priesthood of believers, which you are, and offer worship through these different ways that I would invite you into this day that looks different than anybody else, and in some ways looks the same as everybody else every day, then you get to be doing what I'm doing until we're finished, and you're lodged in your whole new way of being human with me."

A TRINITARIAN PERSPECTIVE IN WORSHIP

Introduction: This edition of *You're Included* comes to you from the city of St. Andrews, Scotland. The University of St. Andrews, founded in 1413, is the oldest university in Scotland and one of the oldest in the English-speaking world. In its 600-year history, the university has established a reputation as one of Europe's leading centers for teaching and research. St. Mary's College, the university's divinity school, was founded in 1539. The school is still housed in its original 16th-century buildings. Join us now in St. Mary's College Hall as J. Michael Feazell



interviews Robin Parry. Dr. Parry is Theological Books Editor with Wipf & Stock Publishers. His published works include *Worshiping Trinity*, *Old Testament Story and Christian Ethics*, and, most recently, *Lamentations*.

J. Michael Feazell:

Thanks for taking time to be with us today.

Robin Parry: Thanks for having me.

JMF: What was it that led you into your study of Trinitarian theology?

RP: It was an experience in my church one Sunday. I must have read something about the Trinity before coming out because it was vaguely at the back of my mind when I went into the meeting. When the meeting began, the leader at the front said, “Well, everyone, we’ve come here to meet with Jesus.” I thought, “Okay, I’ve actually come to meet with some other people as well, but that’s nice.” They went on and they prayed, “Dear Lord Jesus, thanks for being with us, come and be with us as we sing to you.” Then we sang a whole lot of songs.

Something near the beginning made me think, “This is interesting because there’s Jesus talk, but what about the Father or the Holy Spirit?” There was no mention of them. So I listened as the meeting went through. Song after song, they were either what I call “Jesus songs” or they were what I call “You, Lord” songs, which are the kind of songs about the Lord or God and it doesn’t say either Father, or Son, or Spirit. In the context of the meeting, it was clear that the “You, Lord” songs meant Jesus. All the prayers were about Jesus, and then we had a sermon about Jesus, but there was no mention of the Father or the Holy Spirit. We had a sinner’s prayer at the end, but it was a sinner’s prayer re-cast in a Jesus version, “Dear Lord Jesus, I’ve sinned against you. I know you love me, you died for me, you rose from the dead, come and live in my heart.” Then we went away.

By this point I was thinking, there’s something weird about this. The other thing that was weird was that nobody else seemed to think there was anything wrong. It just didn’t click, it didn’t register. I thought, now that’s worrying, that you can have a whole meeting devoid of any sense of engaging with the Father or the Holy Spirit in a Christian meeting and they won’t notice it.

I thought, “Maybe I should go.” I went home and got a worship album, probably the best-selling worship album in the world at the time, and thought I’d have a look through the lyrics and see what they’re saying. I read through the lyrics, and all the songs were good. On their own, there was not a problem with any of them. But as I read each song, what struck me... (it was a recording of a worship event)... looking at the whole thing, there was not a single reference to the Father or the Holy Spirit anywhere.

Intriguingly, the story of Jesus was completely collapsed, so there were references about God’s transcendence, there were references about the imminence and presence of God, but there was no reference to the Incarnation, the story of Israel, creation, no reference to the ministry of

Jesus. One song referred to his death and resurrection. There were no references to the Ascension, the giving of the Spirit or the return of Christ. The whole thing was collapsed into “my experience of God now.” I thought, “That’s really worrying. As a worship event (which this was a recording of), it’s completely un-Trinitarian.”

It’s terrible once you’re led to this, you start listening for it... In subsequent weeks I listened to the songs and the prayers and so on, and I found regularly the Father and the Spirit either hardly mentioned or not mentioned at all. It was terrible.

I then started looking at a Vineyard worship album. I went through every Vineyard album published over an eight-year period, something like eight years, maybe five to eight. I went through the lyrics to see how many of them mentioned the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, how many mentioned two, and if so which two, how many mentioned all three. It was shocking. When you looked at the whole corpus of songs, all the songs were fine. I have no problem with any of them in particular, but when you look at them as a whole, there was no sense of Trinitarian balance. This is what alerted me to the issue of, when we worship, is our worship fully Christian, or is it slipping into something that’s almost Unitarian in practice, or what Karl Rahner calls “mere monotheism.” If somehow we discovered that the Trinity wasn’t true, would it make any difference to the way we did anything? Would anyone even notice?

That was the thing that set off my flags and got me thinking that I needed to look into this and see if I can do something constructive about it, which is what I tried to do by writing the book [*Worshipping Trinity*] and talking to worship leaders and song writers and so on after.

JMF: After your teaching (and you’ve done a lot of work in it), what is it about Trinitarian theology that you find the most compelling and exciting?

RP: It’s hard to put your finger on one thing and say *that’s* the thing. In the same way, when I was a kid, I used to have a favorite color: green. Whereas now, I can’t abstract a single color. Green’s beautiful when it’s alongside of these other colors, but it’s the interplay.

If there was one thing that I keep coming back to about Trinitarian theology, as I conceive it, is this sense that in the person of Christ... It came to me through one of the concerns raised when I started saying we need to be more Trinitarian, intentionally Trinitarian, in the way we worship. Somebody said, “Yeah, but shouldn’t our worship be Jesus-

focused, because we're Christians and the Gospels are Jesus-focused, shouldn't *we* be Jesus-focused? I thought, "That's true. We are Christians and we should be Jesus-focused." Then it dawned on me, to be Jesus-focused is to be Trinitarian because it's precisely in the incarnation of Christ that the Trinity is revealed. By definition, if you are focused on the Jesus who is revealed in the Gospels, the Jesus that the church believes in, if you're that kind of Jesus-focused, you will be Trinitarian. You can be Christocentric Trinitarian – it sort of follows.

I keep coming back to this sense that in the person of Christ, God has completed this work of salvation in the Savior, inscribed in his flesh, our humanity is redeemed. In the risen body of Christ, God has done all that needs to be done to save us. Now, through the work of the Spirit, God is working to join people to Christ to participate in that salvation.

I keep coming back to this thought, and it keeps inspiring me, because it takes the pressure off. I think, I can have hope because it's God doing this. It's not about me doing this or anyone doing this. I look at the statistics of how churches are doing, and I think, this isn't good. Then I think, God's doing this. God has completed this work in Christ. There's no way he's not going to finish it. There's no way that the Spirit's been caught by surprise.

All analogies of the Trinity have their pros and cons. I like Irenaeus' image: two hands of the Father. It has its downsides, but one of the upsides is it gives a lovely way of thinking about salvation. You have the Father, whose intention is to draw humanity and people to himself, so he does this by stretching out the hand of his Son. Then he reaches out the hand of his Spirit, and through the Spirit he draws us to Christ. Then through Christ, he draws us to himself. We're held in this Trinitarian embrace where the Father, through the Spirit, draws us through the Son to himself.

I love that image and this sense that it's God that does this. It doesn't depend on us in the end. God, the Spirit, enables us to participate, and we engage, and it's a subjective engaging with God in our relationship with God. But it's not something *we* do. It's not earning anything with God or achieving anything with God. It's being enabled by God to participate. Even our response to God is, as Matt Redmond says, a gifted response, a response that God enables us to make.

JMF: If Christians don't have some kind of understanding of the Trinity and the relationships within the Trinity and how we're drawn to that and so on... (and many don't – it's common to go into a church that

doesn't have a Trinitarian point of worship or preaching. Even though they believe in the Trinity as a fundamental doctrine, most members don't think about it and they wouldn't be able to explain it if they were asked.) What do they lose? They're Christian, they have faith, they're saved by grace and they walk in Christ and so on to the degree that they can. But what are they missing? What could they have, if they better understood?

RP: Their experience of God *is* Trinitarian even if they don't realize it, because there's no other way of encountering God, because there is no other God to encounter. When anyone has an encounter with God, it is the Triune God they encounter. But it can enrich their encounter of God, their subjective understanding and experience of that relationship with God, and it can free them up to walk with God in more liberated ways, to understand better the God who they encounter, the God who is at work in their life working out their salvation. It's still the Holy Spirit working in them even if they've never heard of the Spirit or can't conceptualize these things rightly.

It would enrich their relationship with God in many ways. For instance, it would enrich their engagement with God as a Father to realize that it's not through their effort to try and please the Father or earn status for the Father or somehow, if they misconstrue their Trinitarian theology, somehow placate the Father who's not very kindly disposed toward them. To realize that you don't have to placate God, God doesn't need placating. God loves us. This is why he sends his Son and this is why he sends his Spirit and draws us.

It enables us to appreciate more the love and grace of God and to take some of the pressure off that we have to earn stuff with God. But it doesn't change the objective fact that it is still the Father through the Son and the Spirit. That's the only way that they are able to engage with God in any sense at all, even if they can't think of it straight.

JMF: Isn't it true that there is no such thing as good in the world or love, mercy, all things good that *don't* come from Christ, that don't come from the Triune God into the world? It's not like people who are not Christian if and when they do good things...it's not like that comes out of some other universe not made by...

RP: Right. They're living in the same created order which is the good creation that the true God made. They're living as God's creatures in the image of God even if they don't realize they are. People shouldn't understand a doctrine of total depravity, say, to mean that everybody is as

depraved as they possibly could be. I've always reacted against the misuse of the scripture that says, even the good things you do are as filthy rags... What the prophet means, what God means when he says that, is "You guys are so bad, you guys in particular, that even the good stuff you do is bad." He's not saying *everybody's* such that even their love and kindness, even *that's* filthy and disgusting in my sight. God isn't saying anything like that.

We can see genuine aspects of the image of God and the work of God and even the Spirit working in and through people who don't yet know Christ, because they're God's creatures in God's world. Although the image of God might be broken in us, it's not completely destroyed. We would cease to be human if that was the case.

JMF: The only way to be human is to be human in Christ. That's all there is.

RP: Right. In one way of thinking about salvation, salvation is about the restoration of our humanity. It's about being human the way God made us to be human. Sometimes I think of it like this: Imagine our humanity is like a rubber glove. You might wash the dishes with rubber gloves... Christ, or the Logos, is like that on which we are modeled as humans. It's like a rubber glove molded on this hand, but the rubber glove has become torn and ripped and damaged.

So what God does in Christ is the very template, the very one in whose image we are made, he takes on – I don't mean *disguises* himself as a human – but he *becomes* flesh, and on the cross melts down this humanity, our humanity, and re-molds it around himself, remakes it, re-forges humanity in the resurrection. So in the resurrection of Christ, we see it's all about the glory of God in human flesh, in human beings. Salvation is about all of that, being human as God made us to be, because we need a bigger view of what it is to be human.

In Genesis, when God makes us, God makes us in his image. The word in Hebrew is *tselem*, the word used to describe the image of a deity. In the Ancient Near East you would have a temple and a statue of the deity in the temple. The statue of the deity was understood to be... They would go through a ritual, and when they went through the ritual, they believed that the spirit of the god would inhabit the statue.

Now, the amazing thing is, Yahweh forbids the use of any statues, any images like that. Because of the kind of God that God is, nothing like that, no statue that can't speak and can't act and do things, can image this God. But God authorizes in the earth his own *tselem*, his own icon, as it were,

which is a human being, to be indwelt by the presence of God in the earth, mediating God's rule and dominion over creation. It's an astonishingly *high* view of what it is to be human. Amazing. And people say Christians have such a dour view that humans are just scum and worm and all that.

The Bible has a very high view of humans as God's icons through which God commissions humans that his glory, the presence of God himself, would be in humans. This is what's being restored. This is a glory lost in sin, and humans fall short of this glory. But in Christ it's a glory that's restored. So being a Christian is all about being changed by the Spirit to share in Christ's humanity. It's about in Christ, through the Spirit, becoming more human.

JMF: Going back to the topic of worship... You've done a lot of work on Christian worship, and I don't know if I can put it in these terms, but could you talk for a few minutes about what we might call the good, the bad, and the ugly of Christian worship?

RP: Sure. There's a lot of good, there's a lot of bad, and there's a lot of ugly. I guess it's easier to talk about the bad and the ugly. One thing that concerns me as a person who thinks theologically and thinks Trinitarianly is all the stuff that *isn't* in worship, particularly in my own tradition.

I'm charismatic, evangelical, free-church ecclesiology, and the way we do things has plus points and downsides. One of the changes that's taken place recently is there's been a move where you used to have the minister who would lead the whole service, and often it would have a clear theological shape, a certain kind of terrain that you would cover. You'd always have confession of sins, thanksgiving, you'd have intercessions and so on. For various reasons, this has changed to a form of worship where you have a worship leader who is basically a singer and guitar player, and worship becomes more about singing one song after another, just linking songs, and that would be a worship time.

One of the problems with that it is in great danger of cutting out crucial parts of Christian worship, like confession, like intercession. And because the songs tend to come out of the same songwriting stables, you don't tend to get songs that deal with issues like lament, or confession, or the Eucharist, or baptism, or listening to the word of God and so on. Things that are central in Christian spirituality are gone, and very quickly you lose a sense of balance or shape.

In some of the more liturgical worshiping traditions, to me it's like

Lord of the Rings – you have this vast landscape of terrain that you’re covering as you move through it. There’s a sense of movement as you go through a meeting or a series of meetings. Over the whole Christian year you have this shape of movement and engaging with different aspects of God and the story of God in Christ.

Sometimes it feels to me like we charismatics are in danger of being like locked in a broom cupboard under the stairs walking in circles, and we’re covering such a small terrain there’s not much sense of... What holds to link the songs together is often in the key, and that means I can go from one to the other... Are they songs that have blessed me recently? But there isn’t much thought often given to the theological shape and the sense of what are the kind of things that we ought to be engaging with here.

This is through no bad intent on the part of worship leaders. In my experience, worship leaders and song writers desperately want to help the people of God to engage with God. This is where their heart is at, but they have no role models in how that can be done. There’s little help given to them through leaders or training courses. When I see the programs of these training courses for worship leaders, it’s often all technical stuff about PAs, or it’s technical stuff about the music, or it might be encountering the presence.

One of the dangers of contemporary worship, particularly charismatic, is it all becomes about my engagement with God now. Everything becomes collapsed into now. There’s no sense of where we come from or where we’re going, and this is bad for our spirituality, because most of our Christian spirituality and the way we were led to God is something we pick up through engaging in the practices of worship. The ways we think about God, the language we use to describe God, the kinds of things we think to talk to God about, and the kinds of things that would never cross our minds to talk to God about, we learn through engaging in prayer. We learn those habits and things through doing it communally. If our spirituality is being shaped in a deformed (not unchristian, but sub-Christian) way when we meet together to worship, then we are selling short our congregations.

Our people are being shaped in ways so that, just to take lament as an instance, if there is never any place for lament in our worship (unlike in Scripture where there is), then when people are confronted with situations where the appropriate and honest response, the faithful covenant response to God, is like Christ himself on the cross, to lament... If we’re not giving

people a vocabulary to know how to respond to God in those situations, they end up feeling bad or feeling like they're somehow unbelieving... "How could I have those thoughts?" It's pastorally terrible.

One of my goals is to help charismatics to rediscover a charismatic way of lamenting in the Spirit. Christ on the cross stands in our place and laments in our place. He prays, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Psalm 22. It's not in a sense of abandoning God – it's, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" He's lamenting as a way of holding onto God in this situation. Christ does this, Old Testament saints do this.

I argue this in a paper and a book I've done on Lamentations.... One of the ways that the Holy Spirit helps us, is that the Holy Spirit, as creation groans [Romans 8] and as the church groans, lamenting the current state, groaning in frustration, groaning looking to the future, and groaning at intercession – the Holy Spirit groans with us, groans with creation. As we groan, I argue, the Holy Spirit is doing the same thing. The Holy Spirit is groaning in frustration at the brokenness of creation, and so lamenting.

The Holy Spirit is looking to the future to bring to birth, like through the travail and pain of childbirth, a new future. The Holy Spirit, through the groaning, is praying by the will of the Father for creation to be liberated. The Holy Spirit can groan through our groaning. In the Holy Spirit, we can lament in the Spirit, so our laments and prayers are taken up by the Holy Spirit and infused with his and become, rather than cries of despair, transformed into groans that take hold of God and look to the future with hope.

There is a Trinitarian way of understanding what is going on and how lament is something that God himself through Christ and through the Spirit is engaged with, and through which we ought to, as faithful Christian disciples, be lamenting, groaning with creation and praying it forward into its glorious destiny.

LAMENT AND THE ROLE OF ISRAEL IN SALVATION HISTORY

Jesus' lament on the cross

J. Michael Feazell: We've been talking about lament in Scripture. When Jesus was on the cross he says, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Many times people look at that and see the despair included, but doesn't that imply the entire Psalm from which it comes, with its conclusion that resolves a sense of despair?

Robin Parry: Absolutely. When in the New Testament someone will quote from the Old Testament, often they might just quote a verse or even a phrase, but the hearers will know the Scriptures; they were immersed in the Scriptures, and the hearers will call to mind the whole context, the whole story, the whole Psalm or whatever. When Jesus says, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" we need to remember that Jesus would have known how the Psalm ended, and the Psalm ends with deliverance.

The book of Hebrews chapter 2 quotes from the salvation part of the Psalm and applies that to Jesus. In the early church, the Christ-followers saw it as appropriate to take the second part of the Psalm as applying to Christ and the resurrection, and Christ as the one who praises God in the congregation.

But we need to be careful not to collapse or to downgrade the despair or the lament of Christ on the cross as if he knew it was going to come out

all happy in the end anyway, so he wasn't really lamenting. Christ isn't just putting on a show. He isn't feigning lament. He really is suffering in our humanity, he really is lamenting on our behalf. He is expressing precisely how he feels. It's the positive part. In Mark and Matthew, "why have you forsaken me?" comes right near the end. This has been building up through the whole experience on Calvary. It comes out near the end, "why have you forsaken me?" It's not just a passing thing and then he gets over it.

We need to beware of somehow collapsing the hope and the despair together — so he's despairing, but actually he's happy. He's lamenting, so we need to take that seriously, but also to recognize that Jesus has not given up on God. He says, "*My God, why have you forsaken me?*" This is lament within a relationship with God where he knows... for the joy set before him, as it says in Hebrews, he endured the shame of the cross.

This is an important tension to hold onto, that we have cross and resurrection. Alan Lewis does this wonderful thing on the theology of Holy Saturday where he says, Holy Saturday is situated between cross and resurrection. In a way, it holds them apart, and it holds them together. On one hand, Holy Saturday means we can't have the cross without the resurrection, or the resurrection without the cross. We have to have the two, we have to hold them together, but we don't want to collapse them into some smudge. So it gives a bit of distance between the two. We need to hear them, he says, in stereo.

On one hand, we need to hear the cross almost as it would have sounded, as it would have felt, without looking back in retrospect from the perspective of the resurrection. But on the other hand, if that's *all* you do, that can't be a Christian way of looking at the cross. At the same time, you have to hear the cross through the resurrection, seen from that perspective.

This is instructive for how we should understand lament, and lament within the Christian life. On one hand, there's a space for lament. We don't want to collapse lament and salvation together, so that the lament isn't really lament. We need to give it space to be itself. In a biblical theology, it never has the last word. We are a people who believe in the cross and the resurrection. If you let lament have the last word, it's like saying, "Go there, but there's no empty tomb."

If you look at the biblical book of Lamentations, this comes out nicely in that Lamentations ends with the one voice that they're desperate to hear. The people in the book of Lamentations are saying, "God, come, save us,

rescue us.” The one voice that does not speak by the end is the one voice they want to hear, the voice of God. The book ends (in the canonical form, the form in which God has seen fit to preserve it for us) without the salvation. They’re looking, they’re calling, they’re begging, and it hasn’t come. But the book of Lamentations is also preserved for us in a canonical context, and we can’t read it as if it’s not part of these other Scriptures, which proceed and follow it.

The book of Isaiah picks up on Lamentations on numerous occasions. In Isaiah we see God’s speaking, God’s solution. To give one example of this: in chapter 1 of Lamentations, over and over again, we see there’s no one to comfort her. Jerusalem is desolate, and there’s no one to stand by her, no one to offer consolation. Isaiah picks this up. Chapter 40 begins, “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.” Over and over again God says, “I am Yahweh, your comforter.”

On one hand, you need to hear Lamentations to give it space to be itself, because God preserved it in that form, and the Bible doesn’t rush in and say, “Quick, quick, quick, let’s get to the hope, let’s rush to the hope.” It leaves the pain, the breathing space. But it can’t let it stay there, and it wouldn’t be a Christian, it wouldn’t be a Jewish, it wouldn’t be a faithful hearing or recension of Lamentations to hear it just in its canonical form but not in its canonical context. We need to hear it in stereo.

Lamentations, in a sense, is Israel’s reaction to its exile. It’s looking back to the exile and it’s looking forward to the restoration. It’s a bit like Holy Saturday as we look back to the cross and forward to the resurrection. In some ways, as Christians, we can see Lamentations as the Holy Saturday literature of Israel. It’s a way of trying to look back at what was, and what’s been lost and what’s been destroyed...it’s looking around at the grave, at this destruction that surrounds them, and it’s looking forward to a salvation that is to come but has not yet come.

Jewish worship does this brilliantly, because every year in the Jewish liturgical cycle, on the ninth of Av, the book of Lamentations is recited. On that day in the synagogue, people sit on the floor. There is no celebration, there are no readings from the Torah, it’s a day of mourning and fasting. The next day it begins with the comfort thing from Isaiah, and it moves forward then, towards the liturgical cycle of Atonement. So Jewish people have brilliantly captured this insight of saying there’s a time to weep and there’s a time to rejoice, and we need to give space for the two, but we need to realize that the time to weep is situated within a bigger

story, and that story doesn't end with weeping.

As Christians, we want to say the reason we have hope... We recognize that there's a cross, and that the creation is marked by brokenness, and that our own lives are often broken, but we know that it can't end that way. We know that it ends with resurrection, because the tomb is empty. As Stanley Hauerwas says, we can never be hopeless people even if we might despair (maybe despair is the wrong word)...even if we might lament, even if we might feel pain, even if we might cry out. To have an honest and integrated and faithful relationship with God, we need to do that. That's the appropriate human response on certain occasions, but if it's a Christian response, it is never hopeless.

The imprecatory psalms

JMF: In the Psalms, there's an honesty of a feeling, of expression... Often it comes across as anger toward someone who has hurt the psalmist in some way. It gives the freedom to feel what we actually feel, knowing that God has already dealt with sin, both ours and others, so there's a freedom to know that he's not going to condemn us for expressing how we actually feel. Yet the freedom to express that isn't an end in itself, and it doesn't leave us alone in our lament.

RP: No. The Psalms of lament usually move through that and beyond that. Not always, but there are situations within a bigger context, and in a bigger context we move beyond that. Some of the Psalms are troubling — the imprecatory Psalms, particularly Psalm 137, smashing the children on the rocks and so on. How could that be an authorized kind of prayer? We could say various things about that, but one of them is, that it is how the psalmist feels, and it is a sense of honesty. Walter Brueggemann brings this up well in his work on lamenting Psalms. There's a brutal honesty in these Psalms — not one we feel comfortable with, but he thinks it's important to have space for that kind of thing even if you can't end with that, if that can't be where you stop.

JMF: I've had people ask about that... Sometimes it's attributed to David...he's "a man after God's own heart" and yet he's talking like this. How can that be part of the Bible and how can it be okay to feel that way? I think I've said worse than that. I don't publish it for everyone to read, but sometimes when I'm in the car alone and there's a traffic situation, I can get like that. Sometimes when I think of things that someone has done, not necessarily to me, but outrageous things that have happened of

injustice, I feel these things. I'm not David, but I don't think when we ask a question like that, that we've never felt like that. We've all said things that we would be embarrassed if they would be played back to a full auditorium.

RP: Often when you see in a Psalm the psalmist will say, "Lord, strike my enemies down and destroy them, wipe them from the face of the earth," or something... Often, it's not a sense of personal revenge that they're after. The psalmist is speaking from a place of powerlessness. What the psalmist is *not* doing is they're not saying, "I'm going to take vengeance into my own hands."

JMF: Right.

RP: The psalmist is saying, "I am not going to take vengeance into my hands. I'm not in a position to do so, and I'm not going to do so. That is God's role." The Psalm is a stepping back by the psalmist saying, "I cannot do anything about this and I'm not going to. This is God's place to do something about this." That's an important theological lesson for Christians to learn — as Paul says, "Do not seek vengeance, for the Lord says, it's mine to repay." Christians, like the Psalmist, need to learn that, even from those imprecatory Psalms.

The second thing we need to realize is, it's not personal vengeance. They're seeking deliverance and salvation. They've been persecuted by Assyrians or Babylonians... When they pray destruction on them, what they're saying is, "Lord, save us." The political reality is, what salvation would entail would be for our enemies to be removed. It reflects a sense of God's justice and judgment. These people have acted terribly, and what they have done is inhuman, and it is not inappropriate for God to judge them.

For a Christian to pray this, a Christian couldn't take it up in an unreflective way — we would have to read it through Christ, and we'd have to read it in the light of Christ saying, love your enemies, forgive those who persecute you, and so on. But there are still important lessons that Christians need to draw, even from these Psalms that at first sight seem so outrageous — they're actually prayers of powerless people who need God to deliver them from people who are treating them inhumanly, and they're being realistic about what that might look like.

JMF: In many cases historically, the enemies of Israel, didn't they do some of those kinds of things to the Israelites?

RP: It would depend when and who, but there were some atrocities;

the Babylonian destruction is one instance. The people are kept in the city under siege, they're dying of starvation and disease, the cities are ravished, people are killed, exiled. It's devastating — not least psychologically, not least in the way they understood their sense of relationship with God and, "We're the people you've chosen, this is the land that you've put us in, this is your city, this is your temple, this is your king and now the king is captured." Their whole world is falling apart. It's incredibly traumatizing.

Even aside from the issue of people starving to death and people being killed, the Bible tends to be very down on imperialism. This comes out in many ways, but here we see the military, imperial power imposing itself on this little nation. The prophets and psalmists don't tend to warm to that. It's a critique of that kind of militarist expansionistic empire-building thing.

Israel in salvation history

JMF: Let's switch gears for a moment and talk about Israel in salvation history. Is the church a replacement for Israel in salvation history?

RP: No — although I have to say that for most of my Christian life, and for most of my theological life, I would have answered yes. I now think it's one of the things that has blighted Christian theology and Christian history, is this idea that the church somehow replaces Israel — that the people of Israel have been abandoned, they were faithless and now we're the people who are doing it properly, fulfilling their mission and so on.

This is disastrous not simply for the Jewish people — and it has been disastrous for them, as any study of the history of Jewish-Christian relations will show that Christians have treated Jews despicably over the centuries and often still do — not merely that, but it's been terrible for us, because we have lost the sense of who we are.

I will give a brief summary of how I would understand what the church is. Not all Christians agree with this, but the way I think it comes out scripturally is that here you have this story, of God creates the world and his desire in Genesis 1-11 is for humanity as a whole, it's for the nations, but creation has fallen, creation has broken, how is God going to deal with that? The way that God chooses to deal with this is through electing a man, Abraham, and the descendants who come from him — not simply for their own sake, but also for the sake of the world, that through this nation and through what this nation is about and their ministry, it's going to be

somehow (and it's not clear how, at the start), God will bring redemption for the created order.

So we're set out in Genesis with this way of understanding what Israel's mission is about, and Israel is called in some ways like a new humanity. Abraham is a bit like a new Adam and his descendants living in the land, Adam and Eve living in the Garden of Eden. They are to live God's way in God's land, modeling righteousness and justice, following the laws; this is the calling they have. As Paul says, "because of the flesh," actually living the Torah doesn't happen. Over and over again they're a stiff-necked people. They can't do it.

Then the covenant curses come into play. In Deuteronomy and Leviticus, God says if you do not keep the covenant, these curses will come into play. These curses are not the collapse of covenant, they're not the breaking of the relationship, they're taking place within covenant. God's covenant is irrevocable. Paul says as much with regard to Israel in Romans 11. God's gift and God's calling and the covenant with the patriarchs is in place, it is irrevocable, and nothing Israel does can break that, but what it can do is incur all the sort of curses that take place within that.

So God starts to say, through the prophets, for Israel to play its role in creation, something has got to happen for Israel. Israel needs saving. So through Jeremiah, through Ezekiel, we learn of this... a new covenant that God will make with Israel where he will put his laws within them. Deuteronomy speaks of circumcising the heart. In Deuteronomy 30:6, it talks about after the exile, God will circumcise Israel's hearts and enable them to obey him. This is what Jeremiah speaks of as new covenant, and Ezekiel talks about putting the Spirit within you so that you'll obey my laws.

So we have this solution whereby God will redeem Israel from their exile and then the nations will come on pilgrimage, they will worship the God of Israel, and so on. These Old Testament (or whatever we want to call it) – those prophetic expectations of salvation are the key for understanding what New Testament says of the church and everything we're about.

Tom Wright put this brilliantly: Christ on the cross is standing in the place of Israel. He is like Israel writ small, I think he puts it like that. He is one man, Israel, and he bears Israel's exilic curses upon himself. As such, he is bearing the sins of the whole world upon himself because Israel is a microcosm representative of humanity. The sin of the world is focused

on him, and in the death and resurrection of Christ we see the exile and restoration of Israel played out and taken to its climax.

In the book of Acts we see this worked out where lots of Jewish people start to come to recognize Jesus as their Messiah and receive the Holy Spirit, which is one of the signs of the new covenant. The Holy Spirit is given and poured out. Here we see Israel being restored in their midst. Somehow in the midst of time, in the midst of the old age, here is *the end of exile* being played out in the giving in the Spirit.

Then the Gentiles, the nations, with Cornelius and so on, come and worship Israel's God. This comes out clearly in Acts 15 with James and the Jerusalem Council. We have this picture in Acts and through the other New Testament documents – in the church, you have Jew and Gentile united into a single body, but they're not blurred together into some mush. They are both one in Christ, both accepted in Christ, because of the saving work of the Messiah.

But Israel is still Israel with its distinctive calling, and the nations, the Gentiles, are like the pilgrim nations in an eschatological foretaste. So the church is like a prophetic anticipation of the end of the age in which we see the promise realized of Israel restored, in Jews who accept the Messiah, and the pilgrim nations coming in, the Gentiles who accept the Messiah united as one body. But the Jews are still Jews. I think that Jewish believers still should be circumcised and follow food laws and so on, Gentile believers should not, because the Scriptures are clear that when the end times come, the Gentiles will be accepted as Gentiles; they don't have to convert to Judaism. Paul is emphatic about this. If Christ has brought in the new age, then Gentiles not only don't have to, they *must* not get circumcised.

We have a vision here of the church in which Jew and Gentile exist as Jew and Gentile side by side in one body, but without saying, as has happened in the history of the church, any Jew who becomes a believer has changed their religion and ceases to be Jewish and has to give up anything that looks distinctively Jewish. I think this is a complete misunderstanding of what the New Testament is about. It's failing to be the kind of church that Jesus aimed to bring about, of restored Israel anticipated — for the end times, when all Israel will be saved, which it says in Romans 11, and all the nations will come and worship, which is anticipated in the church prophetically.

WHAT ON EARTH IS JESUS DOING?

Introduction: Today's guest is Dr. Andrew Purves, Professor of Reformed Theology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Dr. Purves is author of numerous books, including *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition*, *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology*, *The Crucifixion of Ministry*, and *The Resurrection of Ministry*.

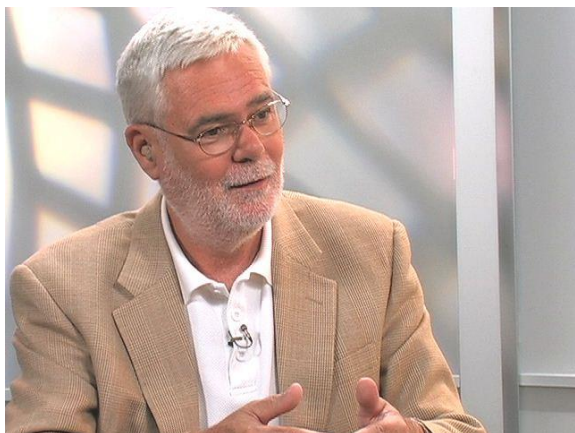
J. Michael Feazell: Thanks for joining us.

Andrew Purves: You're welcome.

JMF: We appreciate you taking the time out of your schedule, which is pretty full, to be here with us. You have been a professor of theology for some time, and you've written a number of books that we'll be talking about. Tell us the story of how you became a theologian and how you got

into writing such books on the topics that you've chosen.

AP: It's a long story, but as quickly as I can... I often get asked, when was I saved? My smart answer is, "I was elect in Jesus Christ from the foundation of the world." It's not just a



smart answer, it's a true answer, because that grounds me in a reality other than my own experiences. I believe that 2000 years ago, my humanity was borne by the man Jesus and born unto God through his apostolic Sonship.

When I was 19, I was a high-school dropout wandering through life in Edinburgh, Scotland, and I had an experience that drove me the next Sunday to church. The minister got into the pulpit, said, "Let us worship God," and instantly I knew that God wanted me to preach the gospel. Then I had to go back to high school and all the rest, and then discovered I was good at this stuff, and started picking up degrees and became, by God's good providence, a student of Tom Torrance and James Torrance. At times I scratched against them, but at the foundation of my theological formation there was this classical, orthodox, evangelical, catholic theology of the confessional church.

After all my studies were completed and I came to the United States, I married an American woman and started to preach, and realized that the gospel I was to preach was the classical faith of the church. That's what began the process of inquiring more and more fully, "What am I to say in the sermon?" In due course I was called to Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, now over 27 years ago. Then it became, "What do I teach the students who are going to preach the gospel?" That was the concern. This classical theology has been with me almost from the beginning.

JMF: You've done a lot of work with pastors, and about pastoral work, pastoral spirituality, and so on, and you've indicated in some of your recent books that pastoral work and social work seem to be overlapping in the church. Is that a good thing, or is that a bad thing?

AP: It needn't be a bad thing, but what defines us in pastoral ministry (that is, essentially of saying the ministry of word and sacrament, and the pastoral work that flows from that), is not social science, but Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father and the power of the Spirit. That reality that undergirds, that which defines what it is ultimately that a pastor and the mission of a congregation must be about, is bearing witness to the lordship of Jesus Christ. That may lead you in social ministry, it may lead you to ministries of care and ministries of therapy, ministries of renewal, economic, health care, whatever, but Jesus Christ is Lord, and there's no aspect of the existence of the cosmos over which he is not Lord. So, in Christ, one would expect to be taken into all corners. But that which defines the core of who we are and what we are about is not some contingent need to which we give a pragmatic response, but that Jesus

Christ is Lord.

If I could put this in a simple image (I use this image often in my teaching), you walk into a situation—hospital room, classroom, you are in a conversation at the grocery store with someone, and the primary defining pastoral question is, “Has Jesus showed up?” In the freedom of his love and in the power of the Spirit, I believe he does, because that’s his choice to be with us.

The pastoral question is, “What is he up to that I can bear witness to, point to...?” Whatever the context, [you want to] proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord at this point of connection or intersection of your life. That which defines ministry is Jesus Christ, not the present pain, but Jesus Christ, who will address the present pain. A technical image: we begin with a Christological starting point—Jesus Christ, present in the power of the Spirit and in the freedom of his love, and then try to help the people make the connection between their present life experience and the Lord who is with them to be for them.

JMF: That brings up something we were talking about earlier, abstract nouns, and thinking of them in that sense as opposed to what they really mean. You mentioned an example of grace as an abstract noun, and others.

AP: Abstract nouns are wonderful things insofar as they sum up and gather, encapsulate, concentrate, some aspect of our knowledge and awareness. Words like grace, hospitality, justice, inclusivity, all kind of wonderful abstract nouns. Love, for example. The trouble is when we distance them from the concrete reality of the Lord Jesus who is the ground who gives them the content, and they become free-floating entities. Sometimes they are used and come around the back, used as weapons against the very gospel itself.

So I tell my students, *grace* is a good word, but remember grace has a name, his name is Jesus. Love is a good word, but love has a name, his name is Jesus. Hope is a good word, but his name is Jesus. In other words, my hope is not in *hope*, my trust is not in *grace*. I do not try to live lovingly. What does that mean? What does it mean for me to live in Christ, who is my hope? Hope and love and grace and so on become concrete and specific and not just free-floating entities where content from the culture can tend to overwhelm them.

JMF: So it isn’t just grace that we should want, in the sense of getting off the hook, it’s actually being in union with Christ. Can you talk about being in union with Christ?

AP: Yeah. Grace doesn't save us. Jesus saves us. Christianity at its core is not a system of ideas, let alone a system of abstract nouns. It is about God choosing for all eternity to have a people of his own desire, a people who would love him, people whom he would cleave to himself and who would cleave to him. Without going through a lot of rigmarole, in the fullness of time, in order that that people of his choice would belong to him, he sent his Son, who is the incarnation of God's love, providence, compassion, and grace, so that all of the abstract nouns have a content and a reality, namely Jesus Christ.

The purpose is that when we look into the face of Jesus Christ as he is attested to us in the Scriptures and as he is proclaimed in the preaching of the church, we apprehend not an argument or a series of propositions, but we are apprehended by, in the power of the Spirit, the living God. We meet Jesus. As we have this conversation this morning, in the freedom of his love and in the power of the Spirit, Jesus is the third person in our conversation. To the extent that that's the case, our lives and our conversation, and as this goes out, as it's broadcast, all of this is to the glory of the Father.

I have been professionally criticized for having too big a doctrine of Jesus Christ. Some people have said that Purves is a Christ-mystic, to which my response is, duh. That which makes us Christian is Jesus, a present, living, reigning, acting Lord who is up to God's ministry in every aspect of the life of the cosmos. That's what it means, that he's Lord. He's not just Lord back there who has given us a moral code, he is Lord now, a living Lord present in power in the freedom of his love and in the power of the Spirit.

I don't manipulate him to be here. He chooses to be here, not now in the flesh, as he was 2000 years ago, but in his Spirit. The real question of ministry is a simple question. If he's here, what is he up to? Because that's what our people need in their cancer wards and their divorcing situations, with their teenage children—do we have a Lord who can be present in power to change the human reality, or is he just an idea? I want to claim that he's present in power.

JMF: Being a believer is more than assent to a set of facts. We often hear a sinner's prayer, for example, in a simple presentation of the gospel: "Do you believe this, do you believe that, do you believe the things Jesus did?" But it sounds like you're saying that being a believer is a great deal more than just a certain set of facts.

AP: My paradigm story here in answer to that question is Acts 9:5, Saul of Tarsus, this brilliant persecutor of the church. He's got the warrant from the court in his pocket, he's en route to Damascus, he's going to round them up, he's going to get them, and he's going to poof out of existence this nonsense that this Jesus who is dead is somehow raised. Paul is accosted, encountered by the ascended Lord—the only story we have of the ascended Lord appearing. All the other post-resurrection stories are of the resurrected Lord, but now in his ascended power he comes, and Saul is knocked to the ground. Paul's question is the core theological question—“Who are you, Lord?”

It's not just “Who are you?” It's not a speculative, dilettante's question, “Who are you?” We often get that—“Who are you?” But it's “Who are you, *Lord?*” In other words, “Who are you, you who have so unilaterally and unconditionally staked a claim on my life and I have to recognize that?” I think the boiler-house of faith is that we are encountered by a person who establishes, from his side, our being in relationship with him, and who calls us to live our lives in terms of that claim upon us.

Because we are thinking creatures, we are then called to think about that as rightly and as faithfully as we can. That's what theology is. We try to think about the creative act of God claiming us in, through, and as Jesus Christ. There are better ways and less better ways, and even right and wrong ways, to think about this. For example, this is a silly illustration, but not every sentence that has the word “god” in it is an accurate and faithful theological sentence. I could say, “God is a pink banana.” That's not a faithful theological sentence. I could say, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.” That is a faithful theological sentence.

We bring our minds to these experiences, to these encounters, as they are mediated to us in the Scriptures and as we encounter the living Lord in our own lives. At some point, if you wanted, I might tell you some of these encounter stories, because I know he lives and reigns because he met me.

I can't explain it. The Bible is nowhere interested in metaphysics. The creation, how did God create? We don't know. *Va'omer Elohim*, in Hebrew, and God said. That's God's choice. The Word became flesh—*Logos sarx egeneto*, the Word became flesh. No metaphysics. On the third day he was raised from the dead. How did God the Father raise the Son from the dead in the powerless world? No metaphysics. He ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. No metaphysics. Deal with it. He's done it. This Lord meets us along our Damascus roads.

JMF: Let's talk about the encounters.

AP: My first transforming encounter...there had been intonations. My mother was an Irish Catholic, my father a Presbyterian of loose form, not practicing. I wasn't brought up in the church in Edinburgh, Scotland; I was a high school dropout at 16. I was sitting in my parent's living room one Sunday evening watching television with my mother and father (my sister wasn't there).

We were sitting around the coal fire watching television, and this is not an allusion to John Wesley, but it was somewhere after 8:00 in the evening, and I got up to leave the living room. My lapsed Roman Catholic Irish mother was in an armchair by the fire. I stopped at her chair and said, "I'm bored with my life." My mother looked up, "Oh," she said, "Why don't you go to church next Sunday?"

Where in the name of heaven did that come from? My non-practicing, ex-Roman Catholic mother shattered me. I went to church. I told the story of what happened—the minister came to the pulpit, "Let us worship God," and I got to do that. I went back home, told my mother, she was so upset with me, she did not speak to me for two weeks. There are many other stories along the way that the Lord encountered me. There is one big story that takes about three or four minutes to tell.

JMF: Well, we would need to hear it now.

AP: It's a big story, and it's the story that in many ways now defines my work, my life. Seven-and-a-half years ago I was diagnosed with stage 3 colon cancer. My colleague at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Martha Robbins, who has a Harvard Ph.D. in psychology, ex-Roman Catholic nun, called me up and said, "I want to come and pray with you." Martha's piety and my piety are a little different, but she's a wonderful Christian woman.

It was a Saturday night, a few days before my surgery. Martha came with a boom box to my house and said, "I need you for an hour." Okay, so we went down to the basement. She had me lie down on the couch. She read from Romans 8, said a prayer with her hands laid over me, put on some music, and said, "Trust me. I want to take you on an imaginative prayer journey." She did some deep breathing to get relaxed, and then said, "When you're ready I want you to picture in your mind a great big door. When are ready, walk through that door, and you will come to a flight of stairs."

So I relaxed and eventually I see a big door, and for some reason I saw

it as a church door, a double wooden church door. I walked through that door, and to my surprise, saw a flight of stairs going down. They were stone stairs. Why? Who would have thought it? She said, “At the bottom of the stone stairs, there are a second set of doors, and when you walk through these doors you will be in a safe place.”

Now what I’m about to say took an hour, but it will just take a couple of minutes to tell. After a little while, I walked through that second set of doors, and to my astonishment, I was in the abbey on Iona off the west coast of Scotland, where I had been many times—the spiritual home of Scotland, Saint Columba’s Island, where in 563 Columba and some Irish monks had settled and from there began to evangelize the Scots. This is our holy place, although the rebuilt abbey is 11th century and Roman, nonetheless, this is the place.

I was off at one of the side transepts beside sarcophagi of dead kings or queens or some folks, and I was small, curled up in a fetal position, scared. I became aware that this ancient abbey was filled with the saints of the Scottish church. This is probably not orthodox Presbyterian theology, but they were praying for me. There were thousands of them, undifferentiated. Gradually, they maneuvered me out of my hiding place and brought me into the center of the abbey to the front of the communion table.

What I’m about to tell you is as real as looking you in the eye. There was a huge green Iona Marble communion table, and I was brought to the front of it. I don’t know if I was kneeling, lying, or sitting, but I was low down. I looked up, and standing in front of the communion table was the Lord Jesus. Absolutely real. He said to me that my cancer was the attempt of the evil one to destroy me, but I assure you, I have the victory. That was it.

Two days after my surgery, I had a pulmonary embolism and almost died. That night, lying in bed in the hospital trying to process what had happened, all the tubes and stuff from major surgery still in me, and just for a flash, a nanosecond, I realized what these words meant, because it came to me again from the Lord, I’m absolutely convinced, “Whether you live or die, you live or die unto me because I have the victory.”

That has shaped the last seven-and-a-half years of my life. I know he lives because he’s met me. The one who has met me has been tested in his meeting me, and my attempt to describe it in terms of the great theological heritage of the church. This is who God is—the Lord who loves us, who

claims us, who blesses us, who will not let us go, and who in the dire circumstances upholds us from underneath of the everlasting arms.

JMF: Did that move you toward one of the books that you wrote subsequently?

AP: I was in the middle of my big academic book, *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology*, and the second half of that book was written during the six months of chemotherapy. Some of that is in the academics of the second half of the book. My editor wanted me to take it out, and I said no, I didn't want it taken out because this is the context of the book, writing on the ministry of the grace of God, the ministry of the comfort of God, the ministry of the presence of God, and the ministry of the reign of God. Although the book is technical, academic, these are not just words. These chapters that I wrote during chemotherapy were...this is my life. On this I depend. This is not just writing a book for the academic guild. The two subsequent books, *The Crucifixion of Ministry* and *The Resurrection of Ministry*, were putting into a more accessible form this theology of the living Lord who encounters us.

JMF: Is there a favorite book among all this that you've written that you feel the most affinity with?

AP: It's like...I have three children. How could I pick? Each book has its own story, its own context, its own reason for being written, and in the editing process, its own particular pain. But *The Crucifixion of Ministry* is in some ways special because over the last three years since its publication I've had hundreds of emails from pastors who I have never met telling me that they've picked it up and it has changed the ministry.

For the want of another image...and I hope this doesn't sound self-serving or arrogant, but that book seems to have an anointing that I don't have any control over. It seems to have a life that God has given it for the blessing of busy, tired, middle-aged, underpaid, over-stressed, over-worked, underappreciated, collapsing self-esteem pastors—it seems to have connected. I will take that for what it is. If it's a blessing, then I am grateful.

JMF: In *The Resurrection of Ministry*, you quote a friend who said, "If Jesus is so big, so powerful, so victorious, why am I so unconscious of his presence so much of the time? Why, when I preach and teach the word of the Lord, are the people not bursting forth with the fruits of the Spirit? If Jesus is the reigning Lord of the universe, why are even little pastoral problems so confounding?" Is that what drove you to think about this topic

and work on that book?

AP: In part. There are intractable theological problems. If God is all loving and God is all powerful, whence evil? Why does somebody like me get cancer and live while somebody with the same diagnosis gets the same cancer and dies? I can't explain these things. They're troubling.

When I get to heaven, I'm going to ask the Father, "Could you not have created a world without cancer?" I'm not sure I have a good answer in terms of a satisfying answer that would be acceptable to the logic of the world other than to make a confession: I believe that in the end, every tear will be wiped away and God will gather his people to himself, and there will be joy, and joy will have a name, and his name is Jesus, in whom we will be in communion.

It's not just "whistle a happy tune whenever you feel afraid" or "a pie in the sky when you die"—it's a question of trusting. No, that's wrong. That puts it upon me. Let me put it this way: I have decided that sometimes experiences and problems to the contrary, the message of the New Testament is true. I've decided to live by that, and that Jesus reigns. While there are a ton of things I can't explain (and at 63 there are more things I can't explain than I could when I was 43), and theology is inherently messy with all kinds of loose ends, I have decided to trust that Jesus is a victorious Lord.

My word to pastors is, don't point to what you can do, point your people to Jesus. Even if they experience things to the contrary, tell them, declare to them, that Jesus in the Spirit is with them. And heaven help us, pray God that the Lord will turn up in their lives. I can't manipulate it or control it, but I'm not without resources.

A story I tell at the end of *The Crucifixion of Ministry* might bear repeating. It's a story of a pastor who gets a call at 4:00 in the morning from Bill. Bill and Mary are a young couple in his congregation. They've been married a number of years, they're in their mid-30s, no children, but Mary's pregnant and in great excitement. They're a faithful couple, they are good people, and you get this phone call at 4:00 in the morning from Bill, he's in his car en route to the local obstetrics emergency room. Mary's hemorrhaging.

What do you do? You throw on some clothes, you get there, you get to the hospital, 4:30, Bill's in the room waiting. He hears your footsteps, he turns around, there's tears running down his face. "Bill, what's the matter?" "The baby's dead." He looks at his watch. "Oh, it's just coming up for time. The nurse said we'll get in in a minute to see Mary. Oh, and

by the way, we want you to baptize the baby.”

You go, “Can I baptize a dead person? Do I have authority to do this?” You have but 30 seconds to conduct a theological colloquium in your head. The nurse comes, “You can see your wife now,” and you walk into the room. There’s Mary in a bed with sheets pulled up to her chin. Baby’s in the bassinette completely covered in a blanket. The couple meet, and they’re tentative and unsure of how to relate. You’re standing there. You can’t fix it. I’m a pastor and I can’t fix it. I can’t raise the dead. This child is dead. I can’t heal their pain.

Then you realize that Mary’s probably never held the baby. So you whisper in her husband’s ear, “Give the baby to her mother.” He goes, picks up the baby, and there’s the three of them, a cameo. “Pastor, we want you to baptize the baby.” Oh, what do I do? Then you remember that you had attended my lectures on Calvin’s doctrine of the ascension (this is not kidding), and remember that Calvin taught three things about the ministry of the ascended Lord.

- 1) He prays for us. So this situation of family catastrophe and of ministerial powerlessness is being prayed for by Jesus.
- 2) Second, he sends the Holy Spirit. This is a charismatic environment. The Holy Spirit is here.
- 3) The third thing Calvin says, “And he gives us to the Father.”

So you say, “Bill, Mary, let me show you what Jesus is doing right now.” You take the dead baby and you lift up the dead baby and say, “At this very minute, Jesus is giving your daughter to the Father, and for my sake he is cleaving your daughter to his bosom.” They won’t remember a word you said, but they will remember the action where you bore witness to what Jesus was doing in this tragic situation.

We have resources. We can’t fix, but we point people to what we believe the living Lord is doing. Pastors, to do that, you need to know the living Lord. To do that, pastors, you need to know your people, and you then facilitate, as it were, that conversation between the living Lord and the freedom of his love and the power of the Spirit and the lives of your people—you help them make these connections in your preaching, teaching and pastoral work. You can’t fix it. But Jesus shows up—at least that’s what I believe.

THEOLOGY FOR PASTORAL WORK

J. Michael Feazell: In your book, *The Crucifixion of Ministry*, on page 128, you wrote, “At its core, pastoral work involves bearing witness to the joining of two stories, the parishioners and God’s. Who is Jesus Christ specifically for this person amid the particularities and the exigencies of his or her current life experience?”

How does a pastor bring those two stories together?

Andrew Purves: It is a fundamental question in two regards. First, as a pastor, you have to live in Christ. You have to know the Lord. That doesn’t just mean passing the theology test (that’s important—know the Lord, knowing how to speak appropriately of the Lord), but you must know the Lord as the Lord of your life. That means a life of piety, of prayer, ethical attentiveness and so on. It means a life of worship, of living in Christ.

Saint Paul used the phrase “in Christ,” “in the Lord,” “in him” in his letters around 164 times. It’s his fundamental statement about what it means to be a Christian. A Christian is someone *in Christ*. I take that to mean an organic connectedness, a relationship...even in rather hackneyed terms, a “personal relationship” with a living, reigning Lord.

That’s something we have to attend to. It’s like cleaning your teeth. You get up in the morning and you clean your teeth. It’s a fundamental good habit. Just because it’s a habit doesn’t mean it’s bad. Our habit, the *habitus*, the rhythm of our life, is to attend to our life in the Lord. You can’t do ministry unless you have a life in Christ, in him, embedded in

him, rooted, growing up in him, so that the flower of your ministry and faith is a result of your roots of faith—life being deeply embedded in the soil of the word of God.

The other thing—to be a pastor you have to be embedded with your people. You’ve got to know your people. One of the sad aspects of contemporary ministry is that ministers tend to sit in big offices with a sanctuary outside, and people come and visit the minister. In the olden days, ministers used to go and visit the people. The word parish comes from two Greek words *para, oikos*, beyond the house—the parish was the walking distance that the minister or priest could cover to get to the houses of the people. We read in Acts that Paul visited from house to house.

This is to say the pastor must know his or her people. You’ve got to be involved in their lives. You’re with them in their births and deaths and getting jobs and losing jobs and in their hospitals and all their ups and downs. You’re with them. That’s the genius of a pastoral charism, of a pastoral giftedness—that your joy is to walk with these people.

So you know the Lord, you’re embedded in the life of the Lord...when one thinks perhaps of John 15—you’re a branch connected to the vine, you’re organically connected and you are in Christ, abiding in him. But you’re also in the people, you’re abiding in them.

As the pastor, then, you are the one who enables that conversation. They know the Lord, too, but you’re the one whose special job and appointment is to bear witness. So I tell my students, don’t use phrases like “pastoral counseling.” If somebody needs a therapist, find a good therapist. Your job is rather to help them interpret the context of their life—the vicissitudes, pains, tragedies, joys. Go to the graduation parties as well as the funeral homes. Make the connections, and in the small things you often don’t even have to say words. You are making connections between Jesus and them. It feeds into the sermons.

For example, I preach all over the country and I come in on a parachute. I preach, I don’t know the people, I don’t know the context. I preach, people say how wonderful it is and all the rest. But at the end of the day, that’s not effective preaching.

Effective preaching arises out of a preacher or pastor, a man or woman who is embedded with the people and preaches into the context of their pain, preaches into the context of the silence of their cry to God—“where are you, God?”, and they hear nothing back. They preach into these terrible cosmic silences, these ambiguities and these confusions that are the normal part of ongoing life. There’s that dual embedded-ness.

One other thought that I've played with through the years is that I think all ministry has a "from-to" character. That is, you move from your place as the pastor, from your life in Christ, from your safe place, *to* where the people are. That may be not be a comfortable place.

Although I'm well acquainted (sadly) with hospitals because of my cancer, I don't like hospitals. I have a daughter-in-law who is a physician. She's comfortable in hospitals. I will never be comfortable in hospitals. Hospitals are not my "to" place. Yet as pastors we have to go into these uncomfortable places. But we can only do what we do in these places because we have a deep groundedness in our "from" place, and that's our anchor.

I would encourage pastors really seriously in this regard. If you have no life in Christ, you have no ministry, because we read in John 15:5, "Apart from me, you can do nothing. Unless you are connected into me, the vine, you can do nothing." So the most practical, pertinent question I can put to a working pastor is, "What's going on in your life in Jesus?" Because if you don't have a life in Christ, you don't have a ministry. No matter how technically proficient you are in the skills of ministry, no matter how many committee meetings you go to, your life in Christ means that you can go into these situations and you know who Jesus is, what he is up to in all of these contexts, and you can point to that, bear witness to that.

JMF: It might seem like a trite question, but how does a pastor do that? How does a pastor remain?

AP: It's not a trite question. It's a critical question. Most seminaries in the United States (this is a non-scientific poll, but I have the sense) do not have enough attention paid to the spiritual formation of the pastor, or in different terms, to the pastor's own formation in Jesus Christ, the pastor's own relationship with Jesus Christ.

I've often been struck, when the disciples saw Jesus praying, they asked, "Lord, teach us to pray." Some form of God's history with Israel had been around 1100, 1200 years. They knew how to pray. Yet something was going on here, because what was the Lord praying? Surely he was praying out of his own Sonship in the Spirit with the Father. I think he was praying, "My Father" because he alone is the only begotten Son. "My Father who art in heaven." The disciples discern that something profound in its spiritual connectedness and power is going on between Jesus and the Father. So they're not saying "teach us the techniques of prayer," they're

not asking, “teach us how to do deep breathing when we pray” (I don’t know if that’s bad), but they’re saying, “How do we get in on your Sonly communion with the Father in the power of the Spirit?”

That’s the point of prayer, is that we are in on the Son’s...the technical word might be *perichoretic*...communion of love with the Father. So Jesus teaches them the Lord’s prayer. But back of that, theologically, is that Jesus is teaching them, “pray in me, pray through *me*,” so that our prayers are through Jesus Christ our Lord. Our prayers are accepted not because Andrew Purves is pious (God knows he’s not) but because they are given to the Lord, who takes what is ours—broken, muddled, irregular, incoherent, distracted—our broken prayers...takes them in himself, heals them, and gives them to the Father in his name. He takes what is his own communion with the Father, his life of love, discipleship, obedience, worship, and says, “Here, this is yours.” Not just “here, take it”—“It’s yours! It’s yours!” Not just a possibility. Karl Barth, the Swiss theologian says it’s an actuality. It’s the actuality that we are in Christ, participating in his life, that makes it possible for me to pray, makes it possible for me to write books, teach my classes, engage in ministry.

The question is for me, for pastors: “Will I pay attention to that life in Christ? Will I seek to grow more deeply in Christ?” Psalm 1 is Psalm 1 because Psalm 1 is doing something that no other psalm can do. Psalm 2 can’t do what Psalm 1 is doing. What is Psalm 1 doing? Psalm 1 is the gateway, the threshold, the entrance into the book of Israel’s response to the Lord, or rather the five books of Israel’s response to the Lord. You have the Pentateuch, five books...the five books of the response, five books of the Psalms. Psalm 1 is setting up this response. It’s a two-way psalm. Will you abide in the way of the wicked, or will you abide in the way of the Lord? I think that’s the challenge for any Christian disciple. What does it mean more deeply, more convertedly, more faithfully to live into that reality that has already claimed them—to find me. To abide in the Lord and to make my home there.

The psalm uses an image about a tree being planted by a stream of running water. It’s a psalm of the exile. It’s all desert — emotionally, spiritually desert, but also physically it’s desert. Yet the Psalmist used, “In the Lord you will be like a tree planted by a stream of running water.” Out of that planted-ness, a plant of faith grows, and the plant of ministry grows. So in the education of ministers, clergy for ministry, we need to help people know what it means to have a deeper, more abiding life in the Lord.

I've gone on too long with that question in answer to it, but it's important.

JMF: It also raises the question of the meaning of grace in terms of one's devotion to the God of grace without there becoming a legalistic framework or an attempt to be something that we aren't. How do those work together? How do we bring a complete faithfulness to God in his grace toward us without bringing our own so-called righteousness and yet living in Christ, in union with Christ?

AP: Let me refer to a Bible verse in order to be precise, because your question is important. Colossians 2:6...and this picks up the Psalm 1:3 image too, "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him..." That's the piety, that's the formation. "...Strengthened in the faith you were taught." This is the faith of the apostles; this is the faith of the church. Get the theology wrong, and you will get life and ministry wrong. Then at the end, and this comes directly to your question, "...overflowing with thankfulness." The response that comes out, the life that comes out of this rootedness in Christ, is not a life of guilt, obligation or duty. It's not "I ought, I should, I must, I have to." It's a life overflowing with thankfulness.

The Greek word for overflowing here in other translations is sometimes translated "abounding." Abounding is an old funny word. I don't abound (especially as we get older) much anymore. The word means overflowing. Paul uses it in Romans 5 to talk about grace. Overflowing. Three times he says, "Grace overflows." Again he says grace overflows, and the third time he puts it in the superlative—grace super-overflows—it's Niagara Falls of grace, not just a little trickle-down effect. It's this huge grace, so that sin has no chance.

He uses the same word here, "Now out of this life in Christ, growing up in the faith and every way into him who is the head, we abound [or we overflow] in thankfulness." *Eucharistia* in Greek. What a wonderful energy system—gratitude, thankfulness, not obligation and duty. Not *musts* and *should* and *don't* and *have to*'s, but a heart filled with gratitude.

I think this is ...I don't know the right word to use...the genius of the Christian gospel. The point where we are called into practice, into ministry, into service, it is not at the point of "I've got to go to another meeting, I am exhausted, I've got to go and work harder." I tell my students this, I *get* to get up in the morning to come and talk to you about Jesus Christ.

Or you say, "Folks, I get up in the morning to preach...11:00 on

Sunday morning that Jesus is Lord.” When that has taken hold of your life, and gratitude and thankfulness abounds within you, your preaching will not be dull, because a thankful person is not a dull person. A thankful person is a person full of the joy and the energy of the gospel.

JMF: We’re told we love him because he first loved us. It reminds me, as you’re describing that, in Titus, “It is grace that teaches us to say no to ungodliness,” and so on. It begins with the grace of God. He moves for us first, and we can move ahead in that.

AP: Often our sense of guilt or need or obligation begins to take over. There’s another verse from Paul in Philippians 3. Through the chapter he is saying that nothing can compare with the fact that— “I’ve lost everything for the fact of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is my Lord.” At verse 12 he writes, “Not that I have already obtained this, the fullness of Christian life, the perfection of life, or have already arrived at the goal. But I press on to take hold of it.”

Sometimes you hear preachers say we’ve got to press on, we’ve got to work harder, go to more committee meetings, give more money, press on, press on. You know, “I guilt you, I guilt you, I guilt you,” and I’m tired of guilt. But if they’ve read the whole verse, “I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” What is the first thing? It’s not that I press on to attain the prize of Jesus Christ. I press on because Jesus Christ has already taken hold of me and I am his prize. The Greek word here means “seized hold of.” It’s not just that Jesus Christ has taken hold of me, it’s Jesus Christ has *seized* hold of me. It’s an intensive. “I seize hold of the Christian life because Jesus Christ has already seized hold of me.” I think of it as we’re grabbed by the scruff of our spiritual necks. We’re seized hold of intensively. When Jesus Christ has us by the scruff of our spiritual necks, we can buck and we even try to get out of it, but he has got us by the scruff of the neck. Because we are seized hold of, with thankfulness I am going to live this life the way he wants me to live it, and give it my best shot, knowing that no matter what, he has seized hold of me, and on that I will depend.

JMF: And your success or failure is not what determines his grip. His grip is the reality.

AP: Remember Peter walking on the water. I’m thankful for silly Peter, Peter the doofus, because he’s walking toward the Lord on the water, his faith deserts him, he begins to sink. What stops Peter from drowning is not that he’s reached up and grabbed Jesus’ hand, but that Jesus has reached

down and grabbed his hand.

There is a place for us to seize hold, but it's lower down the theological food chain. What saves me is not my decision for Jesus, but Jesus' decision for me. He has seized hold of me, and my response is: In gratitude I say, "Yes Lord. Show me what you want me to do."

JMF: In that story, the word immediately is used. There's not a lot of time when you're sinking.

AP: That's comforting because as pastors, we can't throw people back upon their own strength and resources. My teacher Tom Torrance used to say this all the time, "Don't cast people back upon themselves, upon their own faith, their own ethics, their own piety, because we break, we will give out. Cast them back upon Jesus Christ. And held by Jesus Christ, they will discover the resources of their piety and their ethics and their service, but again, out of gratitude and thankfulness, not out of guilt or fear."

JMF: Ephesians 2 is a long number of verses about the grace, the riches of kindness and so on that has come to us. It concludes in verse 10 with, "We are created in Christ Jesus to do good works." Not that you do good works to be...

AP: That's right. To put it in the terms of what high school English teachers used to teach us, using indicative and imperative language: The indicative is prior to and conditions the imperative. The indicative is the statement of fact, of reality. You *are* in Christ. You are loved cosmically from the foundation of the world. You have been seized hold of by Jesus Christ. Now therefore, this is how... The imperative, how you are to live, is the *consequence*, and is conditioned by the prior reality that we are in Christ by God's choice and act. That is the gospel.

JMF: In so much preaching, though, it makes people feel it's the other direction... that they need to do something in order for God to feel this way toward them. So they're looking over their shoulder for what they've done wrong, for where the weak link in the chain lies.

AP: Most of us scratch a little theologically and spiritually, and we say, I deserved this from God. I deserved this punishment, this cancer, this divorce or what have you. That is tragic.

It was the great Karl Barth, the Swiss theologian, who, in the 1950s, published the message that said that God had decided from all eternity that God would no longer be God without a people to love—that God is the God of love. That doesn't mean to say that he's not the God of justice, of judgment, but I can say to you, "I forgive you," and implied within that "I

forgive you” is...you’ve done wrong. I wouldn’t “forgive” you if you hadn’t done wrong. But it’s the “I forgive you” that is the larger reality under which the judgment is subsumed.

There is judgment, and we need to preach that. But we preach it within the context that there is something bigger than the judgment, more that overwhelms the judgment — the “I forgive you, I love you, you are mine, you belong to me, I will not let you go.” That is grace. That is why the Word became flesh—that we may know God is a God of love.

To put it differently, the relations within the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are not relations of law or obligation. The Trinity is a communion of love—three persons, one being. The heart of God, if we can speak, the being of God, who God is, is God is love. God gives us law in order to help us live in an appropriate way. But the heart of things, the center of things is not law, but love. Not condemnation, but forgiveness. That’s freedom. For freedom Christ has set us free [Galatians 5:1], not for guilt. For freedom Christ has set us free. Thanks be to God.

JMF: The gospel really is good news.

AP: Right. It’s called gospel.

JMF: What does a pastor need? What skills should a pastor have? What knowledge and experience should he or she have, expect to have, or strive to have, to be an effective pastor?

AP: That’s a complex question. Let me work my way into it, because I have no slick packaged answer to your question. The first thing I would say: To be a pastor, you need to be well-apprenticed to a theological heritage. There are good theological heritages out there, and to be apprenticed to them means that you put yourself, as it were, under the authority of a tradition that the church has said “This is faithful.”

If you’re in a Pietistic tradition, under the Wesleys perhaps, my Reformed tradition under Calvin... Who was Wesley apprenticed to? The Greek fathers. Who was Calvin apprenticed to? The Greek fathers. You apprentice yourself as a pastor to the men and women who have framed and converted the mind of the church, so that the pastor, as the teaching elder, is a man or a woman who has the mind of Christ and who can teach the people that they may grow and have the mind of Christ.

Being a theologian is not just something that strange people do...get a technical education and so forth. Being a theologian is a requirement for everyone who would be a pastor—anyone who would teach Sunday School, even if it’s the tiny tots. My wife this week in her church is doing Vacation Bible School, and there are tiny tots running around. Those who

teach these little children need to be theologians. They need to know who is the Lord, who is God, the God whom we name, the God who we trust has claimed us, and be able to express that in cogent, accurate and careful terms.

To be a pastor you need to be apprenticed to a tradition of ministry. Too much modern ministry is gimmickry. I don't mean to be offensive in saying this, but too much modern ministry is enthralled into passing psychological fads or sociological fads.

In the fall at Pittsburg Theological Seminary, I will be teaching a course on classical texts for pastoral theology. I think there's a copy in your pile of books. We'll be reading old dead guys:

- Gregory of Nazianzus, 380s, the first systematic text in pastoral ministry in the history of the church.
- John Chrysostom, the Greek father from Antioch.
- Gregory the Great, 590, became pope. His book of pastoral rule was the book of pastoral care for the next 1000 years in the Western church.
- Martin Bucer, the most important pastoral writer of the Reformation age, his pastoral theology just being published in English for the first time.
- Richard Baxter, [who wrote] *The Reformed Pastor*...it doesn't mean the Calvinist pastor; it means the renewed pastor, the pastor in Christ.
- And the reminisces of my favorite, John McLeod Campbell of Scotland.

All these texts are available. They are old texts, but I'm including them... I'm sorry there are no women in them, I wish that were the case, but this is what we have. This is the great wisdom, the depository of pastoral knowledge in the history of the church. I teach this stuff, and the students catch fire. They are staggered at this stuff, this wisdom.

We've got to apprentice our students to the wisdom of the pastoral heritage that has been passed down. People knew how to do pastoral ministry before Sigmund Freud came along. They knew how to do pastoral ministry before we got into all this modern psychology and sociology. None of that's wrong, but it's not what defines our work. Read the great texts, study the great theologians.

The third thing I would say is: Read the great spiritual saints. Read the Augustines and the Gregory of Nazianzuses, read Calvin's chapter on prayer in his *Institutes*, and read Luther on Galatians. Read some of the

great Roman women—Teresa of Avila. You may not agree—that doesn't matter! These are books that have been around for a long, long time for a reason.

C.S. Lewis, in an introduction a few years ago to a translation of Athanasius's book on the incarnation, a famous little introduction...Lewis said, "For every new book we should read two old books, because the old books have been around and are tested." Read the old theologians, read the old ministers, read the old teachers on prayer and be guided in your formation. Read contemporary books, too, but they probably won't be around as long as these old books.

WE ARE NOT GENERIC

JMF: In your work over many years, you've undoubtedly had some ah-ha moments. Can you tell us about one or two of those?

AP: You mean in the classroom or...

JMF: In the classroom, or in general study on your own, or walking down the street one day.

AP: One that immediately comes to mind... (I haven't thought about this in a long time because it was painful.) I was in pastoral ministry for four and a half years in the United States, and there was a middle-aged elderly woman in my congregation who was challenging. I was on the job a week, and I was told in no uncertain terms I had to pay a pastoral call on this woman. I was told she was difficult, so I was brand-new and very nervous and went to pay my pastoral call on her. We chatted a little while and then I got up and said goodbye, and I got out of there and, as Reinhold Niebuhr once said, I had made my pastoral call and took the rest of the afternoon off on order to get my self-respect back.

That night my clerk of session in the Presbyterian church, that's the senior lay person, clerk of our board of management, called me up and said, "Andrew, I received a call from so-and-so. It was appreciated that you made the pastoral call, but you did not pray at the end of the pastoral call." I said, "Did I not? I was so terrified I just ran away." "Well, she is very upset that you didn't pray."

That was a tremendous learning, because all kinds of people no doubt visit this person and do good work. But one of the things I was to do as the

pastor that hadn't entered my head...I was to be the person, if nothing else, I would pray for that person. That was a major learning.

The second event that comes to mind is also somewhat painful. I was about a year and a half into pastoral ministry... I don't recall the circumstances, going back 30 years now...I realized I had no spiritual life. I had studied in four major European universities, around the world and in Europe and in the United States. Nobody taught me to pray. I began to realize that this was a problem. I started casting around who would teach me to pray, and I couldn't find anybody to teach me to pray.

Eventually I discovered a group in Washington, D.C., called the Church of the Savior, an intentional formational community of discipleship led by a wonderful man, Gordon Cosby and his wife, Mary Cosby, and I went off to do a retreat. I was there four days, in D.C., the first 26 hours of which were in silence. It absolutely devastated me. I had never been silent that long in my life. We went through a program, and I came back to my little country congregation in western Pennsylvania and got up on the Sunday morning after I arrived back and said, "Folks, I've had a major experience. I think I've just been converted, and I think I realize that I've got to have a relationship with Jesus and I've got to become a man of prayer. I'm just being really candid with you."

A group of older women from my congregation came up to me after the service and said, "Dr. Andrew, we knew something was going to happen to you, because we've been praying for you." That was a real learning. I tell my students, "May you be blessed with a group of older women who sit on the back pew who will pray you into conversion as their minister." That's some serious learning for me.

As a seminary professor, it's been less dramatic perhaps. But one learning I think I want to share...it's not dramatic, but it's serious, and that is, make sure you don't fake it. Be honest with the people with whom you're dealing. They will suss out a fake. Even as half-professor, don't be afraid to be vulnerable. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."

As I get older I hit more and more walls I can't explain. When I hit a theological wall, I tell my students...I get a question in class and I will wander around and think out loud, and I will say, "I've gone so far, I need to think some more about this. But I'll tell you what I'm thinking at the moment is, I may be hitting a theological wall that I cannot get over. But you know what I do when I hit a theological wall? I get down on my knees and I thank God for the mystery of the gospel."

Our theology ought to drive us to our knees. It took me a while to learn that and to be comfortable with vulnerability in the classroom. That's important in ministry in general. I'm not a person who knows all the answers, I'm not that bright. I don't know everything. As I mentioned in another talk, I was a high-school dropout, I haven't had a classical education, I don't read Latin — I wish I did, and then I could intimidate my students, but I don't. What's the point in pretending? I've had a good education and I'm good at what I do. But there's no point in pretending.

Be honest, be vulnerable. That doesn't mean be soppy, that doesn't mean use vulnerability as a manipulative tool to earn the sympathy of your audience, that's just co-dependency and manipulation... Have genuine vulnerability, because I am a person speaking to people. I have read more books than my students, but nonetheless I don't know everything, and it's all right to be vulnerable, and it's even all right (in appropriate ways with appropriate boundaries) to be intense and emotional.

A student who is a friend came to me and said so-and-so is wanting to take your class on such-and-such and wanted to know what you were like as a teacher. The student, a middle-aged woman, said to me, "I was candid, and I thought you might be interested to know. I said, with Dr. Purves you take notes for half the class and then he starts to preach. Once he gets worked up, he starts to preach and then you put your notes down and listen to the sermon because he's moved from the classroom into the sanctuary."

I praise God for that because the borderline between theology and proclamation ought not to be that far apart. Theology and exegesis, the interpretation of Scripture, are for the proclamation of the gospel. Exegesis without proclamation is aborted process. As Calvin knew, theology is for the proclamation of the gospel. We ought to get to messing a little bit and into preaching, I think.

JMF: Tell us about some of your mentors — the key people, formative people in your life.

AP: My first book, *The Search for Compassion*, I dedicated to my father, an unlettered man, a barber, left school at 14, but he taught me a number of lessons that are dear. He taught me to love his wife. A man must love his wife. He loved my mother. He taught me about love for one's wife. He taught me about honesty in one's dealings, and he taught me about humor. My father died two days before my first child was born. I was in the United States, pastor at the time, my father was in Edinburgh in Scotland, and my mother called me the night of his death and said, "Don't

come home for the funeral, you need to be with Cathy” (my wife) because she was due two days later on her due date. Brendan was born two days later, on his due date — our oldest of the three children, and Brendan’s birth was announced to my family at my father’s funeral.

This is a very personal story. I’ve never worked out the emotions of my father’s death and my first child’s birth. But I know, and this is a metaphor, that my father and Brendan and Jesus and I will sit down together in the kingdom of God. I can’t explain that. It’s more than a metaphor; it’s a statement of expectation — that those who we have lost and loved a while, we would be with. My father...my wife Cathy.

During my cancer seven and a half years ago, I was off for eight months. She was staggering. I was in the hospital for 14 days, she was to come in the morning, and we’d read the daily office of the Episcopal Church. Why do we do that? It’s structured, we like it. So come 8:00 in the morning, we’d pray the daily office, she’d chant the canticles...nurses, doctors coming and going in there, she’s singing it to them. At the end of the day, she would sing, pray, even in prayer, and these wonderful blessings at the end of the day. I came to see that my rhythm in hospital was morning and evening prayer, and her strength and love and support have been... Nothing in my life and career would have happened without her.

Professionally and academically, James and Tom Torrance have been tremendously important to me. Their theology and more than just their published works, them personally, have been a great influence on me and have undoubtedly been the primary influences in shaping my own thinking and my own work. I’m grateful for the two of them.

I must mention my now-retired colleague at Pittsburgh Seminary, Charles Partee...a magnificent Calvin scholar, but for nearly 30 years we’ve been colleagues and friends, and he has been an amazing encourager, scolds sometimes when he told me I could do better than I, at times, believed that I could do, but I would honor him by saying that I love Charles Partee, he was a wonderful Calvin scholar and dear friend. Although he is retired now, I will be teaching a course in the fall with him on the theology of H.R. Mackintosh, the wonderful Scottish theologian who taught Tom Torrance. There are many others along the way, but these would have been the principal mentors.

JMF: You mentioned a story about the last time you saw Tom Torrance. Do you mind sharing that?

AP: It's a lovely story and it's dear to me. I was in Edinburgh, this was six months before my cancer, and wasn't feeling well. I knew something was up but was a little un-brave, shall we say, cowardly, about dealing with it. I called Tom and said I was in town, and he said come round to his house the next morning. So I went round at 10:00, rang the doorbell, his wife answered the door and said, "Andrew, Tom is upstairs in his study waiting to see you." I walked up the stairs and was just about to knock on the door. He must have heard me coming, and he opened the door and greeted me with the words, "Andrew, how lovely to see you again. I pray for you every day." I walked through the door and entered his study, an extraordinary study, and he said, "Sit down in that armchair. Karl Barth sat in that chair." I thought, "Wow, sitting in the chair Karl Barth sat on." We chatted for a while and after midday we went out for lunch—I remember it was a chicken sandwich. Tom got up to pay for lunch at the end of the sandwich in the bar and dropped a huge wad of pound notes. There was the great Tom Torrance, the most important English-speaking theologian of the second half of the 20th century on his knees in a bar picking up pound notes.

Then we went back to his study for a while and chatted some more. About 3:00 in the afternoon I said I had to go, and he said, "Well, what of my books don't you have?" and I mentioned there was one that I didn't have. He pulled it off the shelf and signed it, and then he said, "Before you go I need to pray for you." His study was lined with stacks like in the library, not books against the wall, but stacks coming out at right angles from the wall, and round the back was a little prayer desk, way back in the corner. He took me by the arm, brought me down there, and had me kneel at the prayer desk, and laid hands on me, and prayed for me.

I felt like Elijah — that the work that he had done was being carried on — that I was charged with the theological task, part of a theological heritage that goes back through Irenaeus, through Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers, through Luther and Calvin, through John McLeod Campbell, William Miller, H.R. Mackintosh, Tom Torrance...this is my heritage. These are my teachers, and my commitment has been I will not just read what Tom Torrance says about these people, but I realized a while back I had to make them my teachers too, and to go back and to read these primary texts again as being transformational for my teaching.

Now I discover my students love these people! They get so excited by Gregory of Nazianzus, Macrina, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil of Caesarea,

Irenaeus, and on it goes. “Why weren’t we taught this?” I teach Doctor of Ministry students, old guys, “Why did nobody teach us this stuff?” They come alive in the great theological heritage of the church.

JMF: You do a lot of teaching about pastoral work and your wife is a pastor. How does that work in the family dynamics?

AP: Graciously. It’s complex...there are boundary issues. You can only do so much theology in pastoral work without going nuts sometimes. There are times when we’ve got to watch World Cup Soccer or go out to dinner as a couple going out to dinner after 35 years of marriage and we just want to talk about our three children and not what she’s preaching on Sunday or what book I’m writing. We are a normal couple that does normal things and enjoys doing the things that a couple of 35 years marriage enjoy — companionship and affection and gentleness. But we also talk theology. We read books in common. I should say this quietly...I’m not sure if she reads my books anymore. Sometimes I put this to her and say, “Have you read what I said?” “Oh,” she said, “I don’t so much read them, I live them when you’re writing them,” so maybe that’s the case.

I am a pastoral associate in her congregation. It’s a small urban congregation in Pittsburgh. So she’s my boss. That functionally means that when she’s not in the pulpit for one reason or another, I get to preach without being paid. The congregation loves it when we’re in the pulpit together...seems to (I don’t know) indicate something...that we are together pulling in the same direction. She’s a Calvin scholar by trade more than I am, and she’s a good theologian. Sometimes it can get intense. Can I tell you one time when it got intense?

JMF: Sure.

AP: It’s a curious story. I am a convert to the need to recover the doctrine of the ascension. I’m big on the ascension because the ascension means that Jesus is in the present tense, not in the past tense. Without the ascension, he’s not present in power. So I’m a big advocate for the recovery of the ascension — it ripples through a lot of my recent books. This past spring I asked Cathy, “Are you going to have a special service on Ascension Day Thursday?” “No, we’re going to do ascension on the Sunday before.” “You can’t do ascension on the Sunday before. You need to do it Ascension Day! We need to have ascension day parties and give ascension day presents as we have Christmas parties and Christmas presents and special services at Christmas, and celebrate communion on ascension day, because as the Lord descended incarnation day, so the Lord

ascended ascension day. This is counterbalanced, equally important.”

She said, “I can tell you’re a seminary professor and don’t have to deal with real people with busy lives. I wouldn’t get away with having an Ascension Day party.” “Oh, you’ve got to have an Ascension Day party!” We got kind of testy at each other. Maybe next year she’ll have an Ascension Day service, I don’t know. But when we push the ascension off to the edges of our pastoral and liturgical consciousness, something gets lost. That is, Jesus not just as a past Lord, but as a present Lord, so that we speak of him in the present tense.

Now and then we’ll get into a... she’ll say, “What did you think of that sermon?” and I only comment on the good ones. They’re mostly good. But now and then I won’t make a comment. She’ll say, “Why didn’t you like it?” I’ll say, “You used ‘ought’ too many times” or, “You talked about the gospel as an offer. It’s more than offer — it’s here, it’s yours!” She said, “But I was...” So sometimes we can get into little tussles.

JMF: God does not deal with everyone in the same way.

AP: Right, we’re free.

JMF: Why is that important to know?

AP: Because we are not generic. We are not particular instances of the genus humankind. There’s you, and me. We are specific, particular, actual, real human beings with real autobiographies and histories, and we are complex people. We are people, and people’s lives are different. Our histories are complex. There are things we share in common, and much that’s different. I speak of God with a Scottish accent (I hope I still do), and my sense of things is actually European...31 years I lived my life in Edinburgh in Scotland. I’m not American, I’m different...so, different heritages and different family dynamics.

It seems to me that one person needs (thinking biblically here) a demon cast out. Another needs to be told, “You’re forgiven.” Another needs to be said, “Get off your pallet and walk.” Another needs to be told, “Sell what you have and give it to the poor.” Another needs to be told, “Climb down from the tree because I’m going to come and eat dinner at your house today.” The knack, the trick, the discernment in pastoral work is to know which aspect of the Lord’s work is the word of gospel grace for a particular person on a particular day. A parishioner with whom one might speak is not a generic person for whom is a cookie-cutter response, but it’s personal and particular, it’s situationally connected. I’m not arguing for situational ethics, that’s all relative. What I am arguing is that it’s particular and

personal.

I learned this lesson when I wrote my book *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* and I read the great classical texts of the church. At the end of Gregory the Great's *Book of Pastoral Rule*, he has, I think it is 72 case studies, each a paragraph. Pastoral care of a tall person may be different from pastoral care of smaller person. Pastoral care of a man may be different from pastoral care of a woman. Pastoral care of a poor man may be different from pastoral care of a...just instances, all kind of instances about pastoral work...the gospel is brought to you in your context specifically, not generically. That's both the challenge but what makes pastoral work interesting, because you never know what you're going to confront with the myriad of interruptions that makes the pastor's day, because pastoral work is about being interrupted.

As I've often said, you know the Lord, you know your people, and you must know your people. We cannot sit in an office all day. We cannot just run the shop all day. My friend Judy Peterson is great in this. We're not shopkeepers. You've got to know your people. You've got to know them in their workplaces, in their family places, in their play places, and the grocery store. You know your people and you make these connections. Absolutely critical. The good pastor, the faithful pastor is the person with a heart for that kind of dual connectedness.

JMF: As we come to a close here, let me ask, if there was one thing that you want people to know about God, what would that be?

AP: You belong to him because he loves you, because in Jesus Christ he has elected you to be his son, his daughter, and that nothing in this world, not even your foolishness and your silliness, can separate you from what God has chosen for you. You belong to God, and you are unilaterally and unconditionally loved. Now therefore, live in terms of that freedom. Live in terms of that good news. Honor what it means that you are loved and will remain loved because...I'm going to put it very specifically...in the freedom of his love and in the power of the Spirit, Jesus knows you by name.

LET THE LORD BE THE LORD

Michael Morrison: I wanted to talk to you today about one of your recent books, *The Crucifixion of Ministry*. That's an intriguing title. Why should I want to crucify my ministry?

AP: Because it means putting to death our messianic pretensions — our pretensions that lead us to think that we are the messiah, that we can raise the dead, forgive the sins, fix the divorce, un-diagnose the cancer, do all these things that is the Lord's job to do. The book is about letting the Lord be the Lord, and we are not the Lord. As I thought this through, I thought sometimes we are so fixed on my ministry, my church, that we forget it's not my ministry, it's not my church. It's the Lord's church. He is the one who is messianic, who will raise the dead and forgive the sins and at the end of times will dry every tear and everything will be made whole in him.

The book is about what it means to have our ministries displaced, so that we are not in the center of things, but he is in the center of things, and then through our union with him, which is the work of the Holy Spirit, joined to him... a John 15:1-11 image, that we are the branches, he is the vine, and we are joined into the vine, the work of the Spirit, abiding in him. Through sharing in his ministry, we get in on *his* ministries — not he who gets in on *our* ministry, we get in on his, because it is his ministry that is the healing and saving, redeeming ministry, not ours.

I play with the image. It's just a metaphor, but it's an image in that sometimes we become so wedded to our own ministry that God needs to give us a great shove to get us out of the way. That shove might have to

be strong enough that it feels like a death, because I'm no longer on the throne of the universe, and I want to be on the throne of the universe!

MM: It hurts my pride.

AP: It hurts my pride, my ego, my self-esteem. It's a book about the lordship of Jesus Christ, thought through at the point of the nature of ministry — his ministries. What is his ministry, and how do I get in on his ministry?

MM: I was just going to ask you that. How do I see what his ministry *is*? How do I join?

AP: Who is he? The great theological question is essentially a *who* question, not how did you do that, or what did you do, or can I do what you did? The essential question is, "Who are you, Lord?" — Saul's question on the Damascus Road. When we ask that *who* question, we discover that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and because he had a ministry in the past, in history, and we have the gospel attestation of that, we have the records of the early church, we have some fairly strong ideas about what he was, what he was up to, the kind of things he did, what he stood for.

And he's raised. The interesting thing about him being raised...let me put it in a shock way, because sometimes as a teacher you like to say shocking things — it keeps students awake. The New Testament isn't interested in *the resurrection*. The New Testament is interested in *the resurrected Jesus*. The issue is not the metaphysics of resurrection — "How did you do that?" The interesting thing is, "Who are you, Lord, now that you are raised and ascended?"

If Jesus, as we confess, is raised — and not just raised, ascended, so not just locked into the past but now ascended and so Lord of all time and space, Lord now of the present tense and not just of the past tense, it becomes a question then of, "What are you up to?"

With the resurrection of Jesus, we also have the resurrection of his ministry. His ministry is not just a past ministry, because if it remains a past ministry, Jesus becomes a dead moral influence — you ought to do this, you ought to do the next thing and so on... I'm not messianic, so that becomes a recipe for guilt and burnout, for depression. The mental health professionals tell us that the highest mental health insurance cost for any professional group in the United States are professional clergy.

Part of the issue is that we're trying to be Messiah. We're trying to do what is not within our constitution or capacity to do. But Jesus does it. So

the existential question is, when I walk into a hospital room, a cancer ward, what am I going to do there? I can't un-diagnose the cancer. I can't raise the dead. But I am going to trust that Jesus is going to show up, if not in merely historical terms, then certainly at the end of time terms, he will have the complete victory. My job as a pastor is to bear witness to what he is doing.

MM: In some ways, it's that we admit our incompetence. Yet we go to a seminary to become more competent, don't we?

AP: There's nothing wrong with good skills for ministry. Put it on this level — we're dealing with people. You've got to know how people tick. You've got to know things...family systems and some of the sociology. When you bump into various forms of mental dysfunction, you've got to be able to recognize that and not get hooked into it, and to be able to refer your parishioners to appropriate professional contacts.

Our primary job is not to be psychological fixers. Our primary job, put in conventional terms, is to declare the gospel that Jesus lives, that Jesus died for their sins, in Jesus Christ they are forgiven, and to help them in the process of going into that reality so that they may grow up into Christ into him in every way who is the head, and that they may live lives of holiness, of sanctification. We need to recover our core job description of ministers of word and sacrament — to bear witness to Jesus and to help our people grow up every way into him who is the Lord. We need to have the people skills, but these don't define our job. The theology of our life in Christ defines our job.

MM: So the role of a pastor and the members, too, is to stop looking to ourselves and look to joining Jesus.

AP: Yes, and by the Holy Spirit we are bonded to Christ. In my own tradition John Calvin is our theological father, and at the beginning of Book 3 of his *Institutes*, very famous theological four-volume work, he says that by the Holy Spirit we are bonded into Jesus Christ — bonded, as it were, cosmically glued into Jesus Christ! It's almost like we're covered head to toe, inside and out, spirit and body, by super glue, and we're bonded to Jesus Christ. That's the work of the Holy Spirit, so that our being, our identity is in Christ. That's Paul's teaching, who is a Christian in Christ.

MM: Right. In your book you use the phrase union...

AP: Union with Christ.

MM: Is that what people are getting at with the phrase "relationship

with Christ”? Or is that somewhat different?

AP: It’s on the way. The problem with the word “relationship with Jesus” is you can think of yourself, “Here am I, independent, self-actualizing person, here is Jesus, and we’re going to come to some sort of neutral little arrangement here.” It’s more radical than that. Because in union with Christ, his life becomes my life, his being becomes my being, so that even I have the mind of Christ. I am in Christ. He is the second Adam, and so in Christ is in the second Adam. My whole humanity is remade, reconstituted. I’m a new person, a new creation. It’s not just that the old Andrew Purves is having a nice little relationship with this guy called Jesus, it’s that Andrew Purves is turned inside out, converted in a fuller sense of my being so that I’m a new person.

The old Catholic monastic habit, when you become a monk or a nun, you got a new name. I like that. When you’re in Christ, you’re a new person. Have a new name to identify...I’m a new person! The old baptismal theology...in baptism the old Adam died and in Christ, through the waters of baptism, I’m bonded to Jesus Christ in a new person.

Union with Christ to me carries something more of that profound personal transformation. The question is, will I live it? The question is, do I believe it? Martin Luther says somewhere that “I thought that the old Adam drowned in the waters of baptism, but I discovered the miserable wretch can swim.” Until we rise again at the end of the age with Jesus, there’s a kind of a “yes, but”... also, “but not yet” tension in the Christian life, that we have the power and blessing of the Spirit, but this mortal body will die, yet to be raised. All things are not complete. In this life, and in ministry, it’s strange to say, the old Adam still creeps around, thinking that I can save my congregation, I can renew my congregation, I can be the savior of my people.

MM: That’s what they pay me for!

AP: That’s right, but you’re not a messiah. So *The Crucifixion of Ministry* is about putting to death our messianic pretensions. Crucifixion is a good word. It’s a saving word, it’s a redeeming word, it’s a death word, and it’s a deadly death word. I see the crucifixion of ministry as God saying, “I’m not done with you yet. I am reclaiming your ministry even in mid-career, and bonded to Jesus Christ, we will do great things with you.”

MM: What does the congregation do when the minister that they knew is crucified and stops doing the approach that the ministry used to have?

AP: I don’t have a slick packaged answer for you, other than to say

this: We ought to take a far bigger responsibility for teaching the people. Teach the people about who Jesus is and what the church is in him, and what the job of the pastor is in the church.

Let me give you an example. I often hear pastors tell me, “I serve the Timbuktu Presbyterian Church.” I will say to the pastor, “No, you don’t serve the Timbuktu Presbyterian Church. You serve Jesus Christ as Lord, and Jesus serves the Timbuktu Presbyterian Church, because he’s their Lord. You serve the Lord.” When that focus is in place, it redirects ministry, because then the attention is “What is the Lord doing...what has the Lord called me to do? What about his ministry am I called to bear witness to for the sake of the people?” — because what they need is him. They don’t need me as the pastor.

MM: Then the pastor is just a facilitator in some ways — is that what you’re saying?

AP: No. You’re a New Testament scholar. The word for martyr is *martyres*, bearing witness. I think our primary task is to bear witness. Here’s the issue. Do you think Jesus is up to anything, or is he just back there as a dead moral influence? That’s the critical question.

MM: Or is he unemployed up in the sky?

AP: That’s right. Is he, in the freedom of his love and in the power of the Spirit, an actor in history? The New Testament is saying yes, the church at its best is saying yes, and so I think the issue is fundamentally Christian — do we believe Jesus lives? If he’s living, he’s up to something. The issue is, how do we as a congregation, how do I as your pastor help us as a congregation get in on this?

MM: The pastor is to be a witness for that.

AP: Be a witness to what Jesus is doing. That’s right.

MM: And the other members of the congregation...

AP: Get in on it.

MM: They all have a ministry.

AP: Two things will happen. When we are in Christ, bonded to Jesus Christ, two things will inevitably happen. You’ll become a person, you’ll become a congregation that worships in Christ. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, all of our prayers and worship go to the Father and the Spirit through Jesus Christ our Lord. But also bonded to him, we share in his continuing mission from the Father. So we’re thrust out into the world. We become dialectically a people of worship and a people of ministry and mission — both/and. The trouble is, we have a lot of ministry and mission stuff going

without a lot of worship stuff going. Sometimes we forget to see that in Christ we share in his communion with the Father and in his ministry from the Father.

MM: As people join in the ministry of Jesus, pastors or members, how do they know what he's up to? They know who he is. What difference is it going to make on the street in the way they actually interact with one another or with the world?

AP: As I said earlier, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We have the Bible. But we're students of the Bible not just to know what the Bible said. We're students of the Bible to know what God is up to. That's one radical statement. It's one thing to know Bible verses, it's something else to be...as it were, to go through the Scriptures and apprehend and be apprehended by the living God.

MM: So we need to be reading not just the words but read *through* them...

AP: Read through the words to a reality that can't be contained within the words, but that the Lord God Almighty, Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, use these words in a unique and authoritative way — that we go through them to a reality... These are just words on a page. I don't worship words on a page, I worship the living God. But through this, we know the Lord, and then we have the doctrines of the church, we have the great confessions of the church. So we have structures, lenses as it were, like my glasses, by which we can interpret the Scriptures in way that the church has said, "This is faithful."

There is some degree of caution — we also have the Lord in our lives. It's not just left-brain or cognitive, but everybody in your congregation has been met by the Lord — small ways, big ways, quiet ways, loud ways, he still meets us on the Damascus Road. He still meets us in the hospital room. He still meets us wherever we are, because he's a living Lord. Helping the people then not just to know the Scripture, not just to know the great traditions of the church, but how does the Lord work in your life? Where has the Lord met you in your life? Get people telling these stories.

MM: Aren't people often oblivious, unaware of his presence, of what he's doing? And the pastor's role is to help them see a different perspective on what's already happening?

AP: Sure, and maybe stop talking and being a little quiet and learning to name and own your story, your story with the Lord. How has the Lord dealt with you? How did the Lord deal with you when you met your spouse

and you fell in love? How did the Lord deal with you when your first child was born? How did the Lord deal with you when your first parent died? Etcetera, etcetera.

MM: Aren't people a little reluctant?

AP: Yes.

MM: Why is that? Why would people be so reluctant to think that the Lord is working with them?

AP: It's very personal — it makes you vulnerable when you speak this stuff out loud. So the pastor, with appropriate respect for boundaries (because you don't say all things), you begin to model, to show by your life an openness, a vulnerability, a sensitivity to, an awareness that God is a God who gets involved in the lives of people, even my life. I would trust that slowly a congregation would begin to be aware, yeah, this is a living Lord — not just giving assent to propositions, but to a living Lord who is involved in my life.

MM: Some people might prefer that God stayed at a distance and stayed out of their lives — that he's good for fire insurance, but they don't want him crucifying their life.

AP: Yeah...Augustine famously said in his confessions, "Make me chaste Lord, but not yet," "Make me holy, Lord, but not yet, there's still a few things I want to mess with here." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great German martyr, Lutheran theologian killed at the end of World War II in a concentration camp, wonderful theologian, in one of his books says, "When we are encountered by the living Word, one of two things must happen. Either the Word must kill us, with us being born again, or we must kill the Word." This Word is not tame. This Word, who confronts us with an unconditional claim on our life...

MM: It meddles...

AP: It meddles, and that may mean there are some things in my life I have to put to death. Paul is full of this stuff — put away, put away, be done with...lists all over the place in the second half of all of these letters...put away all of that, but on the other hand, this is how you are to live. Yes, there is a moral inventory involved.

While we are not perfect, and as a Calvinist, I am pretty skeptical that I will be perfect this side of eternity, nonetheless, I'm in process. There are issues I struggle with and try to deal seriously with, and do so under grace and not under law. I try to do so because I am loved and I want to respond with gratitude, not because I am fearful and want to respond with

fear and terror of a God who is out to get me. I believe, rather, I am dealing with a God who has unilaterally and unconditionally said, “I know your name and I love you, and my name is Jesus.”

MM: In the end he can be trusted.

AP: Yes, he can be trusted.

MM: What happens when the pastor is transformed, has a revised ministry, and the congregation catches some of this vision? How would the congregational life be transformed by a renewed understanding of who Jesus is?

AP: That’s contextual, because each local community has its own issues and its own life and ministries in response. So I don’t want to slap on a grid and say this is always what will happen. But some things surely will happen... The preaching will not be dull, the worship will not be dull, and the people will be caught up in the ministry of Jesus in some regard. As grandparents, parents, schoolteachers, plumbers, guys that fix roofs, guys that dig holes in the road, doctors, lawyers, businesspeople, whatever they do... The criterion of holiness is not “how do we live for the Lord on Sunday morning” but “because we live for the Lord on Sunday morning (and that’s not a throwaway, that’s real), how then am I going to live for the Lord on Monday morning?” The criterion of holiness is what I do the rest of the week. That reality is taken into business, the marketplace, where consciously and intentionally I am saying the bottom line is my faithfulness to Jesus Christ. Where is he in this bank? Where is he in this business?

I’m not a great lover of dentistry, but it’s a necessary reality. My dentist gets the list every morning of the patients, and before a patient has come through the door, he prays for every patient. That’s a Christian dentist — that even drilling teeth and scraping plaque is done for the glory of the Lord. Paul says do all things in Christ — not just Sunday morning or pious things — so drive your car in Christ, make love and have babies in Christ, grade papers, teach a class in Christ, pay your taxes in Christ. What does it mean to live in Christ in all things, so that we concretize this reality that has personally claimed us, and whose name is Jesus and who is at work doing what he is always doing — bringing in the reign of God.

MM: This will transform people’s understanding of who they are, but for some people this is a little stretch.

AP: Yeah. I think we’ve made it too tame, on the whole. We’re too much of “Jesus at home in our culture.” I’m not advocating an angry Jesus,

but even in Palestine 2000 years ago Jesus wasn't always at home in his culture — challenging, provoking, particularly the religious...

MM: And his culture rejected him.

AP: Right. What does it mean to have a Jesus who might be a provocateur in our culture... I'm a Scot, I'm not an American. Just to say something that's deliberately provocative, what would it mean for our thinking and acting if we were to say that I trust that Jesus is Lord, what therefore does that mean for defense policy? What does that mean for economic policy? If he's Lord of all, not just of a little religious parcel of my life, but Lord of all — and I'm a Christian and I'm a defense contractor — nothing wrong with being a defense contractor — what does that mean for the ethics of my defense contracting? Or I'm in the military — what does that mean for my ethics as a soldier?

I think we are called into these difficult places of life to bear witness that Jesus is Lord and to expect...how do the Acts of the Apostles put it? These people are turning the world upside down. When you turn something upside down, that's called a revolution. The revolution of the reign of God. A new heaven and a new earth. I get excited about that. That's worth getting up for in the morning. That's going to get me into a pulpit or into a lecture room with some excitement! The Lord is doing something, let's get on and pray the power of the Spirit to bond us to what he's doing and let's get on with the work.

MM: You say it's upside down, but in a way, the world we have now is what's out of kilt.

AP: That's right. It's not Jesus who is upside down, it's *we* who are upside down.

MM: But it's hard... I've heard the story of the glasses that will change a person's vision so they see upside down... they'll adjust to it. But when they take them off, they have to go through the adjustment process again.

AP: Is this not Romans 12:2, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind"? Our minds have to be rewired. We have to learn how to think out of a center in Jesus Christ, not out of a center in ourselves, not out of a center in our culture, not out of a center in given values, but out of a center in Jesus Christ.

Because we live in a culture, I can never be in Christ apart from being a Scot. There's always a tension here between Christ and culture. It's not one or the other, it's Christ in culture, Christ transforming culture, not Christ apart from culture. I'm not going off to some desert to play monk;

I'm in a culture. I speak of God in Scottish accent. But how can I do that more faithfully and more convertedly and more consciously and more critically, rather than less so. That is the challenge. Only at the end of the age when I am raised with Jesus, will I then see face-to-face. But for now I am in an inevitable tension between Jesus is Lord, and I live in a culture. That's part of the missiological frame within which we go in the world.

MM: Jesus was in a culture, and he spoke with Galilean accent.

AP: Right.

MM: Romans 12 tells us, "Don't be conformed to the world," yet in some ways there are aspects of the world we need, and we need to discern the difference.

AP: That's right. I have to pay taxes, I have to drive under the speed limit. Laws and rules are given, mostly, for our good and for the well-being of the commonwealth. There need to be politicians. Praise God sometimes when there are Christian politicians. I don't think any aspect of the world's life is intrinsically evil. Every aspect of the life of the world, Jesus is present there. In hidden ways, perhaps, and that's our job, to make that visible. But there is no part of the world's life over which Jesus is not Lord.

MM: There's a common saying of "what would Jesus do," but it seems you would want to change that to say, "what is Jesus doing now in my life?"

AP: What is Jesus doing now? That's right – and in the life of my community. It's not just what would Jesus do, that's appealing to a past moral influence. It's naïve. We think our children will look down at their bracelet... I was a 16-year-old male once, and I've seen some mischief I can get up to, and I look down at my bracelet and think, "WWJD, oh, I'm going to stand up and fly right." That's naïve.

I think the power question is to ask, *now* what would Jesus do? It's not a bad question, I just don't think it's the most powerful question, but what is Jesus doing now? That's a living Lord.

HOW THE TRINITY CHANGES EVERYTHING

Narrator: On this episode of *You're Included*, Dr. Fred Sanders, Professor of Theology at Biola University, discusses his book, *The Deep Things of God*. Our host is Dr. Michael Morrison.

MM: Fred, thanks for being with us today. We're glad to have you on the program.

FS: Glad to be here.

MM: We'd like to talk today about the Trinity. You've written a couple of books on the Trinity, and I'd like to explore with you a little about the significance of this doctrine for the Christian faith. In some ways, it sounds like it's just about God. There is three, there is one, and that's about him. What's it have to do with us?

FS: The doctrine of the Trinity is a statement about who God eternally is, and essentially is. The doctrine of God, in a way, is irrelevant to who we are. It's not about us, but about God. Connecting that which is true (and is what the doctrine of the Trinity is) to the gospel (or the message of our salvation, and God's



turning toward us, and being himself for us as the Father who sends the Son and the Spirit) is my life message. That's the thing I'm all about, the connection between God and the gospel.

The Trinity is the doctrine of God. That's important to safeguard. It's not just about how God deals with us — it's about how God would have been if there had been no "us." It includes the doctrine of salvation within it, like the expansive biblical way of understanding the tri-unity of God, as the Father who sends the Son and the Spirit. If the doctrine of the Trinity were already a big doctrine to take care of as a theologian, it gets even bigger when you open it up to include also the message of salvation.

MM: It's not just a thought experiment about somewhere "out there." It has an effect on us today?

FS: Yeah.

MM: Historically, it's been a big controversy. Many of the controversies in church history have been about the Trinity. Why is it a controversy?

FS: The main controversy would be the fights around the establishing of the doctrine of the Trinity. If you're persuaded that it's a biblical doctrine, as I am, then of course it was always there, as soon as the apostles began teaching and writing. For the church to come to the next level of clarity about it, as they did through the first few centuries of Christian thought, and classically jelling and coming together at the Council of Nicea, that was the main fight.

Christianity had gone along for some time trusting Jesus for salvation, and confessing the Lordship of Christ. In some ways, nobody had really asked the question of being. No one had raised the question about the essence of God. Think about even today: a normal Christian can go for a long time in a successful, productive Christian life, and never raise the more or less speculative question about, "What is the being of the Son of God?" That doesn't naturally occur to everyone.

MM: They're used to having a relationship with God, but not asking what's God's relationship with himself?

FS: Exactly. All the wonderful richness of relationship thought, and relational thinking, for all that's good about it, can obscure thinking about "being" itself. You can go a long time in your Christian life being a good Christian, and not raise the question of being, but once you raise it, you've got to answer it the right way. It was raised in the early fourth century, clearly and explicitly and thematically, with a little philosophical help, and

an answer was given by Arius, the priest in Alexandria... His answer was that the Son is of a different being than the Father. That's the wrong answer. Once that wrong answer has been given, the right answer, once the question has been raised, must be given. The Son is of the *same* being with the Father. In Greek, *homoousios*, in Latin, *consubstantial*.

MM: The wrong answer actually helped produce the right answer.

FS: Right.

MM: How is it important for Christianity now, as the question basically was resolved at Nicea in 325? Is it still a live question?

FS: It's still a live question, partly because the doctrine of the Trinity is the Christian doctrine of God. It's the biblical doctrine of God, if by Bible, you mean the whole Bible, Genesis to Revelation. Read the whole thing. Take a step back and ask yourself, what does this disclose to us about the eternal identity of God? The Christian answer is that the one God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That's the short answer. It's why the early creeds have that basic Trinitarian shape as the most conspicuous thing about them.

Yet, it's not stated clearly in any one passage of Scripture. It's a vast, comprehensive synthesizing kind of a doctrine. You don't get it clearly stated with all the details and particulars tagged onto it in any one place in Scripture. Jesus doesn't show up and announce, "I come to you preaching the Trinity of God." He preaches the kingdom of God. He does so in such a way that he is the one who has the authority of God and the proclamation of the kingdom of God, and he does it in the power of the Spirit.

When you look at that and think about it, you end up coming up with the doctrine of the Trinity. Nevertheless, the doctrine of the Trinity is not on the lips of Jesus, nor does Paul stop in the middle of a letter to the Corinthians and say, "Now concerning the eternal being of God in three persons, I would not have you ignorant." There's never a place where you get a chapter-length, Rabbi Paul treatment of this doctrine.

MM: He does, at the end of 2 Corinthians, have a three-part benediction. But he doesn't use the word Trinity. Just talking about three things doesn't necessarily mean these three are one.

FS: That's right. Similarly, though Jesus doesn't go from town to town preaching the message of the Trinity, the Gospel of Matthew has 28 chapters of a lot of teaching from Jesus, and the key events narrated in his life. It ends with a surprise ending: "Go and baptize in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit," — it's stated in those terms. Not

the Father of the Son, but the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit. That either is a bad ending for the Gospel.... “Who put that in?” (There’s no textual or critical evidence that it was added at any point. It’s got full textual integrity as belonging there.) You either think that’s a bad, weird ending for the Gospel, or you think, “The whole point of what Jesus was doing and saying naturally culminated in this statement by the risen Lord: of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit as the name of God.”

MM: Is Jesus saying, “I’ll take this a new direction,” or is he saying, “This is the direction I was going all along?”

FS: I like to think of it as the direction he was going all along, though that does get us to the fact that, when you’re dealing with the ministry of Jesus, and the New Testament witness to it, it is the turning of the ages. It’s the moment in the progressive revelation of God where all the promises reach their fulfillment, and a mystery is made known. A mystery that was kept secret from long ages is now revealed. There is something exciting about the New Testament as the point where that mystery is made known and reflected on.

MM: Jesus said, “After I’m resurrected, then you’ll understand” [see John 13:19]. There is this watershed moment at the resurrection, and this passage of Matthew comes after the resurrection, so he’s saying, “Now I can tell you what it’s been about.”

FS: Yeah, it’s not a total surprise, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, that language. In Matthew 11 is a point in Matthew’s Gospel where Jesus is reflecting on the failure of his message. It’s an odd thing to talk about Jesus’s failure, but he’s reflecting on the fact that the word is going out, and it is not being received fruitfully. There’s lots of stuff there. Quotes from Isaiah, it’s the theme of that middle part. He talks to his Father about how God has revealed these things to babies, not to the wise and the educated. Then he says (This is right before he says, “Come to me you who labor, and I will give you rest.”), “No one knows the Father except the Son, and no one knows the Son except the Father” [Matthew 11:27].

Some critical commentators say, “This is a bolt from the Johannine sky. Why is the Jesus of the Gospel of Matthew talking like that? No one knows the Father, but the Son.” I think there are two reasons. One, the historical Jesus probably talked like that. You just don’t get a lot of the reporting of it in Matthew. Secondly, literarily, it sets up what’s going to happen in Matthew 28. Jesus is talking about the not-yet receivedness of his message. It’s a mystery locked up in God. No one knows the Father but the Son. No

one knows the Son but the Father. The only way to get into that club, and get to know either of them, is to get an invitation from one of them.

We're talking about how clearly the Trinity is revealed in Scripture. It's interesting to me that, at that point, Jesus does not explicitly name the Holy Spirit. He says the Father and the Son. "No one knows the Father but the Son. No one knows the Son but the Father." Then you have to wait another 17 chapters to get it rounded out, or filled out, with the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

MM: There's a new element in the proclamation.

FS: When it's completed, yeah. When it's fully made known... You could do neat things, like saying, How does one get in on this divine secret, if only the Father knows the Son, and only the Son knows the Father, how do you get in? The answer, unspoken in chapter 11, is spoken in chapter 28. It's the Holy Spirit.

MM: When Jesus was there in person, it would be him, but now that he's left, you need the Holy Spirit.

FS: Yeah, there's some sense in which Jesus in the course of his ministry was sort of hogging the Holy Spirit. [laughing] There's that sense in which the descent of the Spirit on Jesus in the Jordan was kind of a pre-Pentecost, or a down payment on Pentecost, or it was the indwelling of the Spirit in the one, in the God-man, that would then be vouchsafed to us in the completion of his work.

MM: Some of the church's understanding of that came about as they began to understand that Jesus was God. What sort of person was it who spoke this, and who did this? That was what Arius was denying. He had the name "God," but Arius was saying that Jesus wasn't really the same God. What kind of evidence helped the early church come to a conclusion that Arius was wrong on that?

FS: Arius had a peculiar belief. We're used to a "Jesus is either God, or he's just a man" dichotomy, but Arius opened up a middle territory. He would not have said that Jesus was merely a man. He thought that Jesus was a highly exalted creature, kind of the ultimate creature, the creature through whom all other creatures were made. It's a strange middle zone. It maps more onto the theology of Jehovah's Witnesses today than it would to someone who thinks that Jesus is a great teacher, but merely a man.

It's tempting for me, as an evangelical, to go to the Bible and find passages which demonstrate the deity of Christ. I think they're there. I'm spoiling to have that argument. I think I can win it. The early church fathers

also knew those verses, and had lived with them, and could argue from them, and did argue from them in the debates around Nicene theology.

The real, crucial doctrinal breakthrough was when they argued that salvation itself was at stake in the recognition of the full deity of Christ. That is to say, let's imagine that Arianism is true for just a minute. Sometimes when I do a thought project like this, I'll switch chairs. When I'm teaching, I'll go stand in another corner. I'll say, "I'm going to spend five minutes explaining a damnable heresy here for a minute. This is not me talking as myself. I just want to do justice to it, and spin it out for you." I did that after I saw some student notebooks where they wrote down everything I had explained as if I were teaching it.

I won't move chairs here. Let me just say that if Arianism were true, the situation would be that the one high God, who is too exalted to be among us, sent this great creature, through whom he had made everything else, the Logos (not the eternal Word, but the very, very old Word), and that this mighty spirit being undertook salvation for us, suffered for us. If you step back from that and say, "If that's the case, what kind of salvation was made available to us through the sacrifice of this other creature?" It raises all the problems that people tend to raise these days with regard to classic atonement theology. If Arianism is true, then God is punishing a third party for something between himself and the second party.

It also raises questions about what would that kind of punishment do? What would the experiences of this incarnate not-god accomplish? You could say it would accomplish some kind of salvation, just not the kind of salvation envisioned by the Christian faith.

To put it personally, if sin is, among other things, a personal problem with God, and we need to be forgiven and personally reconciled with God, then only God can do that. Right? It would make no sense... It's an issue between us, this guy over here doesn't have anything to do with it (even if this guy over here, the Logos, is somehow, in some sense, my creator, like if everything was created through him). It just gets into a strange mythological situation that doesn't solve the problem that we're talking about. We're talking about personal reconciliation between God and humanity.

MM: That third party just doesn't fit.

FS: Yeah. The doctrinal insight that if Jesus brought about salvation, and if salvation is what we think it is, then Jesus had to be fully God. It's interesting that the breakthrough and the clarity of the doctrine of the

Trinity, of confessing it well doctrinally, is also a breakthrough and an insight into the gospel. It's not "we know what salvation is, but let's talk about the being of God for a while, and anathematize each other over those kinds of things." No, this insight into the nature of what Christian salvation is helped drive this greater clarity about who the Christian God is.

MM: Could you explain a little more about how that clarifies salvation? Is it what we're saved from, or what we're saved for, or how we're saved?

FS: It probably has effects in all those areas, but I was just thinking about the personal character of salvation.... If we had other problems, we could have other solutions. If the human predicament were that demons were oppressing us, then God could have sent Michael the archangel to solve the human predicament and bring us salvation. We would call that salvation. We're beat up by demons? God beats up the demons that were beating us up. Now we're saved. But that's not our problem. There's demonic stuff happening, but that is not the root of the human predicament. The root of the human predicament is personal estrangement from God, and so only God can save us. He can't send Michael. He can't empower us from within to solve our own problem. There's all sorts of things that God will not do as salvation, because they don't address what we need saving from.

MM: Since Jesus is our Savior, and only God can save, therefore Jesus is God. It's not a proof-text approach, but more of an overview.

FS: Yeah. It gives you a commanding position from which to be able to view the proof-texts properly. You can go to passages that talk about the deity of Christ, and say, "That's why it says that. That's why John's Gospel starts up in the stratosphere, because it's going to talk us through the nature of salvation."

It's stronger. There is kind of a blind way of moving around proof texts in order to construct a doctrinal edifice. That has its weaknesses. When you get inside the doctrine and have some understanding about why it's doing what it's doing, most of the proof texts stay in place. You have a better understanding of why they're there. It's the difference between checking the boxes on something, and understanding why you're checking the boxes.

MM: At the council of Nicea, the Holy Spirit wasn't discussed much. It was mainly about Jesus. The Holy Spirit entered the discussion later, toward the council of Constantinople. How does the Holy Spirit figure into

that same kind of reasoning, that they concluded that the Holy Spirit is God? Was that also because of his role in salvation?

FS: I think so. You don't have a lot of this in the creeds themselves, so the creed of 325, the creed that's actually at the Council of Nicea, just says, "And we believe in the Holy Spirit." That's it. It was a very eventful 60 years or so between that and the second ecumenical council, Constantinople, in 381. There you get what we now call the Nicene Creed (which is actually the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381, but nobody wants to say that, so we all say the Nicene Creed, and by that we mean the 381 creed), and it has a much fuller, robust theology of the Holy Spirit, especially with an eye on his divinity.

What does it say? You could just take the idea of Nicea, that the Son is of one substance with the Father, *homoousios* with the Father, and you could apply that to the Holy Spirit and say, "There's God the Father, and the Son is *homoousios* with him, and so is the Holy Spirit." For lots of reasons in the busy fourth century, there was a resistance to doing that. Negatively, politically there were groups within the church who weren't sure about the deity of the Spirit when it was argued in that way, and the orthodox (Gregory Nazianzus, Basil of Caesarea) and those guys (especially Basil) wanted to be able to build a consensus and say things that everyone could agree with. Gregory Nazianzus got mad about that and said, "You need to use the *homoousios*, or you need to be clear on the deity of the Spirit here."

There might be a good reason for not doing another *homoousios* in the creedal language: it seems to make the Spirit sort of the next Son. It seems like, Take all the decisions you made in Christology, and port them over to pneumatology... Some of it is transferable. The Son and the Spirit are both God. But if you use the same exact creedal, doctrinal language about it, it obscures the difference of the Holy Spirit, the distinctness.

In the Nicene Creed, we end up with, "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord..." You move this heavy, divine name for the one God and put that in the Holy Spirit's category. "...and the giver of life." Wonderful biblical theology. The Spirit is the one who gives life, "...who proceeds from the Father, who together with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified." "Lord and giver of life" clues you into the fact that there's a similar soteriological motive for the inclusion of the Holy Spirit in that argument.

Here's how I might describe that doctrinally: It's not just that God the

Father and God the Son incarnate worked out a transaction of salvation between them which somehow gets applied to us in some human way. The inclusion of the Holy Spirit in the soteriological argument means the application of redemption is also a divine act, without which we couldn't have the gospel as we understand ourselves to have the gospel.

MM: You said that they wanted to maintain the distinction of the Spirit as different from Jesus. Why is that difference important? If they're all God, why have this distinction, or why is it important?

FS: You could ask that question about the Father and the Son as well. If they're all God, why have the distinction? Some people ask, "Why did God make it hard? Why not have a simple theology?"

MM: Well, because he's up there, and Jesus is down here...

FS: Yeah. Then with the Holy Spirit in particular, it's important to recognize the distinction between them, because if you've got a Father-Son distinction, and then you loosely or sloppily lump the Holy Spirit into that with some parallel language, you get the deity of the Holy Spirit, but it comes at the cost of not attending to his hypostatic distinctiveness, to his personal particularity. Bluntly, you could end up with "God and Sons."

If it's just parallel, there's the Father, and his Son, and his other son who's not a son, but is a Spirit for some reason... If you have that, a number of problems result. One is we're Trinitarian, and we're Christo-centric, and those things shouldn't be in tension with each other.

We're focused and centered on Jesus Christ, the God-man incarnate. We do that in a way that doesn't de-centralize the Trinity, right? We're centered on Jesus, who is centered on the Trinity. There's only one way to the Father. There's no way to the Father, except through the Son. Well, if the Spirit is simply a parallel other son (who we don't call a son for some reason because we know better), it seems like he could be another way to the Father, and they all get along and everything, and it's all one happy triangle. Still you would have that problem of the Father. Should I get to him through the Son, or through the Spirit? That would be a problem.

MM: Very interesting. Thanks very much, Fred. We look forward to seeing you again.

FS: Thanks, Mike.

ADOPTION AND PRAYER IN THE TRINITY

MM: Fred, thank you for joining us again. We'd like to continue the discussion about the Trinity that we had earlier. I wanted to explore a little further with you about something you wrote in your book *Deep Things of God*—that God being a Trinity is inviting us into the life of the Trinity. Could you explain that in a little more detail as to how we are invited into his life?

FS: I used that kind of language, invited into the life of God, to set the standard high for what salvation is, while knowing that I'm flirting with or skirting on mystical sounding territory, which I don't mean to affirm, but just because some people have made extravagant claims for the amount of assimilation to God that is possible for creatures, I don't want to have to back off a high view of salvation because of that.

Here's what I mean by invited into the life of God: I mean that in the eternal being of God, there is a Father-Son relationship that takes place in the Spirit, and that Christian salvation is participation in that Father-Son relationship. There are lots of ways we could talk about being saved, being redeemed and forgiven, a lot of language we can get from Scripture about that, but this really central metaphor of being adopted by God the Father, to become sons of God, gets talked about in different ways in Scripture.

John has a particular theology of sonship, and Paul has a particular theology of sonship. They don't contradict each other. They harmonize at a higher level, but there's wonderful agreement there that what's happening is we are adopted as sons. We go from a position of not being

the children of God to being the children of God in the biblical sense of being adult male heirs. It's not we're God's cute little babies. It's that biblical usage: We are the ones who can inherit from God, who stand in that inheriting relationship. The reason that we are adopted sons is because the incarnate Son went from being the eternal Son to the incarnate Son to make possible our inclusion as adopted sons.

MM: You talk about inheriting. What are we inheriting?

FS: That is a great question. What's a good classical answer? We are inheriting the blessings that are Christ. All the riches of salvation have been heaped up in Christ and stored there, and that our inclusion in Christ means that those are all made over to us, so justification, blessedness, peace with God, all of those.

MM: Normally an inheritance requires the death of someone. In this case, it's a metaphor for receiving something.

FS: Yes. Biblical thought is never thinking about the death of the Father, so it's never going straightforward with that metaphor, and even where Hebrews gets interested in that question, it will talk about the death of the testator, pointing to the death of Christ, because, at no point, is the idea of inheritance the idea of the passing away of the Father and the passing on of that stuff into the possession of the offspring.

MM: Part of that, also, is our relationship that we are adopted as children of God. What kind of relationship do we have with God?

FS: Our relationship as saved, our relationship by faith with God, is a relationship of sonship. That's an intimate relationship that the Bible wants to make known to us. It's more than what you would reasonably expect the relationship between a Creator and his creation to be. Just in the abstract, an almighty Creator who produces a creation is going to stand in a lordship or mastery relationship to whatever is created, so you could make a list of things that we intelligent creatures owe God by nature and by the nature of our createdness, and it would be appropriate to talk about all those things in language of being subjects of a master. The New Testament, with great excitement, announces something beyond that and says all of that is still true. We still stand in a relation of creatures to a Creator, but we're also taken into something more intimate and something that we would not have the right to expect just by deducing it from our createdness.

There used to be a fight... Maybe the old fundamentalists fought about this with the liberals — is everyone a child of God, or are just the redeemed

the children of God? I'm sympathetic to the straightforward answer that is easy to construct from Scripture, that sonship to God is a category of redemption in Scripture, and so to be a son of God is to be saved, and, therefore, those who are not saved are not sons of God in the way that the Bible is talking about it.

MM: Right. Ancient Israel was called the children of God, but in a different sense than Christians are.

FS: Yeah, I think so.

MM: One of the things that we seem to inherit or we're participating in God's nature is what Second Peter talks about, that we've become participants of the divine nature [2 Peter 1:4]. What are we participating in?

FS: I want to emphasize that we are participating in the relationship of Father to Son in the Spirit. It's always hard to get the Holy Spirit in there in a clear way. The Spirit's the least analogically clear person, but as long as you insist that you can't have that Father-Son relationship without the Spirit relationship in there somehow, that's what I want to emphasize that we're into.

Some people would take the word nature there in Second Peter in a very direct way to say that we participate in the... would you even say... the being of God, the divine nature itself. I can't square that kind of reading of the word nature there with the high view of the divine nature that I think is presupposed in the rest of Scripture.

MM: Right. God is God and we're not.

FS: We never overcome the Creator-creature distinction, even when we're brought into something more intimate than you could expect from the Creator-creature distinction.

MM: One aspect of our personal relation with God is prayer. How is the Trinity involved, or our understanding of the Trinity involved, in how we pray?

FS: Nice distinction you made there: how is the Trinity involved, and how is our understanding of the Trinity involved, because those can run on very different tracks. As a theologian, I've lifted the hood and looked at how things work under the hood, I can say the Trinity is completely involved in prayer. Nothing works in Christian prayer, Christian prayer can't even be defined as distinctively Christian, unless it's approaching the Father, in the name of the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray, and he started them in this school of

prayer with the language, “Our Father,” so every time we approach God as Christians and say, “Father in heaven,” it would be reasonable for God to object, like to interrupt our prayer and say, “Oh, I’m your Father? Does that mean you act like a son, that you reproduce my character in filial fashion?” There’s a commentary that William Tyndale wrote on the Lord’s Prayer, where he puts in God’s mouth this kind of argument, and the person praying has to immediately respond, “No, I’m not saying I’m your son. I’m saying I have his password, because he gave it to me, and I have been instructed to approach in this Christian way with filial boldness.”

MM: We have no right on our own.

FS: Yeah. That little tag, “in Jesus’ name,” that evangelicals at least habitually end prayers with, is not just the right formula, or the sealed with a kiss, or however you’re supposed to end a prayer to know that you’ve ended it. That little tag is really the key to the whole thing: praying to God the Father has to happen in Jesus’ name. That’s what is going on when we approach God that way. All of this is only in the Spirit, by the power of the Spirit, the Spirit of sonship, the Spirit of adoption, the one who makes this prayer to the Father possible.

That’s what’s going on under the hood. Now, most of us don’t think much about internal combustion and what’s actually happening to motivate our vehicle as we go. The question of how our understanding of the Trinity influences our prayer is a trickier question, and individual results vary.

I always try to present prayer to the Trinity as an invitation to go deeper into something that we’re already experiencing, because I teach in lots of different churches on the Trinity, and I don’t want to do a “drive by” and harm people’s prayer lives by saying something for 30 minutes in the pulpit, because a lot of us are praying. We’re Trinitarian Christians, and we’re praying simply to God, “God,” and not having a Trinitarian thought in our head in the moment of the prayer. If I teach a little bit on the Trinity, people could accidentally get the impression that they haven’t been addressing their prayer envelopes properly, and they’re going to a dead letter office of some kind, that they just write something to God and it hits the post office in heaven, and Father, Son and Holy Spirit stand around going, “It’s not addressed to me. I’m not opening it.”

That is not what’s going on, but the more that you are successfully praying as a Trinitarian believer to the triune God, a deeper understanding, a closer attention to the biblical New Testament patterns of prayer, leads

you deeper into something that you're already experiencing.

MM: What's the difference between praying to the Trinity and praying to the Father?

FS: That's good. Praying to the Father is biblical, and praying to the Trinity just barely is, so if you're trying to stay low to the ground and follow the biblical patterns of prayer... I used to be very cautious about this, too. I didn't want to make anyone's prayer life get messed up just on the basis of a little bit of teaching I did. A little learning is a dangerous thing. If you take the whole course, I think we'll come out okay.

I used to say, "However you're praying is fine. There are no secret formulas. You don't have to hold your hands a certain way to get the prayer to go through." But then I started saying, "But there is a way to get an A on the theology test and to pray in line with clear biblical guidance, and that is to pray to the Father, in the name of the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit." That's the A on the theology test. Then you're not going to be surprised by biblical patterns of prayer that you see. You're not going to read Paul and think, "Why does he bend his knee to the Father in heaven? Why doesn't he pray to Jesus? Why doesn't he pray to the Trinity?" We know God is Trinity.

That's the main thing. The biblical pattern of prayer is not to say, "Oh, Trinity," but to say, "Father, in the name of the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit." Praying to the Trinity would be praying objectively to the Trinity out there. It's not heretical. It's not wrong. I suppose it works. But the biblical pattern of Trinitarian prayer is to pray more from within the Trinity, to the Father, in the name of the Son, as one who is caught up in the middle of that relationship between Father and Son, in the power of the Spirit.

In congregational prayers or open prayers that we overhear from each other in the church, I do my best not to be critical of those. When people begin thinking about the wonders of the Trinity, they'll start praying to one person of the Trinity, then their mind will go on a little journey, and they'll say things to another person of the Trinity, and they don't always edit the sentences as they're going. It's extemporaneous prayer. You'll hear terrible things like, "Father, thank you for dying on the cross," or, "Jesus, thank you for sending your son," and the theologian in me wants to get up and immediately censor everything, something like, "No more praying until you get your doctrine right."

But I don't think what I'm hearing is really heresy, and I won't interrupt

somebody. They have thoughts about the Father, thoughts about the Son, and thoughts about the Holy Spirit, and in the freedom of prayer, they go on a little mental spiritual itinerary. They move from the glory of the Father, to the glory of the Son, and they just haven't made the sentence right. Ideally, the sentence would also come out right, but I no longer think I'm hearing heresy in the act.

MM: Right. Just not well stated.

FS: If asked, I will say, "No, Jesus did not send his son. No, the Father did not die on the cross." There are names for all of this in a catalog of heresies. Do not affirm those things.

MM: And those people would probably agree, when they heard back what they had said.

FS: That's right, and if you ask them the right set of Socratic questions in the right order, they could get an A on the test.

MM: Right. As you were saying earlier, the prayers get through anyway. God looks on the intent, not the precise wording.

FS: Yeah. That's why I love the opening question you asked, what does the Trinity have to do with prayer? Everything. What does our understanding of the Trinity have to do with prayer? Our understanding of the Trinity is an invitation to a deeper grasp and practice of what's really happening in prayer. It rises and falls.

MM: Right. Much of Christian life can be lived without technical terminology about the Trinity.

FS: In *Deep Things of God*, one chapter is called "Praying with the Grain," the idea being that there is a certain directionality, a mediation built into Christian prayer, and to know more about the Trinity and to pray more in line with, or alignment with, or with the grain of that mediation, is to turn every act of devotion into a little microcosm of the relationship to God that we have in Christ.

MM: It's a reminder of the different roles that are involved there. Sometimes we need a reminder of the Spirit's role in our life.

FS: Yeah. It's a rehearsal of it, which is one of its strengths. I'm a big fan of extemporaneous prayer. I'm that kind of evangelical who is mainly into that kind of freedom of unscripted prayer, but one of the great benefits of scripted, traditional, liturgical prayer is that someone sat down and thought this all out, and you get to rehearse the right order, and if you do that enough, then even your extemporaneous prayer will fall into the right form, while still having the kind of freedom that I think is appropriate to

the spiritual life.

MM: There is a big difference between some of the evangelical churches with extemporaneous prayer and this highly liturgical, scripted prayers. You're saying there's a place for both. You're in the evangelical tradition and so am I. How can the scripted prayers help us expand our understanding of the Trinity?

FS: Well, depending on which scripted prayers you're talking about, if you're dealing with the ancient liturgies or their transformation in the Reformation period, through people like Cranmer and some of the Protestant liturgists, then what you've got is some really, thoughtful, careful, biblical exploration that repays close study. That's different from the kind of expressive prayer you get in more extemporaneous settings.

It's not like there are only two types. I'm a low-church evangelical by conviction rather than by accident, and in that setting, you do get these moments that are more scripted. There's the congregational prayer offered by someone in leadership, an elder or a pastor, and while those should have elements of freedom appropriate to the rest of the worship service, they should also be more thoughtful. I am concerned if a pastor or an elder prays a poorly structured prayer that doesn't do justice to Trinitarian theology that I know he knows.

MM: A part of the differences are simply a matter of training, experience? Different people have different levels of understanding of Trinitarian language and prayer itself?

FS: Yeah. Then, there's the distinction between common prayer and whatever the opposite of that is – private prayer, I suppose.

MM: One feature about the Father-Son relationship, as Jesus said in John 17, is the Father loved him from before the foundation of the world, and that seems to be a way in which God's nature is very relevant to us. Has God simply told us to love one another, or is it because we are his children that there's an organic connection as to how we are to relate with other people?

FS: I think it's the latter – that what was made known in the Father sending the Son and the Spirit is... If you imagine away salvation itself, and then keep imagining away all the conditions of it, creation itself, if you take that moment of abstraction and think, what if the world had never been made? What if creation wasn't here, what would there be? There would just be God. This is a grand, strange thought experiment. It's counterfactual, totally hypothetical. If there were only God, would there

be love? The Trinitarian answer is yes, there would be love. God is love, and so God didn't get tired of not being able to love and decide he'd better create a world. "I know I have all this potential in me to be loving. If only there were something to love."

One of the points of the doctrine of the Trinity is it helps secure and fill out our understanding that God is self-sufficient, and ideally that doesn't make us picture God as a stingy, "I take care of myself" great loner, but it magnifies grace by saying God, who not out of any need, not out of any greed, not out of any plan for self-actualization, or improvement, or growth, but purely out of grace, purely out of love choose to make a covenant partner.

MM: That magnifies his love. He's not getting anything out of it. He doesn't need this relationship. We do. Well, we didn't exist. But once we existed...

FS: That's how much we needed the relationship: Without it, we don't exist. God's not in that kind of trouble.

MM: That kind of love is brought to us through the Spirit. The Spirit's been involved in love all along.

FS: Yeah. That's right. The Spirit is hard to talk about, and there is a sinful way of ignoring the Spirit, and there is a theologically irresponsible way of leaving the Spirit out of your considerations, and so we should avoid that. However, there's also a biblical reserve about speaking about the Holy Spirit that I think we violate if we draw a triangle with three points, and point to the third one and say, "Equal rights for the Holy Spirit," and insist on talking equally, and talking with equal clarity sometimes about the Holy Spirit. I don't think that does justice to the way that the Bible makes known the personhood and the deity of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit doesn't show up even in the Gospel of John very much until about chapter 14. John heavily invests in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Then there's Father-Son language all over the place, a dense tangle of Father-Son language, and a few references to the Holy Spirit, but not much until the action of the ministry of Jesus is over. Then chapter 14 kicks in, and we're taken into this inner space where Jesus begins discoursing about the Spirit, and he says some amazing things, and he talks a lot about the Spirit from then on.

There's something biblical to bringing in the Spirit, not as an

afterthought, but as a later introduced topic, where it's made explicit.

MM: Jesus says the role of the Spirit is to point to Jesus. "He will bring all these things to your remembrance," and there is no "fourth person of the Trinity" to point to the Spirit.

FS: Yeah. I grew up in a Pentecostal church, and one of the things we said in that church was the people who talk most about the Holy Spirit aren't necessarily the ones who have the most Holy Spirit. The ones who are most in the power of the Spirit are the ones talking the most about Jesus — and that's Pentecostal self-talk, right?

Having said that, there certainly is a way of ignoring, neglecting and having no ideas about the Holy Spirit that is wrong, and there's a "Spirit forgetfulness" that needs to be overcome, but I'm not always worried about the Holy Spirit, and I don't feel like I have to include an explicit mention of him in every reference I make to the Father and the Son. There's biblical warrant for not doing it.

Similarly, this is not how I run my prayer life. To my knowledge, there's no explicit prayer to the Holy Spirit in Scripture, so if you're having that kind of "I want exact text on this subject," there's a sense in which it's not biblical to pray to the Holy Spirit in a direct way. The rule is: you can pray to anyone who is God, so you've got three options. Four, if you include general prayers to God as being implicitly Trinitarian.

MM: Of course, they always pray in the Spirit.

FS: That's right. That's more biblical than loudly insisting on directing our prayers to the person of the Holy Spirit. That's trying to be more interested in the Holy Spirit than the Bible is.

MM: Thank you very much for being with us. I've enjoyed it.

FS: It's great to be here.

FROM “WHAT” TO “SO WHAT?”

Michael Morrison: Steve, you’ve been a pastor, and you describe yourself as “a practical theologian.” To some people, that seems like a contradiction of terms. Theology doesn’t seem very practical. How do you see theology as practical for the church?

Stephen Seamands: Well, Mike, I don’t think I would be teaching this stuff if I didn’t think it was practical. Sometimes I say to my students the reason I love theology is because it *is* so practical.

That’s why theology arose in the church in the first place, not so that academicians and theoreticians could sit around discussing and fine-tuning ideas. It was out of the life of the church, protecting true doctrine from false doctrine. It was so that you could disciple people when they came to faith in Christ. You had to tell them about what they believed and what

you believed as Christians. How do you evangelize without being able to talk to someone about the faith? Those are the kinds of things. It’s about nurturing. It’s about bringing people to faith. Those are the things that theology is about. So it’s



really practical, and it's supposed to undergird everything that we do in ministry.

MM: I noticed in your book, *Give Them Christ*, that you talk about how it's not just a "what" but a "so what." You're trying to bring out some practical implications of doctrines instead of just trying to prove that Jesus became flesh. Yeah, he did—then you try to answer *so what*: What difference does that make for us?

SS: Right. In this particular book, Mike, I was really concerned that pastors help people understand. We teach them a lot about the *what* while they're in school, and most of them get that. They understand it, but when they become pastors and preachers of churches, what people really want to know is, well, so what? Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us. So what? What difference does that make? So in this book I was trying to help them move from the *what* to the *so what*, and that's where I think doctrine really gets exciting and inspiring when we begin to think about what difference does this really make?

MM: Maybe comment on the incarnation. It's nice that Jesus became a human, but then there's the *so what*. What difference does it make in my job or in my marriage and day-to-day life?

SS: One of the great and foundational human questions that people have asked for centuries is: Does God really care, or is God just far removed somewhere? Did he create this and just pull away from it? But the incarnation means that he came and actually became one of us so that he could get next to us and so that he could understand what it feels like to be human, not in just a theoretical kind of sense but he walked in our shoes.

There's a poet, William Blake, who says "now think not thou canst sigh a sigh and thy Maker is not by. Think not thou canst shed a tear and thy Maker is not near." Jesus has become a human. Eyeball to eyeball, heart to heart. He knows what it's like to be human, to be lonely. He knows what it's like to get angry sometimes about things, to feel sorrow. He wept at the grave of his friend Lazarus, and he saw what it was doing to the people.

So that fundamental human question, does God care, has been answered for us in that he became flesh and dwelt among us. As Eugene Peterson puts it in his translation of that verse, John 1:14, "he moved into our neighborhood." He got next to us. Now I know that, and I can never be the same because of that. I know that he knows.

MM: Right. I was thinking of his struggle in Gethsemane. He's not just

faking this, going through motions, but it was something internal.

SS: He felt, at times we've felt, God-forsaken. We've felt all alone, and he cried out, "my God, why have you forsaken me?" He's felt that as well.

MM: Right. Philip Yancey wrote a book on *Where Is God When It Hurts?* Where is he?

SS: He's in the middle of it. He understands. Alfred North Whitehead says he is "the fellow-sufferer who understands." He can understand, so that when I come to him, I'm not coming to somebody that's aloof, far removed, or has no clue. That's good news, it seems to me.

MM: So we can see his life and learn something about our own life at the same time.

SS: Yes. That's another thing about the significance of the incarnation. First, it's a compliment to humanity, in the sense that God says, "I want to become one of you. I choose to take on flesh and dwell among you." What higher compliment could you give to humanity than to say, "That's how much you mean to me. I join myself to you."

Also, Jesus comes to reveal to us what it means to be fully human. In him we see, and we don't just hear someone talking about, what it's supposed to look like. Others might come and give you a discourse on the dignity of labor, but here is someone who comes and works in a carpenter shop with his hands. He embodies that for us. We see it. We get a person-to-person vision of that, which speaks to us more than any other. We need that as human beings. That's how communication is best done. We see in him the embodiment of what it means to be human, what it means to love, what it means to be free.

We also see the revelation of God. What's God like? That's another great human question, isn't it? For us Christians, it's really not "what is God like?"—it's more, "Is God Christ-like?" and in the face of Christ we see him.

MM: So Jesus is showing us both humanity and God. So do we expect God to look like humanity?

SS: Well, not exactly [laughing]. He actually embodies both, but he does suggest, I think, that God's plan is that you and I might share in the life of God. That you and I might become joined to God and raised, you might say.

MM: You're saying he's showing us true humanity, and he as a true human shared in the life of God, and that we can also, through him.

SS: Right. Through him—he's the pioneer. The writer of the book of Hebrews says he's the forerunner of what that new humanity is supposed

to look like, that lives in God and dwells in God and walks with God. That didn't work out so well with Adam. We turned from that original plan that God had for us, and he's kind of reinstituting that.

MM: Romans describes him as another Adam. Humanity is started again—in this model [Jesus], rather than the old one.

SS: Right. The second Adam.

MM: Jesus can show us what it means to live a human life in dependence on God, in a way that we couldn't see in the Old Testament from God speaking on Mount Sinai, for example. (Maybe that's where people got the idea of the aloof God, and he's just far off, and we couldn't relate.)

SS: I think God had to establish those boundaries and to show us, first of all, that "I'm not one of you." We have such a propensity to make God in our own image, and that propensity to bring God down to our level. God was teaching his people all along that no, you can't do that. There's this appropriate distance. But then in the New Testament, when Jesus comes, he comes near.

MM: On one side he says "I'm not one of you," and the next time he says, "I can *become* one of you." He blesses us with his presence. But with him as a human we see his struggles with pain, sorrow, sin, and suffering. He didn't sin himself, but he could deal with it, and he did deal with it. He stopped suffering for some people. Why didn't he just stop it for everybody?

SS: I think our basic human inclination is to think, well God ought to get rid of suffering. Truly, suffering is suffering. It's awful. God's way of dealing with suffering is a little different—at least the Christian vision of that. Simone Weil said that the extreme greatness of Christianity is not that it looks for a remedy for suffering, but a divine use for suffering. In Christ God enters into suffering himself. He chooses to become one with us in our suffering—takes it into himself, you might say. On the cross in his human nature he suffers, and he cries out, "My God, why?" Then, as a result of that, he is able to redeem suffering and now uses it for the redemption of the world.

It's a different vision of suffering. It doesn't solve all the problems related to the problem of suffering. There's still a lot of *why*'s that we ask, about why certain things happen to us, why things happen in our world, why there's so much suffering. The end of the story says there's going to be a time when there's no more tears and no more pain, but God seems to

be in the business of being more interested in redeeming it and using it for his purposes than just simply seeking to eliminate it and protect us from it.

MM: There will always be these why questions. We don't always know why, but now we're having a different perspective on it, of how this can be used for some good.

SS: Right, and also just knowing that he enters into suffering.

MM: He's been there.

SS: That doesn't make the problem necessarily go away, but sometimes when you can't trace God's hand, you can trust his heart. I think it helps us to trust God's heart to know that he's one with us in our suffering. I think of Joni Eareckson Tada who (as probably many know) has been a quadriplegic since she was 17 as a result of a diving accident. She talks about how when your husband has just left you, when your son has committed suicide, when you've just become a quadriplegic, trying to figure out reasons and answers is pointless. At a point like that, she says, the only answer that satisfies is the man of sorrows. Someday we'll get a full answer, but until then, she says the man of sorrows is enough—to know that God enters into that and doesn't keep himself from suffering. That speaks to our heart even though it may not answer all of our questions about the enigma of suffering.

MM: Even the symbol of Christianity is a cross—a reminder of not just simple suffering but excruciating suffering. So there is a practical significance of what we see there. It could be a doctrine, could become sterilized, but yet there's a practical result as we understand what was going on there in the crucifixion. That that can help us be encouraged. It doesn't take our suffering away. But as Paul described, we're sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

SS: I have sometimes shared with people about Christ and his suffering and helped them to reframe their suffering in the light of his greater suffering, their afflictions in the light of his greater affliction. It seems that "reframing" helps them put their suffering in a perspective that they couldn't before. It's profoundly comforting, even though it doesn't solve the mystery.

MM: The suffering is still there—and it's not just that Jesus suffered *more* than we did. But he suffered with purpose, and somehow we can participate in that purpose.

SS: Yeah. I like to think that his scars, his nail-scarred hands, have

become radiant now—radiant scars. It’s interesting that he has a glorified body, but he still has the scars. Those marks of his suffering are there, and it seems like they’re always going to be there. Even when John looks to see the lion, he doesn’t see a lion—he seems a lamb as though it had been slain [Revelation 5:5-6]. So even in John’s vision of heaven, Jesus still has those scars. But now they’re radiant scars, and it seems that in our lives, God can take the suffering, our scars. If we’ll give them to him, he can work to transform and redeem. Then our scars become radiant, too, and useful for the redemption of others.

MM: It reminds me of the Gospel of John. John refers to Jesus’ crucifixion as his glorification. It was part of his glory that he was willing to sacrifice, to suffer.

SS: Suffering and glory are bound up together in the Christian vision, and this is counter-intuitive and mind boggling, and not the way our culture tends to view suffering. Suffering is something to be eliminated. You’ve got a headache. You take a couple of Tylenol or whatever. You get rid of it. That’s what we would think, so we assume that that’s what a loving God would do: eliminate suffering. But God’s thoughts and ways are different. He wants to work and use suffering. The cross becomes the means of redeeming the world.

MM: Right. Whereas our suffering can’t redeem the world.

SS: No, it can’t, but it can be used redemptively in our lives and in the lives of others. I mean in the sense that God can take a person, for example, who has been through the wrenching pain of a divorce and bring them out, and then they become someone that God uses to minister to other people who are going through a divorce. So that doesn’t get wasted, as it were.

I had a woman several years ago in Canada share about how God had taken the garbage in her life, the suffering, the pain, the things that she wished had never happened. The garbage had become like a compost pile. You throw garbage in a compost pile—rotten eggs, banana peels and leaves and coffee grinds, whatever. She and her husband had just made a compost pile. She said, a year from now, when we go about fertilizing in our garden, around the shrubs and all, she said there won’t be any fertilizer you can buy anywhere that’ll be as near as good as that compost. She said it will be like pure gold.

I thought, that’s what God seems to want to do with our garbage. He can take it, if we’ll give it to him, and use it and turn it somehow into gold.

MM: We want to get rid of it, but he wants us to keep it, and he’ll

transform it.

SS: With his thorn in the flesh, Paul said take it away, and he prayed. He said it's a messenger of Satan. It was not a good thing, whatever it was, but God says, no I want to use that, because in your weakness my strength is made perfect. Paul says, I glory in that now. [2 Corinthians 12:7-10] That's a pretty counter-intuitive vision for the average American today, isn't it?

MM: In your book you mention that the apostles "preached the gospel backwards." It was an intriguing phrase. Maybe you could comment a little more. What's backwards about this, the way the apostles preached?

SS: We used to think of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and what I meant by that was, particularly if you look at the preaching of the apostles in the book of Acts, there's a strong emphasis on Christ's resurrection as being at the heart of everything, and fundamental. So what I meant was they, after his resurrection and after their proclamation of that, they then looked at the cross and his life, and interpreted all that he had done in the light of the resurrection.

For example, his death. I don't think they would have understood it to be redemptive and salvific if he was still in the grave. He had died, and that was the end of it. His word from the cross, it is finished, for example, takes on a different meaning. If he is still dead, we'd say, that's the end.

MM: *He* is finished.

SS: Done and he is finished, whereas now "it is finished" is the shout of a victor. It's accomplished, finished—but that makes sense only in the light of the resurrection. So that's what I meant by "they preached backwards," in the sense that they looked at his whole life ministry in the light of his resurrection, and it only then makes sense.

MM: The resurrection is good news for him, but how is that good news for us as well? That's the *so what* question.

SS: It establishes that he is Lord—the resurrection and the lordship and the divinity of Christ. It's good news because it helps us to really understand who Jesus is in that regard, and so I encourage pastors to call people on Easter Sunday, when they preach, to answer the question who is Jesus, and to submit to him as Lord, because the resurrection establishes that.

But the really good news about the resurrection is that it means that new creation has begun. In the Jewish mind, resurrection from the dead was something they associated with the very end of the age. That was

when God was going to make all things new. They were a little bit confused and discombobulated not because Jesus had been raised from the dead so much, but *when* it happened: It had happened in the middle of history, not at the end. So they had to readjust.

What that means is that new creation has already begun now, and so it's the guarantee that God is going to make all things new. It means that it has begun now. It can begin in us. We are new creatures in Christ, but it's also about the whole of creation. It tells me that God is on a mission to redeem *everything* that he created. I need to join him in that mission now.

MM: Salvation is bigger than just me.

SS: Absolutely. It's about all of creation. Paul writes in Romans, chapter 8, that all of creation groans and travails. It's on tip-toe, waiting. When he returns, new creation is really going to kick into full gear, as it were, but that process has begun now. So the guarantee, that that's where we're going to go, is already now. That's good news.

MM: That can also affect how we look at the creation around us now.

SS: Right. We ought to be preparing this world, ourselves, for its eventual destiny. That applies even to things like the environment. It leads to a Christian focus on creation care, because that's what God wants for all of creation. We need to kind of get on the road to that now.

MM: After Jesus was resurrected, he ascended to heaven. He sat at the right hand of the Father. What's he doing for us now?

SS: For a lot of people, the ascension is a meaningless doctrine. They believe it. It's in the Apostles' Creed, you know, and so forth.

First, you have to ask what it meant for him. Then you figure out what it means for us, but what it meant for him is that he's restored into the fullness of the presence of God once again, something that he laid aside in some measure when he became incarnate. He was present at one place and in one time. He was limited by space and time when he walked here.

Going back to heaven means that now he's in the fullness of the presence of God, and that means he can be everywhere and in all times at once now. He's no more limited. The good news is: that means that Jesus is always present now. He's everywhere. He said in the Great Commission, Don't forget: I'm with you always. That's bound up with the ascension, because heaven and earth overlap, as it were. Heaven is all around us, as it were. It's more of a dimension than a place. Jesus can be everywhere, and that means he's with us now, even as we're having this interview. He's with me moment by moment when I get in my car and

drive home. I can begin to recognize his presence and live in his presence every moment of every day. That is good news. That's just one thing.

MM: I was thinking of his ministry of mediation, as our intercessor.

SS: Yeah. We're told that one of the main things he's doing now that he's at the right hand of God he's not just twiddling his thumbs, but Hebrews [7:25] says he ever lives to make intercession for us. He is interceding at the right hand of God. This is a posture of standing in the gap for others.

So if that's what Jesus is doing, and we are somehow connected to him and joined with him through union with Christ and through being raised up with him, then we join with him in that work of intercession for others. One thing Jesus does is he takes a little bit of that intercessory burden that he has for everything and puts it on us as particular people for particular persons, situations, countries, cities, churches and so forth. We then become these mediators, as it were. We join with him in that work of intercession.

MM: So the feelings that we have are really from him working in us.

SS: Right. It's amazing the different kinds of ministries and burdens. Out of those burdens flow all kinds of different concerns and ministries that people have for particular things.

MM: The story of Jesus—we've sketched out where it has gone, but we also see something in the future part of the story: his return. That's going to have a huge practical importance for us then, but does it have a practical importance for us now?

SS: If you read the New Testament, most of the discussion of the second coming and the return of Christ is really not about trying to figure out when it's going to happen, or even what it's going to look like when it happens, but most of the instruction and the teaching has to do with our lives now. For example, the call to holiness. He who has this hope, John says, purifies himself as he is pure [1 John 3:3]. This hope of his return prompts us to become like him. We're going to become like him.

MM: If we like what he's like. Then it's going to have some influence on what we like and do now.

SS: Exactly. So the second coming is a call to holiness. It's also a call to faithful service. The parables that Jesus tells about the guy who goes away on a trip and the people are back home working. They don't know when he's coming. The ones that are said to be good and faithful servants are the ones who are just doing their job faithfully waiting for his return.

They're not trying to figure out the day or the moment he's going to come back, but they're commended mainly because they were faithful in little. So there's a faithful service.

There's also a call to patient endurance. You're awaiting his return, but a day is like a thousand years [2 Peter 3:8] and you don't know. So you need to be patient. It's a spur to be patient.

I would also say joyful confidence, because we know Jesus is coming back. We're waiting for a *person* to come back most of all, aren't we? Sometimes we get so focused on the signs of his coming, but the thing that's most exciting is that *Jesus* is coming. That word *parousia* that they use to talk about the Second Coming was a word that had to do with someone's personal presence. It's a reason for joy to know that Jesus, our risen Lord, will come back.

MM: I think some people look forward to Christ's return because they are interested in what he can do for me. I've got these problems in my life, and I want them to be fixed. That'll be fixed by Christ's return, so I want him to return. They lose sight of the relationship with him, that he's the one we're waiting for. He is the big reason that it's going to be a joyful time.

SS: Right, and I think it's an indictment on us when many Christians don't talk much about the Second Coming. It seems like folks either over-believe in it, in the sense that that's *all* they think about, and most of the time they're trying to figure out dates and seasons and times and all that. Then in many sectors of the church, though, you just don't hear hardly anything about the Second Coming.

I think that that shows how little we really miss him, because I think we'd talk more about it if we missed Jesus. We'd want to be with him. We'd want him to come back, because we'd want to see him again. Just like we might talk about a loved one who's away. I wonder if that's an indictment on our love relationship with him.

MM: That we need to be developing that relationship now.

SS: Yeah, that we'd be eager. It's the eager expectation of his return, and it's a blessed hope. It's a blessed hope that we have.

MM: That is interesting, but we are out of time. So I thank you for being with us.

SS: Yeah, it's great to be here.

MINISTRY IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

Michael Morrison: Steve, you've written a very interesting book on *Ministry in the Image of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service*. There's a lot packed into each of these words. What I found particularly interesting is, as a starting point, maybe we could talk about the image of God. How are you developing that or where are you getting this from? Am I supposed to look like God does?

Stephen Seamands: Yeah, that's what Archie Bunker used to say. Remember on *All in the Family*, he said, "Well, I was created in the image of God. That means God looks like me." When you think about those words in Genesis, chapter 1, verse 26, God says, "Let us make man [Adam] in our own image," and then it says, "in the image of God God created us, and we were created, in the image of God he made us." Then he talks about male and female being created in the image of God as male and female. I'm suggesting in this book that we were created in a Trinitarian image of God. Let the "let us" suggest the Trinity there.

MM: "Us" being some plurality.

SS: Exactly. The plurality in God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and so then God creates us in that Trinitarian image, with a Trinitarian imprint. If we're going to understand what that image is, we've got to think not just about... Sometimes theologians have thought about the image as like just a capacity that we have that differentiates us from animals, like our ability to make choices or our ability to reason. No, that passage understands that there's a *relationship* that constitutes the image. Just as the persons of the

Trinity are created in relationship or in relationship to each other, we've been created in relationship. In a sense, it seems to be saying that to have the image of God, you need more than one. You need male and female.

MM: For God it's three, for humans it's two.

SS: Right.

MM: In a way, humans need the third, we need God in us, too.

SS: Exactly. You think of a family: you've got a mother and a father and a child. You've got that fullness of the image that you can't quite have in just one person per se.

MM: As one person, can't we be persons? Does it take other persons to make us persons?

SS: The Trinity would seem to indicate that to be really a person actually is to be incomplete, in the sense that it does take another, an "I" and a "thou," to truly be a person. Even the names of the Trinitarian persons, Father and Son, for example, imply relationship. You can't be a father without being in relationship, or a son. To be a person, does mean, at least according to the Trinity, if we let the Trinity helps up to find what personhood is and looks like, means that I am in relationship to another. I'd make a distinction between being an individual, which you can be, I can be, in of just myself, as opposed to being a person, which means I am myself in relationship to you. I can't just be "me, myself and I" anymore.

It's interesting the first time the word "my" shows up in the Bible. I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but it's actually when God creates Eve and he brings Eve out to Adam. Remember what he says – the old guy turns into a poet, doesn't he? He starts, "This at last is bone of my bone," there's the word *my*, the first time it shows up in the Bible. Even to be able to say *my*, he can only say *my* when he looks at her. It would seem to suggest that to be me, I need you. To be a person I need another.

MM: That the meaning of my life, at least in part...

SS: Is in relationship. We tend to think of ourselves in a very individualistic way. I can be myself. I can be me just by being me. It'd be nice to add a few other people; that makes you healthy and kind of rounds you out.

MM: Especially if they do what I want them to do.

SS: Exactly. We tend to think, "Well, those are optional, though, to being a person." Whereas, I think the Trinitarian vision would say, "No, I am myself only in relationship to you. Adam can't say *my* until he sees her – until there's a thou." It takes an I and a thou to be fully personal.

MM: This image that God has created me to be isn't complete until it has these relationships.

SS: Right.

MM: Maybe that leads into the concept of ministry, that there are relationships.

SS: Right. That has profound implications for ministry. Often, the places where people really fail in ministry are in their ability to form and to function well in relationships. Relationships are at the heart of what makes ministry work. It's interesting in the field of counseling, for example. They've discovered that often it's not what a counselor says to someone or a technique they use that fixes the problem or helps the person. Or it's not the kind of therapy approach that they bring to the table as a counselor. Is this a cognitive therapy or whatever. It's actually the forming of a relationship with this counselor. It's the relationship itself that seems to heal.

MM: There's something healthy about that.

SS: There's something healthy about that. This says to me as a Christian leader that I need to be one that's working first of all, at growing in the ability to be healthy in a relational way. Most of us tend, if you put us on a spectrum of being too attached to others, to being too separated or aloof from others, most of us because of our lives we tend to gravitate toward one extreme or the other. I tend to be not too attached. I tend to be too aloof. I tend to want to separate too much, to be alone; to be a lone wolf sort of guy. In ministry, the challenge for me, then, is to work on that and deal with that in myself, and to learn how to move toward people more.

For some people, they have the other problem. They tend to be maybe almost co-dependent on their congregation or someone. They almost become an extension of someone else, and that's not healthy. To be working toward healthy relationships in ministry, to be in relationship. For me, an important part of my ministry has been being a part of a small group of three or four other like-minded persons over the years, realizing God can't do all he wants to do in me if I'm just going to insist on "me and Jesus." Even though I have an important life of prayer, that's something I do as just an individual. I need to be in relationship, in close relationships. I need that community, a small group-type of community to really become the person I'm supposed to be.

As the last thing I would say about us ministers and people in the ministry is that we need to attend to our families and understand the

importance of our family unit. We can't sacrifice our children and our spouses on the altar of our ministry. We've got to be intentional. Sometimes, maybe one of the most powerful and best things we can do, for example, as a pastor of a local church, is just to be a model of what a healthy family looks like, as a husband and wife and also as a father or a mother with children. If that's the heart of God and if relationship is at the heart of things, we've got to take it seriously.

MM: That also means sometimes saying *no* to what the congregation wants and saying what the congregation really needs is an example of this family involvement.

SS: Right. Yes, there's a price to pay for that, but if I let productivity and if I let function, for example (and usually those are the kinds of things that create a lot of congregational demands on us – we want you to do this or do that) – if I become the kind of person who measures my own self on how well I produce or what I do for others rather than who I am in relationship to others, then I'm a part of that problem. In order to make relationship at the heart of things, I think you're right, its going to mean saying no to some things in our lives.

MM: Your book is titled *Ministry in the Image of God* and you've talked about ministry, but it seems like what you're saying isn't exclusive to ministry at all.

SS: Right. Actually this is the heart of reality. When you go with the flow of the Trinity, it's like you have the whole universe behind you. That applies what I just said, what we've just been talking about relationship, that applies to a business person in their place of business. It applies to a coach working with a team. Same principles work. They're universal, I think.

MM: By seeing the Trinitarian interrelationships as our model, then it gives us perspective with which to view our own work and relationships, and that perspective can clarify some of the things we need to do.

SS: Right. If you'll think about the Trinitarian relationships, particularly based, I think we get a window into this in the Gospel of John, where Jesus talks often about his relationship with the Father and so forth. You see full equality. The persons of the Trinity are distinct but they're equal: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You see joyful intimacy between these persons. They love each other. They delight in each other. They delight in the otherness of the other.

Then you also see this glad submission. They surrender. The Son says,

for example, “I only want to do what I see the Father doing.” His desire is to submit to the will of the Father. The Holy Spirit comes along and says, “I don’t want to glorify me. I want to glorify Christ.” Each person; there’s a sort of quality of laying their self down for the sake of the other, and they get their identity as persons not through self-assertion but through self-denial, which is counterintuitive, not the way our culture would tell us. They lay themselves down and then they find ... as when Jesus says, “If you want to find your life, you need to lose it,” he’s talking about what’s been going on through all eternity in the Trinity.

MM: Right. Paul writes it in Philippians 2.

SS: Yeah.

MM: “Look at Jesus.”

SS: Exactly.

MM: “Model this. That he became nothing to serve us.”

SS: Right. That’s how they gain their self-identity, as it were, by laying themselves down, not by asserting themselves.

MM: The Father serves in this way; the Son serves in this way and there’s service everywhere.

SS: Yeah. We tend to look at another person as somebody to fear or someone that’s a threat to us.

MM: A rival. Yeah.

SS: The Trinitarian persons, there’s no competition among them because they’re all about giving themselves over to the other for the sake of the other. In doing that, they find their joy. You find some of these characteristics. There’s also a deferring characteristic where the Father says to the Son, “Judgment, I’m probably the one that should do that but you do it.” They place things, they give it the other, they defer.

MM: Even though there’s like an equality and agreement. There’s also distinction there.

SS: Yes, there is. That leads to a Christian understanding of differences being significant and important. The Christian vision isn’t that there’s going to come a day when we’re all going to get absorbed into one.

MM: Some Eastern religion.

SS: Right. I think Richard Neuhaus calls it sort of a tapioca pudding of homogeneity; we’re all going to get put back into that. But the Christian vision is there always be three, and so it prizes distinctives. Even around the throne in the book of Revelation, there’s people there from every tongue and tribe and nation. That’s led to Christians wanting, for example,

to translate the Bible into the vernacular of every culture rather than wanting just one language to be the language that everyone has to learn and you can't translate the Bible; it's got to be in that language.

MM: Right. It's interesting. The Koran has to be in Arabic.

SS: Exactly. Interesting that even in the Koine Greek here you've already got a language that the founder of the religion didn't speak. Jesus would have spoken Aramaic. You've already got that principle. I think it goes back to the Trinity, because those distinctions that matter. Differences.

MM: Again, that's a relationality.

SS: Within relationship, yeah. Yeah.

MM: Sometimes we have difficulty in setting some boundaries for ourselves and we put expectations on ourselves. Maybe we think that other people have these expectations of us and we're trying to match up to what we think they're thinking. That seems really destructive.

SS: Right. To learn to accept who we are and to be who we are, and not to try to be someone else. I think there's an old Jewish story about the rabbi that when he gets to heaven, he says God is not going to ask me why weren't you Moses when you lived on earth. He's going to say, "Why weren't you you?" For whatever his name was. There is sometimes a tendency for us to try to let other people tell us who we're supposed to be – or sometimes we do it to ourselves. Sometimes those of us in ministry spend five or ten years trying to preach like to somebody else.

MM: Right. Get one of these books and say, "Why am I not more like this fellow?"

SS: I remember years ago when I was a student in school. We had a few Billy Graham impersonators among the student body. We tried to preach like Billy Graham. "The Bible says," or whatever. What the Trinity would say is "be who you are and prize that, and lay down your attempts and quit hating yourself for the person that you are." Sometimes we're our own worst enemy. There's a right kind, a good kind of self acceptance that comes out of a Trinitarian vision where I accept the person that God has made me to be that's distinct from you or anyone else.

MM: Different giftings.

SS: Yeah. I don't try to be a 10-talent person when I'm a 3-talent or a 1-talent person. To simply be who I have been created to be, that's what the Trinity would say I ought to do. That's very liberating to me.

MM: Free to be who you are.

SS: Yeah.

MM: In your book, you tell a story of one of your students who wasn't making the grades that the student wanted to make.

SS: Right.

MM: It was just a fascinating reaction there. Could you tell us?

SS: Yeah. I'd given her a B+ on a paper. Actually she was in that very chair right there. I can remember a number of years ago when this happened. She came in and wanted to know how can I do better on this. As we began to talk, I knew she was doing a lot that semester. She was working. She was doing some counseling. She had some issues she was working through, so there was a lot going on in her life. I said to her, "I think at this point, for this semester, that a B+ is a good grade for you to get. You've got to accept your limitations." She looked back at me and she said, "Oh no. I can't do that. I'm an A student. I've got to have As." I said, "You know, it's not a sign of weakness in a person to accept limitations. Sometimes it's a sign of strength and maturity." "No, no, no."

She went back and forth, and finally I just got tired and impatient with the whole thing. I said, "What do you think Jesus thinks of your B+?" She sort of got quiet, she's a little sheepish, but she said, "I'm afraid to ask him." I was sort of surprised at that and I said, "Why are you afraid to ask him?" Her answer shocked me. She said, "It's because I'm afraid his standards for me will be lower than mine." Sometimes we have these perfectionist standards that we've set for ourselves. Or that maybe we had a parent who demanded that from us or whatever. We put those on ourselves. Sometimes I think to accept ourselves, we've got to smash that idol that we've made. It's because it becomes a false god. We bow down to it. We could feel OK about myself if I get that A. That's a part of the virtue of true self acceptance.

MM: It's a false image of God.

SS: It is. Yeah, it's a false god.

MM: It's interesting how we try to out-perform God.

SS: Right. I think maybe going right back to Adam and Eve, somebody told us we could be like God and we believed the lie, and it's gotten us into this idea that somehow we could in fact be perfect, the super person that we're not. That's a part of the delusion that we run to. It's our pride system.

MM: The whole book is in a way that we *are* like a god. We were created already to be like that but that's the temptation. Maybe it's the

individualism and relationship difference again.

SS: Right. Yet I think that sin is in a sense refusing to accept our proper being like God, but that's mean, and sort of striving for a way of being like God that we were never designed for. It's not in keeping with who we are, but as a part of our fallenness and our brokenness and it's a part of the delusion and the lie.

MM: All right. Thanks very much.

WOUNDS THAT HEAL

Michael Morrison: Steve, you've written a book, *Wounds That Heal*. As you describe it, this book is written more for ordinary Christians. Everybody's been wounded in some way or another, and this book can touch them, and is written in a way for them. Maybe you could start by talking about the title *Wounds That Heal*. You're saying that my wound is eventually going to heal?

Stephen Seamands: Yeah, the possibility is there. It's important to emphasize the subtitle of that book, which is *Bringing our Hurts to the Cross*, because I wanted to show how the cross answers the need for human sufferers and wounds to be healed, as well as a place where human sinners can come to get their sins forgiven. Often, when we talk about the cross of Christ, we focus on how it addresses the problem of human sin, and that is, of course, the primary New Testament keynote – Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures – but we're not just sinners; we're sufferers.

MM: That people have sinned against us?

SS: Yes, we have sinned, but we also have been sinned against. The cross actually addresses both needs. What I was trying to show was how the cross profoundly speaks to us as sufferers as well as sinners. Because, even though we're both, the sufferer and the sinner have a little different need. That is what I was trying to focus on, and to suggest that there is healing power in the cross of Christ for our wounds. That's right out of Isaiah 53, "By his stripes we are healed." By his wounds we are healed.

MM: His wounds help heal our wounds?

SS: Right.

MM: How do we, as the subtitle says, “bring our hurts?” Our hurts aren’t a thing we can pick up to bring there. As a metaphor, how do we do this?

SS: It’s important, first of all, for us to own the hurt and the pain, and to recognize, yes, I’ve been hurt. I’ve been sinned against. Sometimes it’s hard for people to do that. Sometimes they want to let someone else off the hook, you might say.

MM: We say, “Oh, it was nothing.”

SS: “It was nothing,” or, “They didn’t really mean that,” or, “Maybe I deserved that.” Consequently, sometimes it takes a while for a person to admit, “I’ve been sinned against. I’ve been hurt.” That’s really a preliminary step. Then, I think it’s important in bringing our hurts to the cross to begin to think about the cross in terms of how Jesus, himself, was hurt, how Jesus, himself, suffered on the cross. The different ways in which he suffered.

For example, maybe I’ve experienced a lot of shame in my life. Maybe somebody shamed me, or said things to me that put me down, and I experienced a lot of shame. To understand that Jesus was shamed. We tend to think of the excruciating physical pain that he went through on the cross, but in the ancient world, it was the shame of crucifixion that was actually the thing that was most dreaded.

MM: Because this flogging wasn’t private, the process wasn’t private.

SS: Exactly, it’s done publicly out there, and this person is put out, hung up there, you might say, and their family, and their village, their town, all of those would be implicated in that. It was a way to shame that person. Often they left the person up there after they died, and the wild animals would come and pick the flesh off their bones. It was awful. The writer of the book of Hebrew says, “For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross despising the shame.

To know, and to think about Jesus: he was lonely. He was betrayed. He was forsaken. He even felt God-forsaken. All the ways in which he suffered, I think it helps as you think about your hurts, you know, put them in the context of his hurt.

MM: He’s been there; he’s felt that.

SS: He’s experienced that. That helps us to reframe our suffering and our anguish in the light of his. I think that’s maybe a second step, is to

stand before him, and look at him, see what he suffered. Then, often there are things that to bring our hurts to the cross, Jesus on the cross forgives. He says, “Father, forgive them.” I think that’s a kind of a model, and I would say that probably the greatest barrier that keeps people from receiving healing from God, is un-forgiveness. We are going to probably need to say that to someone, “I forgive you for what you did to me.”

MM: That’s the hardest thing to do.

SS: Exactly. I like to explain it like this: in order to let Jesus touch his wounds to our wounds, we’ve got to be willing to forgive that person, or give Jesus permission to begin that process of forgiving. Lord Jesus, I don’t think I’m willing to forgive them, I’m hurt so much, but I give you permission to begin to do that work in me.

MM: I like what you said, “As a process.” Something we recognize the need for, it just doesn’t happen right away.

SS: Right. Forgiveness starts with the will, primarily. You make a choice, and sometimes you only have about 20 percent of your will. You say, “Jesus, take my 20 percent and add your will to mine. There’s a process where little-by-little. I think that’s a key element. Sometimes we’ve got to ask ourselves, “Have I kind of put a wall around myself? I got hurt and I decided, ‘Never again,’ and so I’m using a wall to protect myself.” Sometimes, in order to experience his wounds touching your wounds you’ve got to give Jesus permission to tear down that wall, to dismantle that wall. That’s become sort of your shield.

MM: Then it feels risky.

SS: Yeah, it feels risky to let that down. Sometimes people have lived with a wound so long that it’s become cozy. Their victim-hood has become their identity. It’s become comfortable. They don’t know what they would do without it even though it’s destructive and painful.

MM: Part of their life.

SS: Yes, and so those are all questions, that as I work with people in helping them bring their hurts to the cross, I have to help them work through it. We’re trying to get rid of the things that are keeping Jesus from touching his wounds to their wounds. Then, to actually invite him to do that.

MM: Sometimes when people sin against us and we are hurt, we still need to have some kind of boundary.

SS: Right, but it’s distinct from a wall.

MM: There’s still a boundary there.

SS: Healthy boundaries are important in relationships. Sometimes, after we've been hurt especially, we need a time when we pull away. Like a dog that's gotten hurt in a fight – retreat and lick your wounds for a while. There's a legitimate time and a place for that. Sometimes in ministry (I'm speaking of myself), I've had this "I'll just be a good soldier" mentality too often, and I fail to take the time to pull back and realize, "I've been really hurt and I need to own that and bring that to the Lord, and not just try to keep going on like nothing happened."

MM: Which some wounded soldiers would try to do.

SS: Exactly. We tend to do that. We don't like to admit that we've been hurt. We don't like to admit we're weak. So there's a legitimate time for a good kind of boundary setting. Maybe part of the reason I got hurt in the first place was because I didn't set good boundaries. I've got to learn sometimes to boundary myself from certain kinds of people, certain kinds of situations. That's a part of becoming a healthy person.

MM: Thank you. There are some abusive relationships, not just marriages can be abusive, but congregational settings can also be abusive, but forgiveness doesn't mean perpetuating that.

SS: Right, certainly not. How does a battered wife forgive? Does that mean that she allows herself, "Now I've forgiven this person who battered me, do I turn around and let them continue to do that?" No, you don't perpetuate that. You forgive for the past, but it may mean standing up to that person and being really firm for the first time in that relationship.

Forgiveness doesn't mean you become a perpetual punching bag, or that you don't sometimes demand that justice be done in a situation. If someone swindled you out of a lot of money, maybe your business partner took advantage of your trust and so forth, I don't think that taking that person to court is incompatible with forgiveness. Some people would think, "Oh, how could you do that?" You're not taking them to court to try to get revenge, but you do have a legitimate right to justice. You would still need to forgive them for what they did, but it might be appropriate to take them to court where if someone did something to break the law that hurt one of your children, for example, to see the state punish that person for that, that's not incompatible with forgiveness.

MM: In many cases, maybe all, maybe that is the best thing for that person.

SS: Right.

MM: That they do experience some justice, right?...

SS: You're holding them accountable. Sometimes I've seen abusive people use forgiveness as a bludgeon.

MM: Oh, "You're supposed to forgive me."

SS: "I did that to you. You're supposed to forgive me now."

MM: "If you were a real Christian."

SS: Yes. That becomes a form of manipulation and power. That's where you need a person who stands up and says, "No." Sometimes a person has a hard time doing that. People who are in abusive relationships, that's become their way ...

MM: Over, perhaps, years.

SS: Yes.

MM: A pattern.

SS: They may need some help. Someone else to come alongside them to help them walk through standing up to someone.

MM: They can take those hurts to the cross and realize that, "Okay, Jesus has been there. He's been in abusive situations."

SS: Right.

MM: Then, what?

SS: There is a healing light that flows from his wounded side and his hands. As we've forgiven, his healing presence can come into those situations, and so that dimension of healing, I think, happens as we bring our hurts to the cross. He does touch our wounds with his wounds. The grief, and the sadness, and the pain, I think, can get absorbed into his broken body.

MM: He helps carry some of these burdens.

SS: Yes, and then, I think, finally, just as his own wounds have become radiant scars (like I like to call them), I believe he can begin to take that wound and when it begins to be healed, he begins to take it and use it for his purposes. That which Satan meant to use to destroy you becomes a channel of God's healing grace to others so that now he's using you in an area of ministry, for example, that relates to the very pain and the suffering that you went through. He redeems it for his glory.

MM: Just as Jesus has been through it and can help us, if we've been through it, then we can help someone else. But it's not always the same specific hurt that can be generalized as the feeling of abandonment.

SS: Right.

MM: Kind of a general one.

SS: Yes. I think suffering, in general, does sensitize us to the hurts of

others regardless of what the hurt was. I think that it makes us less judgmental of others. It gives us more compassion, in general.

MM: What about when we've had hurts that aren't attributable to anyone in particular? We've got cancer, for example. We've suffered in a hurricane, it came through and blew down our house, killed our son. We can't blame anybody. Is that harder to deal with?

SS: Sometimes it is, because to forgive someone, there has to be a someone. There needs to be a something out there. Sometimes situations like that are the hardest to deal with, partly because it's harder to focus on someone there. Although I would imagine if that had happened, I might have to talk to someone about whether they're mad at God about that, and maybe they need to ...

MM: There's someone involved.

SS: Exactly. Maybe they need, it seems strange to say this, because we don't think of God as hurting people, but do you need to forgive God? What I would mean by that is God sometimes allows things to happen to us that we think he should have not allowed to happen, so we're mad at God about that, so sometimes the person we have to forgive is God. We have to stop holding anger and bitterness toward God for that. We've got a clinched fist. You're upset with him. You need to bring that to him. Bring that to the cross as well.

MM: I imagine that is more difficult.

SS: Right. It is interesting, though, Scripture says that on the cross he endured the hostility of sinners. Jonathan Edwards preached that great sermon, "Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God," but I think on the cross it was God in the hands of angry sinners. I think we were there saying, "Crucify him, Crucify him." The anger that we felt over things that happened. There is a sense in which he's carried that.

MM: He's been through that, too.

SS: He understands. Christ is a safe place where you can bring your anger at God, too.

MM: Our anger at him is nothing new?

SS: Exactly.

MM: He's big enough to handle it.

SS: Right. You think about going from Palm Sunday to Good Friday, and why they turned on him. Because he didn't act like Gods were supposed to act. He didn't do what they were wanting him to do. We have to sometimes own that, and I'm mad at you about that.

MM: He was not the kind of hero we were looking for in our particular circumstance.

SS: Absolutely.

MM: Even those wounds, in time, for some people they don't heal. Maybe they don't bring them to the cross. When we see how the cross intersects our particular hurt, then it does become transforming and healing for us.

SS: Right.

MM: As you said, then we are able to better help others who are going through something similar. In some ways it's like the title of your book has come around full circle there, that our wounds become wounds that heal others.

SS: Right. Yeah, we become healed helpers. What was the name of that book by Henri Nouwen...

MM: It was *Wounded Healers*.

SS: We become wounded healers, don't we?

MM: Right, but we are also healed.

SS: Exactly, and that's the amazing thing about how God works, that he takes evil and suffering and he uses it to accomplish purposes, to bring good out of it, to bring glory out of it, so Joseph can say, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." You get stunned and awed at God's ability to work his purposes in spite of, and in the midst of. I think the challenge in our lives is to let God have our sorrows – to not waste them – to see that they can be used for his purposes. It's not that God caused them, but if we'll give them to God, he can redeem them.

MM: But we have to trust him.

SS: Right. The cross helps us trust him.

MM: Thanks for discussing that with us.

SS: Thank you.

JOHN MCLEOD CAMPBELL AND GRACE

J. Michael Feazell: Welcome to *You're Included*, the unique interview series devoted to practical implications of Trinitarian theology. We're talking with Dr. Daniel Thimell, Associate Professor of Theological and Historical Studies at Oral Roberts University. Dr. Thimell earned his Ph.D. from the University of Aberdeen in 1993. He has 30 years of pastoral experience and has taught at Trinity College in Bristol, England, and the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. In 1997, Dr. Thimell won first place in a nationwide preaching contest sponsored by *Pulpit Digest*, and he's a regular contributor to *Clergy Journal*. He and Trevor Hart co-edited the book *Christ in Our Place: Essays Presented to Professor James Torrance*,

published by Pickwick in 1991 as part of the Princeton Theological Monograph Series.

Dr. Thimell, thanks for being with us today.

Daniel Thimell: Delighted to be with you.

JMF: I wanted to begin by asking you to



talk about your Christian journey and how you came to be a Trinitarian theologian.

DT: It was during my time at Westmont College, particularly under the tutelage of Ray Anderson, when I began to reflect more deeply on my understanding of Christ. I had come to know him as Savior years earlier, but it was during those wonderful classes that I took from Ray Anderson that I began to discover the theology of John McLeod Campbell, a Scottish pastor and theologian who, when he would make his pastoral rounds, discovered that his people didn't have any joy in believing.

JMF: What was his time frame?

DT: McLeod Campbell was a pastor in the early 1820s, in Scotland. He found that as he made his pastoral rounds, the people would dread his coming because they were afraid that he would inquire after their spiritual condition, and they felt so unworthy. He found that they had no grounds for rejoicing in God, and he thought this strange, that here we had this wonderful good news of what God had done in Christ, but the people were not finding any joy in it.

JMF: Sounds somewhat like today, doesn't it?

DT: It has amazing parallels to today. He found that the problem was that they were so wrapped up in themselves and in their adequacy to be "eligible" for grace. They understood that Christ had done something wonderful on the cross, but all their doubts were as to themselves: Have I repented enough? Am I sincere enough? Have I believed enough? Am I worthy enough?

So he sought to direct their attention away from themselves, hunting in themselves for some kind of worthiness, and instead pointed them to Christ and to see how God felt toward them, and to see what God and Christ had already accomplished for them.

This really switched on some lights for me. It helped me see that in Christ, we have a full revelation of God; that God has come in our humanity to disclose his heart to us. In Christ we see a God who loves us unconditionally, who will go to any length to bring us back.

JMF: Why is that hard to get our minds around?

DT: Because it's counterintuitive. In our society and world today, everything is based on performance, whether it's the job we have, perhaps the relationships we have, we're always trying to *win* a relationship. We're trying to *earn* a job, earn a raise. So when we're told that God loves us unconditionally, that we're already loved and accepted by him, that's astonishing.

Grace is an alien word in our culture. We think that we must *do* certain

things, perform certain things. We must bring a certain amount of merit so that God will accept us. So when McLeod Campbell began to proclaim the gospel that God and Christ had already done it all, his people were astonished, and some of them felt liberated for the first time in their lives, and others began to murmur and complain.

Eventually he was forced to leave the ministry of the Church of Scotland for daring to preach a universal pardon available through Christ. But he went on to become one of Scotland's finest theologians with his work *The Nature of the Atonement*.

JMF: So Ray Anderson brought this to your attention as part of the class?

DT: Exactly. He helped us see that Christ reveals the Father, and we began to appreciate the depth in God as being a Triune God, that within God there's this Father/Son relationship that's been existing from all eternity. God is a God of relationships. Ray also emphasized the fact that the Holy Spirit is another of the three persons in that communion.

JMF: So if there's relationship in God, then that translates over into how everything is made, including us, our relationships with God and with each other.

DT: That's a crucial point. Within God, God being from all eternity a triune communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, experience an abundance of love through all eternity. It was out of the overflow of that love that God through Christ brought the world into being. We were made in love, and for love.

After the fall, Christ the Creator becomes the Redeemer. God comes to reclaim that which he had made. He was not willing to live without us. In love, he went all the way to be incarnate in our humanity, in our skin and bones, to live life as we live it, with the same temptations we face, the same struggles. Yet through it all, Jesus was faithful to his Father. Then he died our death and rose in triumph in our humanity. Now he presents us in himself as those who are loved by the Father, who have been redeemed.

JMF: Didn't Campbell have a great influence on Thomas and James Torrance?

DT: He did. Campbell had been branded a heretic by the Church of Scotland in his day because at that time, the Church of Scotland was enamored by the high Calvinist idea that only some are predestined to salvation and that Christ only died for some. Calvin himself (but that's another story) taught that Christ died for the world. But McLeod Campbell, when he began to state that Christ's atonement was universal,

that he died for everyone, raised the eyebrows of his peers and he was defrocked from the ministry.

But later, he was awarded a doctor of divinity by the University of Glasgow before he died. By the time he died, the majority of the Kirk, as we call the Church of Scotland, had come around to his point of view of a universal atonement.

Both Tom and James Torrance loved the writings of McLeod Campbell. They found particular help in his emphasis on the priesthood of Jesus, that Jesus not only did a priestly work by his death on the cross, but that he represented us in his humanity, that our humanity was assumed by Jesus so that as he lived his life, we were there in him, and when he died, we died, when he rose, we rose.

Paul writes to the Colossians, in chapter 3, “You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” This is a present reality, because Christ goes on bearing our humanity. We’re included in the priesthood of Jesus. “When I go to pray,” James Torrance was fond of saying, “I’m not left to struggle God-ward with my prayers hoping that I’m worthy enough or pious enough or good enough to get a hearing, but rather, Jesus Christ ever lives to make intercession for us, as Hebrews 7 puts it so memorably.” This dimension of the priesthood of Jesus has been emphasized greatly by the Torrances. It helps us understand our ongoing relationship to God today.

JMF: Most people have the idea that Jesus was human while he was here on earth, but after he died and was raised, that he’s no longer human; he’s fully God but not fully human anymore, but that works against the scriptural witness.

DT: It does. One of the most memorable passages is 1 Timothy 2, where Paul writes to this young pastor he is mentoring and reminds him that there is one God and one mediator between God and man, *the man* Christ Jesus. He puts it in the present tense. Jesus’ mediation today with the Father is as a human. He goes on being human. This is important because the humanity of Jesus is our bridge to God. It’s through his humanity that we’re included in the life of God and the communion of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. It’s through the humanity of Jesus that I can come right into the Father’s arms even though I don’t deserve so glad a welcome.

JMF: So getting back to your journey, these things were brought up, you were introduced to them through Ray Anderson, and then how did things go after that?

DT: After serving in the pastorate for a few years, it was my privilege

to go to Scotland in 1985, where I studied under James Torrance. These were transformative years for me. James Torrance was a wonderful man of God, Christ-centered, a tremendous warmth about his pastoral way, but he brilliantly reflected on the nature of God as a triune God and as a communion of persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

He also made much of the fact that in our life in God, grace is the first and primary thing, that God's expectations of us are the second thing. The first thing is his grace. As J.B. (To his face, we called him Professor Torrance; to one another we affectionately called him J.B.) said, you could summarize a paradigm for the Christian life as being grace, law, consequences. God's grace comes first, and then he enables us to keep his expectations through his grace. Then as a consequence, we live our lives in Christ. It was a very freeing thing to see and experience this.

JMF: I love Paul's letter to Titus, where he says, "Grace teaches us to say no to ungodliness." Often what we hear is, "say no to ungodliness," but Paul's point is that it isn't *law* that teaches us to say no to ungodliness — it's grace, the fact that we're already accepted, forgiven, and clean in Christ, that is what teaches us, that's the springboard toward saying no to ungodliness.

DT: Right. Grace is the basis for our life in God, not our works. Paul says to the Galatians that he's astonished that they're deserting the gospel, that having begun in the Spirit they wanted to continue in the flesh, that having received the free grace of God, now they thought they were on probation or that they were on performance, that they had to somehow or another be obedient enough or keep enough rules in order to be in good with God. Paul wants to draw them back to the gospel of grace in Christ.

JMF: The place where the rubber meets the road with that, we might say, is when a person has sinned.

DT: Yes.

JMF: Maybe they've sinned again. Maybe they've done the same thing they've been struggling with for decades or whatever. There's a sense at that moment of, "I am never going to overcome," and there's a sense of, "God has left me. I am forsaken," but that's where the real gospel can meet us with hope and joy in the face of our sin.

DT: That's important. One of the greatest enemies of the Christian life is our preoccupation with ourselves, our unworthiness and our failings. Luther said that the condition of the sinner is that he is *incurvatus in se ipsum*, he's curved inward on himself. That's the bondage we face sometimes because of our brokenness. We don't look up to God and his

grace— we look inside ourselves and we see our hurts, we see our failings, we see wrongs we've committed, and we feel despair.

But the gospel invites us to look away from ourselves to what God in Christ has done. It was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us, when we were powerless that Christ died for us. Our life in Christ continues after conversion, where we're continually upheld by the faithfulness of Christ, continually upheld by the grace of Christ.

That's why Paul writes to the church at Corinth. He says in 1 Corinthians 1:30, "Christ is our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification." He is all of those things. If we try to find it in ourselves, we'll only be discouraged. Sometimes this is an ongoing thing. We don't get a magical mastery over all our sins when we suddenly get the right insight or when we hear the gospel of grace. We're broken people, and that brokenness will not be completely healed until the next life.

JMF: Doesn't that mean that there's a significant difference between our faith and Christ's faith? In other words, what we tend to do is say, "My faith is weak. I want to believe what you just described, and yet I find a hard time believing it, because you don't know how bad of a sinner I am," but we're dealing with, not the quality of our faith, but Christ's own faithfulness. Our trust is in him, not in our faith.

DT: That's a vital point that isn't emphasized enough today. This was one of the great teachings of Tom Torrance. Early in his career, in 1957, he wrote an important article called "One Biblical Aspect of the Concept of Faith." He pointed out that in the Bible, particularly in the Psalms, there's this continuing contrast between God who is faithful, true, stable, and unchangeable, and man, who is frail and changeable as a flower that is vital and full of life one minute and withering and blowing away the next.

The Bible encourages us to take refuge from our own frailty and instability in God, who is faithful. Tom Torrance points out that this is continued in the New Testament with the emphasis on the faithfulness of Jesus. That's why Paul says, "When we are faithless, he is faithful. When we are vacant of faith, he is full of faith. He is faithful."

Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me. And the life I live, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." Paul was not impressed with his own faith, but he was very impressed with the faith of Jesus. Paul didn't have the feeling that it was the vitality of his spirituality, or his faith, or his sincerity that guaranteed him a place in God, but he was very impressed with the faithfulness of Jesus. That's what kept him going.

JMF: That's freeing and comforting to know, that it's entirely the love of God and his faithfulness toward us, Christ's atoning work for us, that we depend on and rest in. We don't have to (as Tom Torrance puts it) look over our shoulder all the time wondering if we're doing good enough, believing well enough...

DT: That's right. A centurion went to Jesus, his daughter is desperately ill, but he says to Jesus, "I believe, help my unbelief." Jesus didn't say, "Go away until you get more faith."

JMF: Yeah. The church does sometimes...

DT: Right. But he could come to Jesus in his brokenness and his half-belief and say, "Lord, I don't even know if I believe. My faith is so fragile that I'm just desperate." Jesus met him right there and wonderfully healed his daughter.

JMF: You wrote an article that was published in *Princeton Theological Review* called "Torrance's Theology of Faith." In that, you use an illustration, along the lines of what you just said, about a drowning man.

DT: This is a vivid way of putting it. Calvin describes faith as an empty outstretched hand, and the place of a sinner before God is like that of a drowning person. That person is going down. They're losing their life, and there's nothing they can do to save themselves. The lifeguard can come and save that person, but the person needs to stop struggling. Instead of taking swimming lessons at the time, he needs to relax in the arms of another who will carry him to safety.

The analogy that Tom Torrance used, which I find to be a vivid one, he employs in his *Mediation of Christ*. He said when his daughter was very young, he would sometimes walk her some place, and she would put her tiny weak hand in his and she was secure in the strong hand of her daddy. He says, "That's the picture of faith." It wasn't the strength of my daughter that kept her secure, that guided her to the right places, it was simply my strong hand around her weak hand. He says, "In Christ's faithfulness, we're being undergirded by the faithfulness of Jesus every day of our lives."

JMF: So getting back to...you had gone to Aberdeen, you had studied under James Torrance, and how did things go from there?

DT: It was during that time that I began to study in depth not only McLeod Campbell, but also Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin. I was seeking to understand how one's understanding of God affects one's understanding of salvation and of the Christian life.

Aquinas has many wonderful things to say. He was one of the great

theologians of the church. But when it came to his understanding of the gospel, he began to insert conditions. He said that God will meet you if you meet him halfway: “If you do what’s in you, if you try your best, if you’re sincere enough, if you confess enough, if you comply with the conditions the priest sets forth, then you can receive grace.”

Aquinas was convinced that Christ had done a great work on the cross, but he argued that God meets us halfway, and the classical definition of that position is semi-Pelagianism. Pelagius taught that we’re saved by works, but Thomas Aquinas said that’s not quite right. We’re not saved by works, we’re saved by works-plus-grace, and that’s known as semi-Pelagianism.

I wondered how he would have such an understanding that our works contribute to salvation. I wondered what in his doctrine of God led him to that position. I discovered that he was heavily influenced by Aristotle, and his understanding of God was one of absolute will, and God who decreed the way he’s going to work with the world. God can do whatever he wants, and he decided to set up a situation in which those who perform sufficiently along with his grace would receive salvation. To my mind, that didn’t square with the gospel, didn’t square with the God revealed in Christ.

Then I moved on to look at John Calvin. John Calvin has a much more Christ-centered theology. He understood grace as being totally unconditional. He points out that when John the Baptist said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” that John was saying that because the kingdom of God has come with all of the grace that Jesus is bringing, you are enabled to live a new life in Christ. Repentance wasn’t a condition of salvation—it was a way of living out the new life in Christ.

Calvin was much more helpful because he had a Christ-centered understanding of God the Father. His doctrine of God led to a much better understanding of salvation and the gospel. The problem for Calvin, in my view, is that he had an understanding of God’s grace being limited from all eternity to certain elect ones, and those were the ones who received salvation. In that respect, he departed from his Christ-centered point of view, because you don’t find a God who only loves certain ones in Christ. You find Christ opening his arms and saying, “Come to me, *all* you that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” And, “God so loved the *world* that he gave his only Son.”

Last, I looked at McLeod Campbell, and I saw that McLeod Campbell was an advance over both Aquinas and Calvin because he was thoroughly Christ-centered in his understanding of Scripture and of God.

JMF: When James Torrance retired, you ended up teaching in that position for a semester.

DT: I'm still amazed to think of that. It feels pretentious to even admit it. But after I had completed my study under Professor Torrance and I had gone back to the States, he retired and he telephoned me and invited me to come and teach his classes. I was astounded and overwhelmed, but it was a wonderful experience to come back and stand in the classroom where he had stood. Not imagining that I was in any sense his equal or a worthy replacement, but joyfully proclaiming the same gospel and the same theology and quoting him without apology, frequently.

JMF: But you only stayed one semester.

DT: Right. I could have stayed longer. They were still in the process of finding a professor, but I had the longing to get back to the States and back into the pastorate again.

JMF: You were on a leave of absence from the church.

DT: Yes. There was a church that I was serving in North Dakota at the time which graciously allowed me to have that time, and I felt I couldn't keep them waiting, so I returned back to the States.

JMF: We're out of time, but it's been enjoyable. Thanks for being with us.

CHRIST ATONED FOR EVERYONE

J. Michael Feazell: You're particularly interested in the theology of John Calvin as well as the theology of Karl Barth. Could you, in a nutshell (even though that's quite a tall order), give us a little comparison between the two?

DT: Barth, when he saw the bankruptcy of liberal theology, realized that it had nothing to give to the people. When he saw Kaiser Wilhelm's aggressive war policies in World War I, he returned to "the strange new world of the Bible," and he began to discover a transcendent God, not a domesticated little house pet that liberal theology had made him to be. He began to rediscover in the writings of Calvin and those in the Reformed tradition a tremendous emphasis on grace and a much higher view of Scripture.

Calvin has a great deal to offer the Christian church because of his strong emphasis on grace. He has a wonderful discussion in chapter 3 of *The Institutes* when he talks about the difference between legal and evangelical repentance. Legal repentance says that if you turn from your sins and if you're sorry enough, if you turn over a new leaf, then God will reward you with salvation. This is the kind of teaching that was being presented in the church before the Reformation. It's our performance, our obedience, our self-reformation that merits us or makes us eligible for God's grace.

Calvin said no, that's legal repentance, that's a denial of grace, that's a denial of what God has done in Christ. He said that a proper answer is

“evangelical repentance,” or gospel-based repentance: a lifelong turning from sin and growing in Christ through grace. Repentance is a gift of God. It’s not something that we bring in order to earn or win God’s favor. This is a wonderful emphasis on grace.

Calvin, through much of his theology, is Christ-centered. He says the only way of restoring pure doctrine is to hold up Christ and all that he is. However, when Calvin comes to the question of why all don’t respond favorably to the gospel, why when the gospel is preached some say yes and others say no, and having already emphasized that it’s all about grace, he said “the answer must be that some were never intended to receive grace.”

Although I take issue with him there, in Calvin’s defense, it was the way he was reading Scripture. He thought that Romans 9 to 11, where God says, “Shall the potter say to the clay, why hast thou made me thus... I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,” he thought that it was scriptural, that God for some mysterious reason decided from all eternity that he would save A and B and C, but he would not save X, Y, and Z. This was not based on anything that God would see in their life, any goodness or performance or anything. It was his mere will.

When Barth read this part of Calvin, he said, “He has departed from Christ here! He’s not reading the gospel through the lens of Christ anymore. He’s departed from his professed Christ-centered aim.” Barth said a proper doctrine of God’s call and God’s predestination is given us in Ephesians, where Ephesians says we’re predestined *in Christ*.

If we have a Christ-centered doctrine of predestination, we don’t have a God of a double decree, a God who arbitrarily decides to save some and damn others for all eternity, but a God who loves everyone and sends Christ to die for everyone, and who underwrites everyone’s responsibilities in the life and cross of his Son. Barth represents a significant Christological correction, if you will, of John Calvin. There’s much to appreciate about Calvin; I have to disagree with his understanding of election.

Calvin did teach that Christ died for the world. If you read his commentary on John 3:16, he says world means world, the world of all lost sinners. Christ died for all sinners. He taught two incompatible doctrines: 1) That Christ died for the world and 2) that God never planned to save the non-elect, that he only planned to save a few certain ones by name.

Later, the high-Calvinists (as they are sometimes called) tried to resolve that conflict in Calvin's teaching by making him consistent. They revised his theology to say that God only planned to save certain ones and they're the ones Jesus died for and none other. They were the least happy with Barth, with his Christological correction of Calvin. They wanted to retain the God of *will*, the God who was pure *will* and who can do whatever he wants, and if he only wants to save some, they should consider themselves lucky and the rest of them can go to hell because they deserve it anyway.

JMF: That doesn't reflect the will of God as he's presented in Christ. Christ presents a completely different picture of who the Father is and what the Father's will is.

DT: Yes. He says, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" [John 14:9]. There isn't any other god lurking behind the back of Jesus. The Bible says in Hebrews, "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our ancestors by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son whom he appointed heir of all things." [Hebrews 1:1-2]

Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh. He is the full revelation of God. We don't need to fear that there's some bad news somewhere else. Jesus Christ and his unconditional love for the woman caught in adultery, his forgiveness of her in telling her to sin no more, and acceptance of a greedy tax collector, showed that God is a God of unconditional love and mercy who welcomes every sinner into his embrace to receive his salvation already won for them. Barth represents a significant advance on the thinking of Calvin (even though there's much in Calvin that is rich, and I still appreciate and learn from).

JMF: Barth is sometimes called a universalist. Where does that come from, and what is it based on?

DT: A person could go on the internet or could read some theological dictionaries and learn there that Barth is a universalist. I can say to you with full confidence that that is simply not the case.

When I was a student at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, I was privileged to take a Barth seminar taught by Geoffrey Bromiley, the co-editor of the *Church Dogmatics*, who translated most of its volumes. He knew a little bit about Barth. I chose, for my paper in his class, the topic "Is Barth a Universalist?" I went chapter and verse. I looked through all the passages I could find in the *Dogmatics* where he speaks to the subject.

Barth was convinced of a universal *atonement*. Barth believed that

Jesus Christ assumed the humanity of every single human being and that when he died, they died, and when he rose, they rose. He paid the price and won a completed salvation for them. There is something in the human heart that is used to thinking, “There’s something I need to do. There’s a five percent or a ten percent I need to contribute. Yes, Jesus did this wonderful work on the cross and he died for my sins, but that’s not quite enough.”

Often, the gospel will be preached by a well-meaning evangelist in this way. They’ll describe in moving terms about all that God has done in Jesus, about how Christ lived an absolutely faithful and upright life, he endured the contradiction of sinners, was always upright, how he died a brutal death and how that is a substitute for our sins and he has paid it all. But having said this is what Jesus has done, then they will say, “now this is what you must do.”

JMF: In order to “get in on it.”

DT: You need to turn from sin, read your Bible, go to church. All these things are enjoined upon Christians, but they’re not conditions of salvation. It’s not as if I have to do certain things in order to be worthy of it. I’m included in Christ because 2000 years before I was born, he lived my life and died my death and rose in triumph. When he rose, I rose.

People who are used to thinking in those conditional terms don’t understand it when Barth says that it’s complete. People think, “If he says it’s complete and that there’s nothing that I have to do in order to earn salvation, then he’s a universalist.” But that’s not what he’s saying. He’s simply saying that we can’t earn the salvation. It’s a completed gift in Christ.

But he also says, in many places in his *Church Dogmatics*, that if we deny the Lord who bought us, that if we refuse to acknowledge that in Christ God has done it all, then we can be nailed to that denial for eternity. For Barth, the sinner in hell is the ultimate insane person. He’s denying reality. He’s denying that Christ died for him. It isn’t that the price hasn’t been paid—it’s that he’s unwilling to accept it.

An illustration has sometimes been used that helps clarify what Barth is saying here. There’s a story (that I’ve been told is true) of a man who is convicted of murder, sentenced to life in prison. Some years later, the governor decided to commute his sentence, and so the governor issued a pardon. It said so-and-so is hereby pardoned for his crimes and may be set free from prison. This pardon was brought to this prisoner. It was already

completed. There was nothing he could do to earn it, or win it—his name was already on it.

But that prisoner refused. He said, “No, I’ve done the crime and I’ll do the time. I will not accept this pardon.” Legally, he could not be forced to leave that prison even though the pardon was there for him. Hell is a monument to the person who says, “My will be done, not thine, O Lord.” This is what Barth is saying.

After I finished that paper and turned it into Professor Bromiley, he wrote a note on it, that it indicated a careful research of Barth typically lacking in studies on the subject. Many people have not given Barth a fair hearing because they’ve heard some scare story, “Oh, he’s a universalist.”

JMF: Cornelius Van Til comes up, a quote from him or Francis Schaeffer, when you do a Google search.

DT: Yes. Van Til was very warm toward Barth, or maybe you could say hot behind the collar. He wrote a book titled *Christianity and Barthianism*, which gives us some idea of how he saw the two standing, even though Barth believed in the Trinity, the incarnation, the substitutionary atonement of Christ and the inspiration of Scriptures, and yet he’s described as being someone who has departed completely from Christianity.

Van Til was so unhappy with Barth’s rejection of double predestination and his emphasis on a universal atonement that he approached Barth, I would have to say, with a closed mind. Even though he had a fine mind, it was closed when it came to Barth.

JMF: Most of us suffer from that one way or another from time to time. (laughing)

DT: I know. I’m very open to my own ideas. (laughing)

JMF: Scripturally speaking, 1 John 2:1-2 talks about how Christ’s atonement reaches not just our sins, but the sins of the whole world. Colossians 1:20 talks about how God is in Christ reconciling all things.

DT: Yes. And 2 Corinthians 5:19, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

JMF: These words are not particular. World actually means world. All things means all things.

DT: That’s right. Whenever you have to add italicized words to a verse in order to make it square with your theology, you’re in trouble. Whenever you have to say, “God so loved the world *of the elect* that he gave his only Son.” (laughing)

JMF: Even there, the definition of elect is rooted in Paul in Ephesians 1. Christ is the elect, and we all are elect in him.

DT: Right. God loves all of us equally. He cherishes each one of us equally. He, as it were, carries a picture of each of us in his wallet. Each one of us is dear to God. When he went to the cross, all our faces were on his heart. He is overwhelmed with joy so that the heavens rejoice when one sinner returns to him and receives the salvation already won for him.

JMF: Yeah. And [on the other hand] there's a refusal that we're free to make [**DT:** Yes.], like the fellow in prison—he refuses the pardon. Who can explain that? He likes it better in prison, it works better to the way he is, or something. But for whatever reason, he refused it. Maybe his sense of justice. Who knows?

DT: Sometimes it's that, but often it's a sense of pride. "I'm not going to kneel before this man [Jesus] and confess that he did what I could not do. He died my death and he paid the price. I'm a dignified person. I don't need to humble myself and accept Christ as Savior."

But the Bible talks about someone trampling underfoot the covenant. It says how should we escape if we neglect so great salvation [Hebrews 10:29]. Paul, having given this wonderful statement of the universally completed atonement, says, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself," and then he says, "We beseech you on behalf of God, be reconciled" [2 Corinthians 5:20]. In other words, you're already reconciled, the war is over, but you need to be reconciled in your own heart. You need to receive that which is already completed for you. So to declare a completed atonement, to say yes, when Jesus hanging from the cross said, "It is finished," does not mean universalism. It does not mean that we can say, "That's fine, then, we can just go our merry way." No. It means that we're encouraged to believe, to receive, to accept.

JMF: The passage, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation," I grew up hearing preached the opposite of its actual meaning. The idea was, How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation in the sense of neglecting to obey the rules and keep the rules that are going to give you this salvation, as opposed to how can we be saved if we neglect the very thing that has already saved us.

DT: Right. That would be, as you implied, turning that verse on its head, because it's talking about this wonderful salvation where God in Christ has done it all. A true salvation, one of grace. Jesus hanging from the cross said, "It is finished." He didn't say, "We're almost there, and if

they just do their part, if they just keep enough of the laws..." He said, "It is finished." It's completed. It's far beyond our poor power to add or detract. All we can do is humbly accept it and live a life, as John McLeod Campbell says, of joyful repentance.

JMF: A lot of times we're given the impression that you are saved by grace and that's the starting point, but then if you want to maintain that position, you need to obey well enough or it will be taken away from you, you'll lose it.

DT: It's as if God pulls the old switcheroo on us.

JMF: Yeah—bait and switch.

DT: At first it's all grace. That's the good news, but now here comes the bad news. Now you're on probation for the rest of your life. Now you better do this and you better not do that, or else.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is consistent. He is always a God of mercy and always a God of grace. Grace is not just the beginning point of the Christian life. It's the continuing basis and foundation for our life in Christ. The Christian life is not based in my attitudes or my actions. It's based in the life of Christ.

The Bible describes a Christian as one who is "in Christ." Paul says if someone is in Christ, he's a new creation. He says, "You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ." I'm hidden with Jesus. Paul says, "I'm seated in the heavenlies with Jesus" in Ephesians 2:6. He's given us every blessing in Christ.

My life in God is grounded in Christ. He's the basis for my acceptance before the Father, not my performance. This was the Galatian heresy, that you begin in grace and then you maintain it by works. This is not to say that works don't matter, or that obedience doesn't matter, that living a godly life and doing the will of God is irrelevant. It's to say that it's not a basis for keeping your salvation.

JMF: So how does that work together?

DT: The answer to that lies in Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:30 says he is our sanctification. That's an interesting statement, because the other point of view that you mentioned would have to deny that, and would have to say "No, I'm my sanctification. Jesus does justification. He's the one who gets me right with God, and then I do the sanctification. I make myself holy. I make myself good enough. I keep myself in salvation."

JMF: We even use the Holy Spirit in that mix by saying the Holy Spirit leads us, but if we don't follow, then we don't have sanctification.

DT: If we understand that Christ is our righteousness and he's our sanctification, I think this helps us. When I come to God in Christ, I'm accepted for who I am in Christ, not for who I am in Dan Thimell. Not because I've been so good or worthy or earnest or consistent, but what I had to offer him, as Bill Gaither said, was brokenness and strife, and he accepted that. I'm accepted *for who I am in Christ*. In Christ, I'm accepted by the Father. In Christ, I stand holy before the Father. I stand pure before the Father in his humanity.

Justification, we're sometimes told, it's "just as if" I had never sinned. A better definition is: to be justified is to be accepted for who I am *in Christ*. Because I was there in him. My humanity was carried by him throughout his life and in his death on the cross. I got this from James Torrance, and I'm unashamedly using that as a central point in my own belief. To be justified is to be accepted for who I am in Christ—and then to be sanctified is what? It's to *become* who I am in Christ.

The amazing good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ is your future because he's your past. My whole life is enclosed in Christ. I'm hidden with Christ in God. I'm not tremblingly tiptoeing on the precipice every day of my Christian life. Rather, I'm living joyfully in Christ, realizing that sometimes I let him down, sometimes I struggle with the same old sins, sometimes I look inside me and see ugly attitudes, sometimes I say hurtful things, sometimes I'm not as faithful as I ought to be to my calling.

But when we are faithless, he is faithful, Paul says, for he cannot deny himself. I'm included in him, and he's faithful. One day I will stand before the Father and he will throw his arms around me and say, "Well done, good and faithful servant," because my life was included in Jesus.

JMF: When Paul says that this new life is hidden in Christ, he means what he says. It's hidden even from us. Most of the time, we don't see it. It reminds me of a passage Paul mentions: we look in the mirror, though we see a poor reflection. We don't see who we really are in Christ—we see what you were just describing: a person who falls short, a person who is weak, the person who doesn't measure up. But Scripture assures us that Christ has already made us new. He has hidden that new person in Christ, waiting to be revealed at the time when we see him face to face and we see ourselves, really, as he's made us to be in him, face to face for the first time.

DT: Right. If we want to see who we are in Christ, we need to look at Christ. The mistake is, we look at ourselves, and then we get discouraged. This is what it means to walk by faith and not by sight. We're always

tempted to walk by sight, and we look in that mirror, and we look a little too closely in that mirror. We get depressed and discouraged, and Satan whispers in our ear, “You’re not worthy of the gospel. You’re not worthy of being a minister, you’re not worthy of being a Christian.” And we’re *not* worthy.

JMF: Right.

DT: When the prodigal son comes home to the father and says, “I’m no more worthy to be called your son,” the father is saying, in effect, “Whoever said this was about worthiness? You never were worthy, but you’re my boy, and I love you. I’ve always loved you, and my forgiveness is here for you.” We don’t walk by sight, but by faith in Christ. The secret for living the Christian life is to abide in Christ. To look in Christ, to gaze on Christ, to live our lives out of the resources we have in Christ. Paul says, “I am crucified with Christ. It may not look like it, but I am. I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, I do live. It’s a vital, vibrant life, but the life I live, I live by the faith of the Son of God. I live by his faith, and he loved me and he gave himself for me. I’m his.” [Galatians 2:20, expansive paraphrase]

CHRIST'S COMPLETED WORK

J. Michael Feazell: Why do most Christians seem to think that Christianity is primarily about right behavior?

DT: There are probably a number of reasons. One is that a lot of the preaching they're exposed to assumes that. A lot of preaching is works religion. It's advice on how to be a better parent, how to be a better father, how to be a more effective Christian, how to pray better. All these how-to sermons leave one to think that Christian life is mostly about performance.

God does care about the life we live. He does care about the kind of parenting that we engage in and these things. But when we put the focus on the *how*, we make it look like Christianity is a matter of performance. We should be focusing on *who*. We should be focusing on *who is Christ?* What has he done for us? How has he included us in his life? Then we should see that as a basis for the Christian life.

Another reason that most Christians are focusing on behavior is that we live in a performance-based society. Raises are based on performance. Relationships are based on performance. We're used to that. It's in the air we breathe, it's in the water we drink. It's natural for us to interpret the ways of God based on the ways of humanity.

JMF: There's a difference between salvation, which is by grace, and behavior, while it's important, is not what our salvation is based on.

DT: Right. The life we live is a *response* to grace—it's not a condition of grace. It's not, "If I live well enough, then God will be nice to me, he'll be good to me, great things will happen to me." But rather, because God

in Christ has done it all and continues to present me acceptable to the Father through what he has done for me, that's the basis for my Christian life.

The behavior of the Christian life, the obedience that we're called to engage in, in the Christian life, can only be carried out through God's grace — only through the presence of Christ in my life can I live the life God calls me to live. It's appropriate to preach on living the Christian life so long as we're Christ-centered. Paul Scherer, the great Lutheran preacher, a generation ago told divinity students at Yale, "When you're preaching, wherever you are in your text, make it across country, as fast as ever you can, to Christ." I think we need more Christ-centered preaching.

If Christ is the Alpha and Omega, if he is the basis for our life in God, then why do we try to base it anywhere else in our preaching? If we offer all kinds of advice on how to live, and fail to ground it in Christ, we're preaching works religion.

JMF: What do we mean, by grounding it in Christ? What most Christians tend to get from the kind of preaching you're talking about is: "Christ is the role model, I need to measure up to the way Christ is"—so that is centered in Christ from that perspective. "How do we live like Christ did in order to be accepted by God?"

DT: That's where the model is centered in Christ but not really the way of living, the secret of living the Christian life. Then it becomes "he did his part, I do my part."

JMF: Right.

DT: In the Bible, Christ is not simply an example. He *is* an example; he has left an example that we should follow in his steps, Peter writes [1 Peter 2:21]. But Christ is also the basis for our life. He's also the one through whom I can live the Christian life. Christ is the author and the finisher of our faith. He's the one who begins our Christian life and he's the one who completes it. Paul says, "I'm crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me. And the life that I go on living in the flesh and my humanity, I live by the faith of the Son of God" [Galatians 2:20].

Christ is that living reality in my life. It's not like he's standing far off with his arms crossed, waiting to see if we're good enough for the next goodie to fall from heaven, but rather, he's my constant companion — the source of my life, the source of all the love I need, the source of the faith I need, the kindness I need, the faithfulness I need, the persistence I need.

JMF: We tend to think that if I am being faithful and I am being

patient, then Christ is living in me. But if I'm not being that way, if I'm not measuring up to the standards of God, then Christ isn't living in me. So unless I'm measuring up, Christ isn't in me, and I should measure up better, in order for Christ to be living in me. What's wrong with that?

DT: The Christian life is not an on-again, off-again kind of thing like that. The Bible describes the Christian life as entering into eternal life — that he who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. We pass from death into life when we come to Christ. Eternal life is, by definition, one that is unbroken, that goes on forever.

God says, “There’s nothing that can cause you to fall out of my wagon. You’re mine. I’m committed to you, and the life I’ve given to you is for keeps. You’re always going to be my boy, you’re always going to be my daughter, and nothing can change that.” The life we live is not an anxious life. It’s not a nervous life or a fearful life. It should be a joyful life because God in Christ has done it all, and he’s going to get me safely there, and whether I’m up or I’m down, God will continue to live in me.

In the traditional English wedding ceremony, marriage is described as a covenant, not a contract. A contract would be, “If you perform well enough, then I’ll perform well enough. You scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.” Many people, even though they go through the marriage ceremony and promise undying love, in fact, see it as a contract. When the other person pleases them less than someone else, when the other person lets them down or they get sick or become disabled, they say, “I didn’t love them anymore. I needed to find someone else to love.”

But in the marriage ceremony, we’re promising to love the person for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part. It’s an unconditional promise. How can we make that kind of unconditional promise to a fallible person, a weak person, a frail person?

How can we as weak, frail persons make that kind of promise? The apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 5 when he says, “Love one another as Christ loved the church, who loved her and gave himself for her.” It’s the sacrificial love of Christ that is the basis for our life together in marriage. It’s through Christ that I can forgive when my spouse says something hurtful or does something that’s not right. I can be forgiving because God in Christ is forgiving through me. This model of a marriage is the same way that God treats us in all of life. He treats us unconditionally. He loves us for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health.

Most people know the great love chapter — 1 Corinthians 13. It says, “Love bears all things, hopes all things, believes all things, endures all

things. Love never ends.” We often include it in the marriage ceremony. One time I read that passage in a wedding ceremony, and one of the groomsmen came up to me afterwards and said, “That was a really cool poem, where did you get it?” I said, “It was from the Bible, and it’s describing the love that God intends to be the basis for marriage.”

Having made these wonderful statements about love, we need to ask ourselves, “What does the Bible say about God?” The Bible says, “God is love.” He’s the only source of love. Since God is love, I can re-read 1 Corinthians 13 and say, “God hopes all things, believes all things, endures all things. God’s love never ends.” That’s the basis for the Christian life — an enduring love that persists despite my weakness, my failings. Sometimes I don’t feel particularly pious, sometimes I don’t feel as devoted to God, sometimes I do things that let him down, that I’m embarrassed about, but God continues to persist in his forgiving love, and continues to say, “You’re mine, I married you forever, this is for keeps.”

JMF: So the gospel is about a relationship — the good news is who God has made you to be in Christ, not good news about a potential bonus if you meet certain requirements.

DT: Right. Christ completed that work. He said from the cross, “It is finished.” We are offered a relationship based on what Christ has already done. James Torrance used to say, “Faith is the dawning awareness that God in Christ has done it all. He’s completed it. He’s lived our life and died our death and risen in triumph, and I was there in him when he lived and died and rose again.” It’s a completed gift. He offers me a relationship based on his completed work. My life in God is a relationship.

There’s a typical pattern in the letters of Paul. Paul moves always from grace in Christ to responsibilities in Christ. The first half of his letters talk about the wonderful things that God has done in Christ. So you have in Ephesians, “We’re predestined in Christ, we’re seated in the heavenlies with Christ, God has given us every spiritual blessing in Christ.” It’s already ours in Christ. No one can ever take that inheritance from us.

Then he moves on to saying, “Husbands, love your wives. Bosses, watch out for your workers, take care of your workers.” There are responsibilities that flow from that, but I carry those out through my life in Christ — not in order to *get* it, but because I *have* it.

JMF: He’s reminding us, “Here’s who you are in Christ — because you are a child of God, because you are in Christ — therefore act like it.” He never says, “Act this way and then God will do such and such for you.” It’s always, “Here’s who you are, so act like that, behave like that.”

DT: Right.

JMF: The behavior doesn't change or affect who you already are in Christ by what Christ has already done.

DT: Right. A good loving parent may have a child who disappoints her and at times does things that she would not want her to do, which bring great pain to her heart, but she says, "I still love him. He's still my son." God is like that, only far more so. God is the source of true unconditional love that never ends. Sometimes a parent will finally, after repeated disappointments, give up and throw in the towel. But God never does. The Bible says, "Nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Who is he that condemns? Christ has already done it all" [Romans 8].

JMF: The parable of the prodigal son is an excellent illustration of that. Within the story, the son has done...you can hardly think of worse things in that culture to do. He's repudiated his father's fatherhood...

DT: That's right – he said, "I can't wait till you die, give me the money now." That's pretty crass.

JMF: And he's blown the inheritance... he's wasted everything.

DT: Right. On terrible living.

JMF: But the father never says, "You're not my son anymore." Even though the kid, when he prepares his little speech, he in effect is saying, "I know I'm not your son anymore. I just want to be one of the servants so I can get something to eat." He's still selfishly looking out for an angle. He's not even repentant in that sense — he's looking for an angle. "Father, I have sinned, but..." His take on that is, "Just let me be one of the servants so I can get a meal." The father doesn't even listen to his speech.

DT: Right. He says, "It's not about performance. It's not about what you can do, because you can't do it."

JMF: It's about who you are, because that's who you are.

DT: "This my son was lost and now he's found." "This my son." He's always been my son, you're still my son, we're going to throw a party because it never was about your worthiness or your performance.

We can picture him...he's off in the far country breaking his father's heart every day by the way he's living. We can picture the father every day going out on the porch and scanning the horizon, seeing if that's the day his boy is coming home, because he's never stopped loving him, never stopped having a place for him in his heart.

JMF: Yet, all of us can identify with the older brother who says, "This is the most unfair dumb thing in the world."

DT: Right.

JMF: And we can hardly identify with the younger son.

DT: That's because we're far more aware of the sins and failings of those around us, than we are of our own.

JMF: Yeah.

DT: We're experts in the faults of those around us.

JMF: If we are experts in our own, we're so depressed we can't believe that something like that could be true.

DT: Right. In both cases, whether we're looking at others or looking at ourselves, we should be looking at Christ. That's the problem.

JMF: Which is why Christ told the parable.

DT: Exactly. Jesus said one day,

Two people went to the temple to pray, and the one person prayed, "Lord I'm really cool. I thank you that I'm not like this wretched sinner over here. You know, I've always kept the rules." And the other man said, "Lord, I'm a sinner. I have blown it. I have done terrible things, and Lord be merciful to me, a sinner. I have nothing to offer you, I just ask you for mercy." [Luke 18]

Jesus interpreted that story. He said that the second man, not the first, went home right with God. It wasn't performance. It was receiving mercy.

JMF: Yeah. Robert Capon talks about that in his book about parables. He says the problem is that we love that parable and we say that's beautiful, I like that. But we don't want the forgiven admitted sinner to come back the following week with the same prayer. We want him to come back with the other prayer that now says, "I've been doing all the right things."

DT: Yep. But we never graduate beyond our need for grace. We never stop needing God's mercy. We live our lives by his mercy and by his grace, by the life of Christ in us.

JMF: We feel guilty doing that. Because, after all, we wouldn't forgive someone, and we don't forgive ourselves, for doing the same thing over and over.

DT: Right. There's a limit. We've had it, you know? That's the way we treat other people. We might be very understanding and forgiving for many, many times, but there comes a point where that line is crossed, and we give up. But when Jesus compares humans and God, he'd say, "If you, being human, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven..." God's love is far greater, it's much more than ours. So much more, that it's unconditional. The Bible says the

gifts and the calling of God are without repentance. He never takes them back.

JMF: Aren't we afraid to rest in that? We've sinned, we know it, we're full of guilt, shame, doubt, frustration, and anxiety, and we are afraid to say, "This is already taken care of. I don't need to dwell on this and worry about it... I need to move on and trust in and rest in the grace and forgiveness of God and in my relationship with him, which is separate from the consequences of what I might have done as far as having to 'reap what I have sown' in the sense of sin hurts."

DT: There are consequences, and God doesn't always protect us from the consequences of our actions. If we drive drunk, we may cause an accident, and that accident won't be reversed the minute that we're sorry. There are still those consequences, but God has forgiven us.

JMF: We have to learn that salvation is different from the natural consequences of our sins. We're going to experience those, but we don't need to fear that God has dumped us, given up on us, forsaken us, and that our salvation is in jeopardy because of the sin. That's where we mix the two...

DT: I think we're always projecting our human experience onto God and thinking that he is like people we know. And just as other people finally lose their temper and lose their patience...

JMF: And especially me.

DT: Right, especially myself. God must be like that. We've also learned that if something sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Beware of the Bernie Madoffs who promise you an enormous return on your money. So if somebody comes along and says, "God will love you no matter what. God's mercy is there for you — no matter what you have done or do, it is still there for you," we say, "Wait a minute. You're feeding me a lie. It sounds astonishing, it's scandalous."

Paul described the gospel as a scandal, a stumbling block. It was a scandal to both Jews and Greeks for different reasons. The gospel surprises us, collides with our common-sense understanding of things. Often, we're far more aware of our failings than we are of the goodness of God, far more aware of our sins than we are of his mercy. So we need to look away from ourselves to Jesus.

It's remarkable, when you look at the time when Christ was arrested and Judas and Peter both, in essence, committed the same sin — they both betrayed Jesus within hours of each other. One of them despaired and took his own life and the other, Peter, returned to the Lord and received his

mercy. There was no basis for Peter to be forgiven — it was blatant what he did. He didn't deserve another chance, he even swore, saying, "I've never met him, I've never known that man," when he was asked "surely he was with that Galilean." But Jesus loved him. He never gave up on Peter. He never gives up on you or me.

When bad things happen

JMF: When something bad happens, we tend to think, "This is evidence that God is punishing me for my failure to measure up. He's against me and turned his face from me, and what hope do I have, because obviously I'm under his curse?" Sometimes that's what someone at church tells you — there is no causeless curse, you know.

DT: God's getting you. He's getting even with you here.

JMF: Right.

DT: Sometimes we have that kind of a God, who's a mean ogre with a big stick or something. It's because we're so focused on our own sin that we fail to look at God through the eyes of Christ. We fail to look at him through Christ. We substitute another god for the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

JMF: So what do we do with the bad things that happen to us? How do we cope with that in terms of who we are in Christ?

DT: That's a crucial question, because as Jesus said, "In this world you have tribulation." Sometimes we've been so interested to get people to accept Christianity or to come to Christ that we make promises that the gospel does not promise. "Come to Jesus and all your problems will be solved." "Come to Jesus and you'll never have a difficulty. He'll take care of everything. You'll never have a problem, never have an adversity, never have a sickness."

But this is not true. Paul, the greatest missionary this world has ever seen, the author of the most books of the New Testament, said that he had a terrible experience, a painful experience — there was this jagged thorn in his flesh and he kept praying to God, "Take it away." God said, "No, my grace is sufficient for you, for my grace is made perfect in weakness." Sometimes God says that to us. He says, "yes, you've experienced brokenness, you're experiencing a terrible thing that's happening to you in your life and you are asking, 'God, just take it away from me.'" But God says, "That's not my plan."

In my own life, my late wife, Adrienne, was battling cancer. She was a godly woman, a humble Christ-centered person. When we found out she

had cancer, we did everything we could. We took her to the doctors, we tried medical treatment, but there was no treatment for her cancer. We prayed, knowing that God had healed many people and that there are verses in Scripture urging us to pray to God if we're sick and ask for healing. So we prayed over and over again for healing.

In the course of my wife's illness, she had to have surgery seeking to remove that cancer, and they removed one of her eyes. The hope was that that would contain the cancer, but it didn't. Later, it was clear to the doctors that there was no cure for her.

One day when I was praying, asking for healing, I didn't hear an audible voice, but I heard an inner voice that I believed was the Lord speaking to me saying, "Dan, you've asked for healing over and over again for her." He says, "But you've never asked what is my purpose in all of this. I want you to know, I could heal this cancer now, but she would continue to be sightless in one eye, she would continue to be less than whole in this life. Or I could heal her completely. And I'm going to heal her completely."

That wasn't what I wanted to hear. But God has a mercy that sometimes is a severe mercy. Sometimes it involves taking us through pain, through difficult experiences. God can deepen our love for him, deepen our compassion for others, and deepen our understanding of life when we walk through these painful experiences with Jesus, who continues to have nail-scarred hands.

The humanity of Jesus not only means that I'm included in Christ's life now, and that he represents me to the Father and all those good things. It also means he continues to bear our scarred humanity. Jesus, who appears to the disciples after he rose again, still had scars in his hands. My Jesus has scars. He tells Thomas, who doubted that Jesus had really risen again, "Behold the nail prints in my hands." In other words, you'll know me by my scars.

Jesus understands. God understands our pain. He understands our difficulties. He knows about our scars. He walks through those scarring episodes of life with us, brings us comfort, brings us mercy, but doesn't always give us that detour. God doesn't guarantee us an untroubled passage from here to heaven, only a safe arrival.

THE TRINITY, UNITED WITH HUMANITY

J. Michael Feazell: The doctrine of the Trinity is something that, for many Christians, is an abstract thing... it's "I don't know much about it, and what difference does it make?" What difference *does* it make?

DT: The Trinity is tremendously relevant to everyday life. It's true that some people, because it seems abstract or puzzling, can't get their minds around it and so they say it's an article of faith, and leave it at that. A member of my congregation that I served in southern California was raised in a Unitarian church, where they don't believe in the deity of Christ or of the Holy Spirit — there's simply God out there who made everything. But once she discovered the joy of a Trinitarian understanding of God, she said to me, "God seems so much more personal to me now."

The doctrine of the Trinity tells us that Jesus Christ is not an *emissary* of God — he's God himself, condescending to step into our life, take our humanity upon himself, to experience our pain, struggles, temptations, and challenges. Through it all he was faithful to his Father, faithful to his purposes, all the way to dying and rising again for us. So the first thing the Trinity does, is it makes God personal to us.

Another key aspect of the Trinity is that the Trinity preserves for us an understanding of God as *love*. If God is a solitary being for all eternity and then created a world, how can we understand that God would be loving? We can understand that he might decide to treat us in a way that we might think is nice, but can God know what is love, if he's a solitary being? But

the Bible says that the Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father. There's a relationship of love, of union and communion between God the Father and God the Son that has been going on since all eternity past. The Holy Spirit participates in this tri-unity of love with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit experience. The Trinity is the foundation for the doctrine of the love of God.

It's also important for the knowledge of God. If God had not come to us as a human, in Christ, then how do we know what God is like? Jesus may have said some inspiring things about God which we all like, but how do we know he's right? Maybe someone else would come along with a different picture of God, and who's to say? But if Jesus is God himself come among us to open his heart to us, then God becomes personal, touchable, believable. So the Trinity is a very practical teaching.

Sometimes we get caught up in concepts that don't help us. A good way to talk about the Trinity is as a communion of three persons — the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who all share the same reality from all eternity. They're inseparable: you never have one without the other two. It's a communion of three persons — the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. It's not as if God was two persons and then at Christmas suddenly God morphs into three. God always was three, and God the Son becomes man the first Christmas.

JMF: For most people, you can understand Father, Son, and Spirit. But the idea that Father, Son, and Spirit are one God is troubling. How can people be helped with that?

DT: We know they are one because it's declared many times in Scripture. Jesus said, "I and the Father are one. He who has seen me has seen the Father." He was declaring a one-ness between himself and the Father. How can they be one? One powerful teaching that the church has had for many centuries goes back to the Cappadocian divines—the doctrine of *perichoresis*. *Perichoresis* is saying that the three persons of the Trinity interpenetrate each other. They mutually indwell each other.

This isn't just some neat idea that some theologian thought up in an ivory tower one day. Jesus said, "The Father dwells in me and I dwell in the Father." There's a mutual indwelling, and when we understand that the Father, Son, and the Spirit are spiritual or spirits, we can see how they could interpenetrate each other, or mutually indwell each other. In this way, among other things, you not only have the oneness, they all interpenetrate the same reality, but we also can understand how when we encounter one person of the Trinity, God the Father, or God the Son, or

God the Holy Spirit, we're really up against all three. You can't separate them.

JMF: There's also the term "hypostatic union." How does that fit with who Christ is and who we are in him?

DT: The hypostatic union refers to the union of God with humanity in the Incarnation. Some people think of Jesus as being God in a man, and they explain the puzzle of the incarnation of Jesus being God and man by saying, "The Spirit of God came and descended on Jesus, and that's the incarnation." That is *not* the incarnation. We Christians believe, based on Scripture, that God dwells in *us*, but we're not an Incarnation, we're not the Incarnation. The Incarnation was a union of the person of the Word, Jesus (as we call him since his life on earth), with humanity.

This is an amazing idea — that God united himself with the human race. There are some challenges to that, because we don't normally think of ourselves as being one bundle of humanity. We tend to think of, I am an individual, you're an individual, you have your problems, I have mine. We think of ourselves as independent of one another, as autonomous actors. There is a sense of individual identity and individual responsibility, but the Bible also sees us as being part of one bundle of humanity so that what affects one affects all. The Bible says about the sin of Adam, "One died, therefore all died."

When Christ united himself with humanity, he didn't unite himself with a particular man who lived in Judea long ago—he united himself with the humanity of the entire human race. That's why sometimes we refer to this doctrine as "the all-inclusive humanity," because he includes all of us in his humanity, so that his representation of us is not just a legal one, where we agree to let him represent us, perhaps, or God agrees to treat him as if he is standing in for us, but he includes us in himself, so that what happens to him happens to us, so that he has lived our life, but we were there in him. He's died our death, but when he died, we died. When he rose, we rose.

This is why Paul writes to the church in Colossians chapter 3: "Set your sight on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." You have died. Christ died long ago, but when he died, you died. We're included in his humanity.

JMF: If we're already in union with Christ, he's already drawn us into himself, and as part of humanity, we're seated with Christ at the right hand of the Father, our life is hidden with him and so on. How does *repentance* work with that? If we're already included with Christ, where does repentance come in, and what is its role in the context of that relationship?

DT: We often think of repentance as being a condition of grace. We sometimes say, for example, “That person did something mean to me, and I’m not going to forgive him unless he’s sorry and unless he changes.” That’s the way we’re used to treating other people. But the amazing news of the gospel is that God doesn’t say, “After you repent, after you change, then I’ll forgive you.”

If we could transform ourselves, if we could turn over a new leaf, then Christ didn’t need to come — he should have just come to earth to congratulate us. In fact, we’re not able to repent unless he comes in and transforms us. On one hand, Christ already lived our life, he took us up into his life, but on the other hand, we’re now called to respond to the gospel. We’re called to say *yes*. We’re called to say, “I confess Christ died for me. I confess: when he died, I died.” Repentance is a lifelong process of becoming who I already am in Christ. Repentance, rather than being a condition of grace, is a response to it.

JMF: We often talk about participation in the life of Christ. How does that work?

DT: Participation is a relational term. It’s talking about living in a relationship with Christ. The Bible records that “God created man, male and female, created he them.” Adam and Eve’s being as humans was as a being-in-relation. They were created as male-and-female, not just as a male over here and a female over there, but as persons in relation.

We’re relational beings. God is a relational being. God is a God of relationships as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We’re invited to participate, to live in a relationship with One who has already included us in himself in his life, death, and resurrection. We’re called to say *yes*, we’re called to believe, and yet paradoxically, our believing is a gift of God. Our believing is a sharing in the faith of Jesus. “The life I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.” [Galatians 2:20]

JMF: When we talk about faith being a gift of God, is it a gift that he gives to only some people? Not everybody believes, so is it a gift he just gives to some, or is it a gift he gives to all, and they don’t accept the believing or the faith? How does that work?

DT: This is one of the oldest questions that the Christian church has discussed — and debated for many centuries. Some have said, “God decides who gets the gift of faith, and if you’re predestined to believe, you’ll believe, and that’s that.” Others have said. “No, God doesn’t have anything to say in it. All he does is lay the offer out, and then we decide

whether to believe.” Both sides have an element of truth, and they’re both mistaken.

It is true that faith is a gift of God. It’s God’s grace. It’s not because I was pious enough or good enough to make the right decision, make the right move, have the right attitude to God. It’s also not that God pushed certain buttons so that some people believe and become Christians, and the others don’t.

If I believe, it is because God has granted me faith, but I need to embrace the faith that he offers me. There’s no way around that. If I become a Christian, it is because God draws me. The Bible says, “No one comes to me unless the Father draws him.” So if I come to faith in Christ, it’s because the Father drew me. He wooed me. Augustine says, “God is the infallible seducer.” He draws us to himself. I became a Christian when I was seven years old. I went for it and confessed Christ as my Savior. But it was the Holy Spirit who drew me to God at that time.

What about those who don’t believe? If God gives faith, and other people don’t believe, God must not have given them faith. At that point we have to say, “No, that’s not quite right.” The Bible has passages that make clear that there still is the responsibility to believe, to say yes. For example, in 2 Corinthians 5 when Paul says, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.” On one hand, that’s complete — grace is already there for us. We’re already reconciled, in that sense, by what Christ has done. But in the next verse he says, “Therefore, we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” So we are called to be reconciled. We’re summoned to believe. We’re summoned to say yes. We’re summoned to take up our crosses and follow him.

The Bible holds us accountable. It says, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” And, “He who believes in the Son of God has eternal life and he who believes not does not have eternal life” in John 3. So I summarize that question about how some believe, and some not, by saying that in the Bible, if I believe, blame God, if I don’t believe, blame me. If it looks like I’m trying to have my cake and eat it too, that’s simply the witness of Scripture.

JMF: Some people say that it’s dangerous to put too much emphasis on grace, and that the primary emphasis needs to be on godly living, and grace is a part of that. But if you put too much emphasis on grace, then it’s dangerous, and you’ll fall into antinomianism. There seems to be a great fear of that among some people.

I’ve seen talk shows where there are people representing various

streams of Christianity, and some have said, “If we take away hell as a means of scaring people into doing the right thing, then everything will fall apart. We’ve got to have some kind of a hammer to hold over people’s heads to make them behave right,” as though that’s the primary issue. [They think that if] you get carried away with all this grace talk, everybody’s going to run amuck and do what’s right in their own eyes.

DT: It’s well-meant as a genuine pastoral concern, that whatever is preached should have a good impact on people’s lives. I understand that. At the same time, I get concerned when we make pragmatic concerns our primary criterion. We’re looking for “what works.” We want to have leverage to use on people so we can get the results we want. We’ll preach hellfire to scare people into living the right life so they don’t do bad things.

The Bible does speak about last judgment. It speaks about hell as being the destiny of those who reject Christ. But when we use that lever and say “If you step out of line you’ll go to hell,” we not only are contradicting the gospel (which declares that it’s by grace that we’re saved, not by works), we’re also damaging people’s spiritual lives by creating a mean God who is not a God you’d want to draw near, but an angry God with fierce streaks on his face who detests the individual. The pastoral consequences of that are bad.

Sometimes we want to use levers with people to try to raise money for the church. We’ll say, “If you give, then God will give you even more money back. If you give \$100, God will give \$1000. If you give \$200, he’ll give a million, and so forth.” And it seems to work! People say, “That would be great! I’ve got some financial difficulty. I’ll give.” But this makes God into more of a Coke machine than a loving Father — a God who you have to make deals with — a God that you have to connive with financially.

But God loves to give good gifts to his children. We don’t have anything to offer him. He has all things already. When we get concerned, when we use pragmatic concerns to determine theology, we always end up damaging the people’s relationship with God, damaging their understanding of God. It makes them draw further away from God rather than be closer to him.

JMF: In the Old Testament, there are examples of where Israel disobeys and God sends a plague or a punishment on them. How are we to understand that in terms of the New Testament, when we find Christ presenting God as full of grace, mercy, and compassion? When we find something bad happening in our lives, we look at the Old Testament and

we think “God is sending this punishment on me because I’ve sinned.” How are we to look at that?

DT: You’d get different answers if you asked various people. This is an area that we don’t hear about much nowadays, but to my mind the Bible speaks of not a spectator God, but an active God — a God who is involved in life. The Bible says, “In all things God works for good to those who love him.” God is working in all things. God was working in the thorn in the flesh that he sent to Paul. Calvin explained that by saying that there are two causes behind things that happen, there’s a divine cause, and then there could be what he calls a secondary cause.

Some individual might go to harm someone and attack that person. God didn’t push a button and tell that person, “Go and attack that person.” But God is nevertheless working in that event to bring about good. He’s not stumped by history, he’s not stumped by what evil people try to do. The classic example of that is the cross, where the Bible makes clear that Jesus was crucified by the set foreknowledge and purpose of God. Evil men perpetrated it, and they’re held accountable. God didn’t push a button and tell them to murder Jesus. But God, in his providence, takes the worst thing that could happen and turns it into the best thing that could happen. The execution of the innocent Son of God is turned into our eternal salvation.

When bad things happen, God is working for our good. The Bible says, “Whom the Lord loves, he chastens.” We need to ask God to give us a teachable heart when we’re going through a difficult time. We can ask for help, we can ask for deliverance, but we can also ask, “Lord, what are you trying to show me through this?”

JMF: Are you working on any projects right now that we can look forward to?

DT: I’ve been working on a book on our life in Christ. That’s been a tremendously exciting topic for me, because all of our lives as Christians are taken up into life of Christ, and I want people to see what a difference that makes for their marriage, what a difference it makes for their life before God as they’re trying to grow in godliness, what a difference it makes for the things we’re called to do as Christians — to see that in all things we’re called to abide in Christ and draw from the life of Christ in all that we do.

The Bible says, “Christ in you is the hope of glory.” Paul says, “I can do all things through Christ.” One Christian was telling a friend that this was his life’s motto — “I can do all things through Christ.” The friend looked at him, scowled, and said, “You mean you can’t do anything

without Jesus?” He said, “Yeah, I can go out and make a big mess of things and stumble around,” he says, “but if I want to do something worthwhile in life, I need to do it through Christ.” I’m working on that as a project.

JMF: Many people look at the concept of “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” as being from the perspective of “I will ask Christ to help me with everything I do,” and help me do this, help me do that. As long as I’m asking Christ to help me do everything, then I am participating with Christ, I’m doing all things through Christ who strengthens me. But if I don’t pray that and I’m not thinking about that, then I’m not living in Christ — so therefore you need to be praying the way I’m praying, otherwise Christ isn’t in your life.

DT: That turns a good promise of Scripture into a formula. I don’t think that’s the point. We have died. Our life is hidden with Christ in God. I am included in Christ, and I can’t extract myself from that union. I am intertwined with the life of Christ in my life.

JMF: That’s the foundation of our hope, isn’t it? If any point rested on how well we do something and it wasn’t entirely by the grace of God (what he’s already done and made of us in Christ), then that’s the point where we’ll fall short, and it will all fall apart.

DT: Right. I also think that we need to be careful that we don’t bring in Jesus as a means to our ends. You know, I can do all things through Christ, so I’m going to ask Jesus to help me with my plan or my project. We need to open ourselves to the Lord and ask, “What are *you* trying to do in my life?” Then we need to depend on him to help us accomplish *his* purposes.

JMF: Yeah. It’s like praying, “Lord, please make the Cubs win.”

DT: Exactly. Let me hit a home run.

JMF: Let the slot machine hit the jackpot.

DT: Exactly.

JMF: As we finish up, what is something that you would most want people to know about God?

DT: I would want them to know that in Christ, God is closer to them than the air they breathe, and that God loves you tenderly, unconditionally, and he is ready right now, right where you are, to take you to a new level in your life. He’s already forgiven you, he invites you to trust in his forgiveness, he’s already secured for you a place in heaven. Believe it. Live your life out of Christ and spend your journey with Jesus — enjoy and entrust knowing that God will never, ever let you down.

JMF: That makes me have to ask this — What if I’m a rat? How do I

cope with my rat-ness in light of what you just said?

DT: If you're a rat, you're a part of a rat race, because all of us have some rattiness to us. [Oliver] Cromwell once was having someone paint a picture of himself, and the painter was painting a rather idealized portrait. Cromwell stopped the artist and said, "Paint me warts and all." The Bible paints us warts and all. God knows those flaws. He knows flaws that you and I have, that we don't even realize, and he still cherishes us. He loves us dearly, like a loving father carries a picture of his son in his wallet. God, as it were, carries a picture of us in his wallet. He knows all about those flaws, and he still loves us and cherishes us infinitely.

JMF: That's what makes the gospel good news. Not the hope that maybe someday I'll measure up to some kind of perfection, but the fact of what Christ has already done.

DT: You're already loveable, and he wants to transform you into the image of Christ, and if it takes 1000 years, that's fine. When he's through transforming you into the image of Christ, Christian, he won't love you any more than he does right now.

GRACE LEADS TO GODLY LIVING

Introduction: Welcome to a special edition of *You're Included*, recorded in the ancient Scottish city of St. Andrews. St. Andrews is the home of the University of St. Andrews, Scotland's oldest university, founded in 1413. St. Andrews enjoys a reputation as one of the finest institutions of higher education in the United Kingdom. It is the home of St. Mary's College, the university's renowned divinity school. In St. Mary's nearly-500-year-old college hall, *You're Included* host J. Michael Feazell, [then] Vice President of Grace Communion International, interviews Professor Alan J. Torrance.

Dr. Torrance is a Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of St. Andrews and a widely respected teacher and author. As the son of James B. Torrance and nephew of Thomas F. Torrance, he carries on their theological tradition. Professor Torrance's work includes *Persons in*



Communion: Trinitarian Description and Human Participation.

J. Michael Feazell: Professor Torrance, thank you for agreeing to meet with us.

Alan Torrance: It's a pleasure to be here, Mike. Thanks for coming.

JMF: We want to begin by asking about a word that I'm sure my grandmother would not know what it means, but she knows what it's about. Could you talk about the Incarnation, and why it's important for Christians?

AT: The Incarnation concerns the heart of Christian faith. If I didn't believe the Incarnation, I'd pack up my bags, resign my job, and go and do something useful. The Incarnation affirms that God is with us as the person of Jesus Christ. It's fundamental to the knowledge of God. In the person of Christ we have God disclosing God's own being to us. But it's not just that in Christ God comes to us as God. God comes to us as *man*, and taking to himself a human-knowing of the Father.

When we affirm the Incarnation, we also immediately affirm the Trinity, because the knowledge that's given to us in Christ is a human knowledge of the Father, and Jesus knows the Father in the Spirit. We are taken by that same Spirit to share in Jesus' knowledge of the Father. But that's not just a human knowledge of the Father—we've been taken into the knowledge of a Father that belongs to the eternal Son, in and through the incarnate Jesus.

Without the Incarnation, we don't have anything that begins to resemble a full and final and adequate knowledge of God. But it's not just the knowledge of God that the Incarnation's vitally important. The doctrine of salvation is contingent, is dependent, upon the doctrine of the Incarnation.

What is the Christian doctrine of salvation? The key to understanding what salvation's about is the Greek words that Paul uses. Paul uses the word *apolutrosis*, meaning redemption, and the key to that is three Hebrew concepts which that Greek word translates in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.

The first is *padah*, meaning God delivers us from bondage. It's a word that is used of God's deliverance in Israel from Egypt. In salvation, God is delivering us from bondage, the bondage of sin, the tyranny of sin, the disease that we cannot overcome in and of ourselves. God does that in the Incarnation. God comes in Christ to deliver us from bondage. That's the first key metaphor.

The second: God comes to us and deals with the *costliness* of sin. There's another Hebrew word, *kipper* or *kofer*, that is also translated by a form of the word Paul uses for redemption, and that concerns the sacrificial offerings. On the Day of Atonement, the priest would take a lamb, and he

would have [the names of] all the tribes of Israel along his coat...he'd lay his hands on the lamb, declare the sin of Israel—in other words, all of Israel's sin is being laid on that lamb. Then the life of the lamb would be taken and Israel would see the life of that lamb, the costliness of its sin being taken from them. Or, a scapegoat. He'd lay his hands on a goat and declare the sins of Israel, hit it on the backside, and all of Israel in the celebration of worship would watch the goat run off into the wilderness carrying away its sin. So, the second metaphor, in the Incarnation, God comes as human to deal with the costliness of sin and carry our sin away from us.

The third metaphor is *go'el*, the kinsman redeemer. This is perhaps the most important. There's a provision under the covenant where if a family lost its father, or a woman lost her husband, then a kinsman, a relative, would come and marry that woman and restore that woman to an inheritance that she would otherwise lose. Or, if a farmer falls into debt and loses his farm, the kinsman member...perhaps that man's brother... of that family would come and restore that person to the inheritance that was lost. Again, the Incarnation concerns God coming as a human to restore us the inheritance that was lost in Adam.

All three metaphors are intertwined. So in the Incarnation, we have God coming to deliver us from sin and from guilt, most importantly. People think of guilt as a good thing. Well, guilt oppresses. It can make us ashamed of being in the presence of God. Guilt eclipses God. It can become a barrier between us and God. In the Incarnation, God comes to deliver us from guilt, and he comes as our kinsman redeemer, blood of our blood, flesh of our flesh, to restore us to an inheritance that was lost. What was Adam's inheritance? Communion with God.

All this takes place in the Spirit. We have not just the doctrine of the Incarnation—the doctrine of the Incarnation unfolds properly when we understand the doctrine of the Trinity, because everything Christ does is in the Spirit, bringing humanity by the Spirit, through the Spirit, into communion with the Father, to share in that eternal communion which is constitutive of the being of God, which defines the being of God. God is eternally Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That communion of love is shared with the world in the person of Jesus Christ. Sinful, alienated, diseased humanity is taken and re-created and given to participate in that eternal communion of love.

A lot of people think of God as an individual voyeur God, who sits in

a rocking chair at some distance watching the world and condemning all that goes on. A lot of liberal theology is like that. That's why liberal theology is often full of exhortations and condemnations, bullying us into social action of some kind or another. That is a pauper's understanding of God.

The God of the heart of the Christian faith is a God whose being is eternally one of love and communion. A self-contained individual isn't capable of love. Without the doctrine of the Trinity, it wouldn't make sense to talk about the love of God. 1 John suggests God is love. That is required to be understood in Trinitarian terms because there's an eternal triune communion of loving.

I mentioned knowledge of God. The Incarnation opens out knowledge of God by getting us to share in Christ's human knowing of the Father, which at the same time is the eternal Son's knowledge of the Father. No one knows the Father save the Son and those to whom he reveals him.

It's also incredibly important for worship. I'm sure you're a more holy man than I am, but sometimes on Sunday morning I turn up in church and I don't feel in the mood to worship. I ought to, but for whatever reason, maybe I'm worried about my work or family, I've got concerns. You go into church and you're going to try to find the energy to pray, sing hymns, and worship. In charismatic churches, they often poof up the energy with lots of choruses and so on.

One of the great answers to this problem is to remember what worship is. Worship is the gift of participating in the incarnate Son's eternal communion with the Father. Before we go into the church, the worship's already going on. The Son is adoring the Father. The Priest, the sole Priest of our confession, is providing that everlasting worship in our place and on our behalf in the Spirit. When we enter into the church... (it doesn't just happen at church, it happens at home)...when we worship, we're not starting something that wasn't previously going on. We've been taken by the Spirit to share in what is going on and to participate in the prayer that the High Priest is offering for me and for my family, concerning my work-related problems, et cetera. The praise and rejoicing that goes on in the mind of Christ I've been given to participate in by the Spirit.

JMF: The fact that it is in the Spirit would seem to indicate that we don't see it. There's not evidence to us that it's going on, except that the word of God says so. Is that where faith comes in, to believe the word of God that it's true, regardless of the fact that we may not see it or feel it?

AT: Precisely. Faith is a form of sight. It's a form of healing as well. Remember when Simon made that confession about the Christ? Jesus said, "Flesh and blood hasn't revealed that to you, but your Father who is in heaven." Faith is about being given the eyes to see and the ears to hear, to recognize what we otherwise wouldn't see. Sometimes I face struggles because sometimes we begin to doubt when we trust our own physical hearing and seeing. The Spirit gives us the conviction, the recognition of what's going on.

Two years ago my wife died of cancer, and she was ill for three and a half years until she died. It was a very difficult time. I've got four boys; it was a difficult time for the family. During that period, sometimes it was difficult to understand and see purpose in all of this. We prayed for her to be healed, and she wasn't healed. There were times when it was a challenge not to give up and find oneself disoriented.

Again, a return to the Incarnation, because this is so pertinent to faith. The heart of the Incarnation is the doctrine that Christ knows our weaknesses, takes our questions, our doubts to himself, ("My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?") and identifies with us in our suffering. By the Spirit we are united with that. We don't float free of the cares of this world. We are given to recognize the One who stands with us in the concerns of this world, who knows our weaknesses, our doubting, our blindness, who in every respect is as tempted as we are and knows our struggles. He knows even our sense of god-forsakenness at times, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

One of the most moving things that I experienced when Jane was dying in the final weeks of that awful period was the Spirit's giving one the sense that God's solidarity with one, was present with us in and through this grief, that God is Immanuel, God with us.

A lot of people ask the *why* questions. If you're Christians, why is God not healing Jane? Even if they didn't ask it verbally, you tended to feel that people were thinking that. But far more important than the *why* question is the *where* question. I don't know *why* God allowed Jane to die of cancer, but I know the answer to the *where* question. Where was God in and through that process? He was right with us in that grief, sustaining myself and my family and giving us the eyes to see and recognize his presence in and through that misery.

When we're talking about faith, we are simultaneously talking about the Spirit. It's easy for us to make faith become a work. Suddenly Alan

Torrance, in a heroic way, has faith. No, faith is about the work of the Spirit, taking Alan Torrance in all his frailty, confusion, doubting, and loneliness and suffering, and giving him the eyes to see and hear the grace of God in the context of doubt and suffering. I think that's the answer one ought to give. Faith is a form of discernment. It's through the *hypostasis*, the substance, in Hebrews 11:1, of things hoped for. It's where we see and discern that which is the object of our hope.

JMF: Is our faith a participation in Christ's own faith?

AT: That's exactly what faith is. Faith is the gift of sharing by the Spirit in the incarnate Son's human communion with the Father, *his* faith. There's a big debate in New Testament circles which is incredibly important. Since Reformation times, we've always tended to emphasis in the Protestant churches justification by faith, as if Alan Torrance is justified by *his* faith. I don't think that's Paul's argument. There's a grammatical issue. Paul says we are justified, and then the question is whether he says by faith *in* Christ or by the faithfulness *of* Jesus Christ. It depends whether the genitive case there is objective or subjective. There's a strong case, when Paul says in two or three places that we are made righteous or justified through the faith of Jesus Christ, he means that we were made righteous through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ rather than through our faith in Jesus Christ. So the point you just made couldn't be more important. Our righteousness, our justification does not lie first and foremost in our faith—it lies in the faith and faithfulness of our incarnate Lord.

JMF: That would mean that when we're experiencing doubt, which is not uncommon for us to be full of doubt from time to time, we don't need to fear that God has left us because we don't have good enough faith, because our trust really is in Christ himself to have faith for us.

AT: You couldn't put it better. That is gospel. That is good news. It wouldn't be good news if God comes to me and says, "Alan, if you have faith, and if you somehow manage to sustain that faith to the point you die, then you'll go to heaven, and you'll be saved." I don't have confidence in my ability to sustain that. But the good news of the gospel is that God comes and provides that faith, and that faithfulness, for us on our behalf.

The parable of the prodigal son is one of my favorites. It's often told as a story of confession. The prodigal son comes home because he's repented, and because he's repented, the father accepts him home. That's nonsense. That's not the story. He comes home for one reason and one reason only,

and it couldn't be more plain—because of the quality of the pig food! He wants to use his father still further. The point of the story is that the father, who is a wealthy dignified nobleman, *ran*—that means he grabbed his robes up around his waist—humiliated himself in order to run and embrace his son—before he had heard any statement.

It's a great parable of the love of the father. But the gospel goes further. There's a non-parallelism between this parable of the prodigal son and the gospel. The whole time that the son was in the far county, the father was at home. In the gospel, we have the Father going (in the person of the Son) and setting up home in the far country to be with the son and to be where the son is. And, just to continue the non-parallelism, in the person of the Son, God completes all that was required of the prodigal. He offers the faith, the worship, the worth-ship... all that is required is fulfilled in him, in the place of the son. So that by the Spirit, the son might be given to recognize the meaning of grace; that, as John Calvin put it, all parts of our salvation are complete in Christ, the head of the human race. Wonderful good news. Remarkable.

JMF: Some people, upon hearing that explicated, get uncomfortable and say, if that's true, then that would give me the freedom to behave improperly. It would give me freedom to sin and not worry because I know that God has forgiven me and loves me despite my sins, so there has to be something wrong with that, because it would promote...especially among our teenagers... if they heard something like that, they would go out and sin all the more.

AT: That's invariably the response that one gets. Let's think about that for a minute. Let's think up an analogy. I was blessed with a very devoted, faithful, loving wife. There's one period in my life when I was involved in theological conversations in Holland, in the Netherlands. I was regularly going off to Amsterdam. Lots of non-theological things go on in Amsterdam, and it's sometimes known as sin city. (I used to pull Jane's leg about this.) Let's imagine that my wife had come to worry as to whether I was engaged in illegitimate activities on my travels.

Two responses she might have given. She might have said, "Alan, I want you to know that if you even contemplate involving yourself in any illicit activities while you're away in your travels, I get the kids and I get the car and you're going to pay for this the rest of your days." She could have spelled out the ramifications and implications, the costliness of any sinning I got up to.

Or she might have said this: As she waved me goodbye from the front door of my house, “Alan, I just want you to know that if ever you find yourself in trouble, no matter what comes your way, I’ll always be there for you. You’ll always be welcome home. I’ll always love you, I’ll always be there for you.” That sounds a little bit Mills and Boonish. [Mills & Boon publishes romance novels in the U.K.]

But ask yourself: which is most likely to lead me to engage in un-theological activities on my trips to Amsterdam? There is no question in my mind that I’d be much more likely to go my own way in the first situation, because the first response basically said, there’s no real unconditional love between us—it’s a contractual deal. If you play the game, then I’ll play my part, etc. That’s not love.

The second was genuine, unconditional, costly love, and that is what converts us, and that’s what makes us faithful. I don’t think antinomianism (the repudiation of law) is a consequence of discovering God’s grace, seeing the extent of God’s grace for what it is. It’s the opposite. When we are brought by the Spirit, we are given the eyes to see the lengths to which God goes out of unconditional love for you as a particular person, as an individual. When you see that and are given to live in the light of that, you’re liberated from sin. It doesn’t encourage us to go and sin, thinking it’s not going to matter. It has the opposite effect.

That’s the difference between what’s called legal repentance and evangelical repentance. When we’re presented with a *law*, I don’t think repentance is sincere. It’s when we’re presented with the gospel, the *euangelion*, the unconditional love and forgiveness of God, when we see that, believe it, given our eyes to recognize it and affirm it, that sets us free from sin. It liberates us from sin. It’s an evangelical *metanoia*. A *metanoia* is the word for conversion. It means the transformation of our minds. When we’re presented with unconditional love, it transforms our minds.

The church is often trying to prop up the gospel either by dangling people over the pit or setting up conditions: if you commit this sin, you’re beyond the pale. No. We should have the courage to trust in the grace of God and the work of the Spirit getting people let in, liberating people by giving them eyes to see the meaning of the unconditional freeness of grace.

JMF: It reminds me of Paul’s letter to Titus [2:12] where he says, “For it is grace that teaches you to say no to ungodliness.”

AT: Precisely. I like that. Why did I take five minutes to say what you said in a sentence? Exactly.

JMF: When people ask that question, it doesn’t work like that. Christians who receive the grace of God don’t think like that.

AT: There's no question: good, devout Christians sin. I don't mean to claim that I'm a good Christian, but I sin all the time. *Why* do I sin? Why do I sin when I believe so strongly in unconditional freeness? I am convinced when I look at a moment that I'm sinning, it's because for that moment, I've lost my faith. I'm not believing in the grace of God.

To believe in the grace of God is to believe that the risen, crucified Jesus, the sole Priest of our confession, is now saying, "Alan, there is nothing you can do that will separate you from my love," and when I believe that, when I'm presented with that and have the eyes to see that and hear it, I'm not tempted to sin. It's when I look away from that, that sin becomes a temptation. So the answer to sin is for the church to continue to remind people of the unconditional, costly freeness of grace in Jesus Christ. It's when we're living out of that reality that we're liberated. Not just liberated from sin but, more importantly, from the desire to sin.

JMF: The gospel is not about rules and law-keeping. The gospel is about the positive relationship that we're brought into with God and with one another. The gospel is a gospel of relationship, not behavior.

AT: Precisely. That's not just the New Testament—that's the heart of the Old Testament. Exodus 20, the Ten Commandments, the laws, where do they start? The first one, "I am the Lord thy God who has brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." When people talk of the Ten Commandments, they want to start with the "thou shalt" and the "thou shalt not." But it only makes sense in the context of that first verse, which spells out the nature of God's unconditional covenant commitment to Israel. He loves Israel and has delivered them from bondage in that love. It should read, "I am the Lord thy God which has delivered you from Egypt...therefore, as I am unconditionally faithful to you, Have no other God's before me. And as I am unconditionally faithful to all of Israel, so be faithful to each other. Don't kill, don't commit adultery, don't lie, don't steal, etc."

In other words, the Torah, the Jewish law, the commandments, are simply spelling out the structure, the logic of a relationship of love and faithfulness. The key concept in the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, is God's *hesed*, God's covenant faithfulness, or *berith*—that's the word for covenant. It's about relationship. The whole of the Pentateuch is a relational gospel. When Jesus summed up the law, in "love God and your neighbor as yourself," he wasn't introducing some new formula—he was being a good Jew. He was summarizing the heart of the Ten Commandments. I couldn't agree more with what you just said.

GOD'S WRATH, HELL, AND THE ROLE OF SCIENCE

J. Michael Feazell: Let's talk about a subject that is sometimes misunderstood, perhaps, or frightening to people. What is the wrath of God?

Alan Torrance: The wrath, or "wroth," as we say in this country... When we speak about the wrath of God, we are speaking about the *love* of God. We mustn't forget that. There are two kind of anger, or wrath, that we know in the human context. There's wrath which can emerge when someone's will is frustrated. Someone's football team doesn't win the game, or the referee makes a decision that wasn't the one that you wanted to see made, and people get angry. A lot of people think of God's wrath as the wrath of a largely voyeuristic individual up there, when his will is frustrated. But that is an unbiblical definition of the wrath of God. The wrath of God is the wrath of the jealous God.

What is meant by the jealous God? It does not mean jealousy of the kind that would mean a breach of the commandment, thou shall not covet. But rather God's wrath, God's jealousy, is God's love for his people. When God loves a people, he hates to see that people taken apart by sin or by disease or whatever. The wrath of God is God's anger at the costliness of sin to a people that he loves, when he sees the destruction of a people. So the best kind of human analogy is when a father adores a daughter or a son, and they are used and abused in some relationship where someone takes advantage of the one they love. Then there will be a wrath and anger

that is a righteous anger grounded in love for their well-being.

God's wrath doesn't mean that he just loves the victim and hates the victimizer. God loves the victimizer as well as the victim. But God is angry with those responsible for all that destroys and destructs the *shalom*, the peace and communion and *koinonia* of his people. You can't have a proper understanding of the love of God without an equally robust doctrine of the wrath of God. It's imperative that we don't forget that to speak of the love and grace of God is to take seriously the biblical affirmations of the wrath of God.

God's love isn't any kind of mamby-pamby sentimental fuzzy love. It's a real valuing of the dignity of people. When that dignity is destroyed or betrayed by sin, God is angry — as angry as he is loving. But the important thing is...when we talk about the wrath of God, we're not talking about something that is arbitrary. The Christian life should never be based in fear. Christian life is lived from the love of God. When we see the wrath of God, we see beyond it the love of God. The wrath reposes in the love of God. So we should rejoice in the wrath of God because, if we're going to do this right, it's the wrath of God that values persons, but loves...and not just the exploited, but the exploiter, the sinner and the sinned against.

JMF: There's a passage about how mercy triumphs over judgment. Is that applicable to the wrath of God or the love of God in this way?

AT: Absolutely. This talk of mercy is there because of the wrath of God. God forgives those with whom he's angry. He forgives me although I give him endless cause to be more than angry. We've got to say this as Christians — we rejoice in the fact that he's angry. I can rejoice in the fact that God is angry with me, because God is only angry with me because of the extent of his love for me and for those against whom I sin. So when we're talking about the wrath of God, we are talking about the good news, odd though that may seem.

JMF: We tend to think of God's anger being just like ours, and ours is usually irrational. Even if it's somewhat justified, it still is not under control so well, and it's irrational, and we usually form poor conclusions while we're in that state of mind.

AT: Precisely. Not so with God. What we must not do is project those conceptions of human anger and wrath and frustration of will onto God, because if we do that, we don't have the biblical understanding of wrath. The theological mistake we make more than any other...is when we take human concepts, interpret them in the human context, and then project

them onto God.

There's a great example of Jesus dealing with that problem. After Peter's confession about the Christ, Jesus says that the Son of Man is going to suffer, and Peter becomes angry. He says, "No, there's no way we're going to allow this to happen," because Peter had a concept of messiah — and in the light of that prior concept in his mind, he was going to make sure that Jesus fitted that concept.

How did Jesus respond? The hardest comment that Jesus ever made was to Peter when he was doing that. "Get thee behind me, Satan." In other words, it is demonic to take a prior concept from human order and try to fit God into that prior human understanding. Why is it demonic? Because it's reversing revelation. It's turning revelation on its head. Revelation takes our human terms and fills them with new meaning — the meaning that is given them by the gospel and by God's involvement with us in the person of Christ. We must do that with the word "love," we must do that with "wrath." If we do the opposite, then we are not just impeding revelation, we're inverting it. To do that is demonic.

There's another remarkable example ...in some ways that feminist theology wanted to grasp but failed to think through. Jesus is concerned about our using terms and concepts that are not reconceived in the light of the gospel. For example, he doesn't like us using status symbols, "I'm a professor." Jesus would have been skeptical about my using the term professor. We're not to call anybody Rabbi. There's only one Rabbi "Call no man teacher," there's only one teacher, namely God.

Jesus saw the way human beings used the terminology of hierarchy to oppress or control and exert power over people. What does Jesus do? We're not allowed to use the term *teacher*. I'm not allowing you to use any term that people are going to use to oppress others and to control. Then he goes on and says, "And call no man father," because there's only one father.

If we're going to use the same term for God and humanity, then as Jesus saw, there's a potential for abuse. For male fathers, a term that's appropriately used of God, and then, as it were, taking that divine authority to themselves in some sense. If we're going to use a term "Father" of God, we're to call no man father. That is a dominical injunction. How many Christians do you know stopped using the term *father* of their male parent? Christian churches ignored that for 2000 years.

Had we obeyed Jesus, there would never have been any feminist

charges that it's oppressive to call God Father. The feminists are right, but there is a risk. If we call God Father and males father, then we, by association, give male parents a kind of authority, a superiority in the world order. We open the door to sexism. Jesus anticipated that. We're not to call anybody father, technically. I think what he means is this: We have got to be careful that every time we use terms of God they are radically commandeered and disentangled from any continuity with the human context, that is potentially oppressive.

So, back to the original question from *wrath*. If we use the term wrath of God, we must make sure that it is understood in the life and the totality of God's orientation to the world and to his people.

JMF: His redemptive purpose.

AT: Exactly. Every term that is used of God and God's purposes must be reconceived in the life of the gospel. The great theologian who was rigorous about this was John Calvin. Karl Barth, perhaps even more consistently than John Calvin. But Calvin set about doing that in his great work with the *Institutio*. Every term he sought to reconceive in light of biblical statements.

JMF: In that context, then let's talk about hell for a moment. What is hell? How should a Christian view hell?

AT: Hell is a place of separation from God. It's a place of godlessness.

JMF: Do you mean separation in the sense of alienation or in the sense of actual space?

AT: No, I think alienation. People standing against God, trying to live without God. There's much that needs to be said here. First, when Jesus used the term kingdom, we often thought about the kingdom of God in terms of heaven. One day the kingdom will be fully realized. But the kingdom's not at hand.

Just as the kingdom will be fully realized on one occasion, and yet is at hand at the moment, I think we have to say the same thing about hell. There's a sense...to the extent that we seek to live without God, we stand against God, and hell is already realized in some sense. The Bible seems to suggest that one day it will be fully realized for people who seek to stand against God. But that raises the question as to what we can say about the population of hell and how populated hell is. We get into very controversial territory. Can I speak to that for one moment?

Several things have got to be said, but they can be said very quickly. First, to the extent that hell is populated, it's populated by people who are

loved by God. God is love. God loves all of his creation unconditionally, and that never ends. Second, to the extent that hell is populated, it's populated by people for whom Christ died and whom Christ has *forgiven*.

People find that difficult to conceive. But just as we are to forgive 70 times 7, unconditionally, with no exception, so does Jesus. Jesus, as fellow human, wouldn't tell us to do something he wouldn't do himself. Jesus is God come as human. If God was telling us to do things that he wouldn't do himself, then there's no integrity in the gospel. Hell is populated by people who are loved and forgiven by God.

I think the most one can say is this: to the extent that hell is populated, it's populated by people whom God has allowed to opt to live against his purpose or live in isolation from him. If that happens and to the extent that that does happen, God is utterly distraught for eternity.

Finally, it is not possible to be a Christian and *want* hell to be populated. It's not possible. Why? Because we are to love our enemies. That means all our enemies. We're to love Hitler, right?

JMF: That's the first question that we hear. What about Adolf Hitler?

AT: We're somehow to love Hitler. That may be humanly impossible, but I believe that God loves Hitler, and one day, when we have that mind which was in Christ Jesus fully in us, we will be set free to love even Hitler.

JMF: In that day we would also have seen and taken part in everything that Hitler had taken away having been restored through Christ, wouldn't we?

AT: That's right. It will be a lot easier. We don't love what Hitler did. To love an evil person is not to love their evil. A final comment: I often have students come up to me and say that they had a grandparent that they loved who has just died, and they sadly weren't Christians, and they fear for their salvation. They find it puzzling — how could it be the case that God doesn't love the grandparent as much as *they* loved their grandparent? The only answer for that, is God loves the grandparent even though she or he wasn't a Christian, and infinitely more than they possibly could.

JMF: Right.

AT: When it comes to questions of the future destination of people, often the people whom we've loved and who have died, we just say this — the only God we know is a God who is all loving, all just, and all forgiving, who would never do anything that is contrary to his love, justice, and forgiveness. Therefore we can joyfully commit those people to God and trust those people with God, given that God loves them more than we

do.

I think there's good news even despite the biblical warning about hell. In the dominical warnings, Jesus speaks about hell. Although it does raise a question sometimes whether Jesus in some sense speaks to that in and through the cross and resurrection, whether we need to go back to what Jesus said and interpret it in the light of what he has done, because he descended to hell for us.

JMF: Yes. That's the reason he came, because of the reality of the consequences of separation and hell. Let's switch gears for a moment and ask about science. Is science a hindrance or a help to Christian faith?

AT: Good science is a wonderful gift of God. It's helping us understand God's creation, simple as that. To the extent that scientists are being genuinely scientific, interpreting the contingent order, creation out of itself in its own light, and are doing so truthfully and faithfully, it's a wonderful gift. Science can only function because of the intelligibility of the contingent order, and that intelligibility is given by God. It stems from the intelligence of the Creator. It's an extremely strong argument from science for the existence of God, if you're wanting to engage in arguments for the existence of God.

But there are problems in the scientific community, because there's a philosophy that's sometimes *confused* for science, called Naturalism. Naturalism is as old as the hills...well, not quite as the hills... but it's as old as civilization. The view goes back to the creation. It is a view that the world is basically a closed causal system that operates in indifference to questions of value, fairness, and so on. Certain forms of science, sometimes in the biological sciences this is more common, science wants to presuppose naturalism, the view that God does not exist.

We see that illustrated in Richard Dawkins's thought, for example. He believes that to be scientific is to repudiate the existence of God, to be an atheist. I am of the view that that is *not* scientific. Scientists should not be in the business of making theological claims – that is to go beyond the boundaries of scientific investigation.

How compatible, therefore, is the affirming of the existence of God with science? It's remarkable what's taken place in the last 30 years. We've seen in the last 30 years the most significant developments in philosophy and Christian philosophy since Thomas Aquinas. In 1974 I started a four-year philosophy degree. In those days, there was a man called G.L. Mackey who was of the view that it was logically incoherent

to be a Christian theist. You could count the number of Christian philosophers on the fingers of a mutilated hand, to be frank. The vast majority of analytic philosophers repudiated theism.

In the space of only 30 years, that situation has changed profoundly. Now, at least one in four analytic philosophers in North America, which is where analytic philosophy is at its finest, is a theist; the vast majority of those are Christian theists.

In 2001, one of the world's leading atheist philosophers, Quentin Smith, wrote an article (and this is going back to the science issue) in the journal he edited, which was called *Philo...* a journal of the Humanist Philosopher's Association, with every leading atheist philosopher on its board — all the brains behind Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett and so on. His article was a 10,000-word article called “The Meta-Philosophy of Naturalism” — a look at the philosophical underpinnings of naturalism — that's the atheistic philosophy of Dawkins and his book.

In that article he establishes that the Christian philosophers, this new breed of Christian philosophers (led by Alvin Plantinga, the greatest living Christian philosopher, one of the greatest philosophers), have beaten the atheists, the naturalist philosophers. At every key point, their writings are more logically rigorous, more cognizant. His article was a clarion call to atheists to get their act together if they're not going to be swamped by the quality of Christian philosophy.

One of the things that's emerged out of the Christian philosophers was the number of arguments that stem from contemporary science for the existence of God. One of the factors that the Christian philosophers have been writing about recently is the fine-tuning of the universe. The chances of carbon emerging are infinitesimally small. Other factors, ranging to Planck time and so on.

I won't go into the details right now, but the factors, the chances of this universe occurring in the way it is, such that there can be life on this planet, is just an unthinkable small number. We're talking about factors such as 1 in 10 to the power of 60 in one of the fine tunings — in another fine tuning, 1 in 10 to the power of 43. But the difference between 1 in 10 to the power of 43 and 1 in 10 to the power of 42, we're talking about massively small chances. And 10 to the 43 is 10 with 43 zeroes after it. Similar is the chances of there being a planet in which you and I can sit here being filmed engaging in intelligent conversation are unthinkable small. Science has no explanation for that. Science can't explain the intelligibility of the con-

tingent order. It can't explain why there's something rather than nothing.

One of the attempts to explain fine tuning on the part of atheists is called the "multi-verse theory," which suggests that there's a new infinite or infinite number of random universe occurings, one of which just happens to look like it's been designed. But then there would need to be a mechanism to produce all these random potential universe occurings. Where would that come from? That still wouldn't explain why there's something rather than nothing.

There's a vast number of fundamental questions which are beyond the bounds of science, that science will not be able to answer, which theism answers very straightforward. In other words, theism has spectacular and unparalleled explanatory power. That's something to bear in mind when we get media from everywhere bombarding us with the atheism of people like the Dennetts and the Dawkinses of this world, and Sam Harris, and so on. The quality of the arguments and the final answer don't even begin to touch the quality of the arguments that are being offered right now by the world's leading Christian philosophers.

JMF: Do you have a suggestion for a lay person who might want to read a book that would help them along those lines? What would it be?

AT: John Polkinghorne has written some very useful books, and David Wilkinson of Durham has written some successful books. The person that I would encourage everyone to engage with is Alvin Plantinga. A great many of the articles he has written on God and science are on the internet, so you don't need to fork out for a book to become familiar with the issues. Scotsmen will never fork out if we don't have to.

BEING IN CHRIST

J. Michael Feazell: Paul wrote to the Colossians that God was in Christ reconciling *all things* to himself. What are the implications of that for how human beings live together?

Alan Torrance: The word Paul uses is *apokatalasso*. That is the word for “to reconcile,” and it means, technically, “exchange.” It summarizes what you were saying earlier about redemption. You can summarize the whole of redemption and salvation in that verse...God was in Christ bringing about an exchange — taking what is ours, our alienated, sinful, fallen humanity — and healing it and transforming it. God is in Christ taking what is ours in order to give us what is his. What is his? It’s a life of communion characterized by unconditional love and unconditional forgiveness. When we are given by the Spirit to participate in Christ... The phrase “in Christ” appears in Paul 154 times. That’s the heart of Christian life, is being *en Christo* in Greek, participating in Christ.

To come to your question...what are the implications of this for how we live in society? To be a Christian is to be given the eyes to see and the ears to hear every facet of life in that light. To be a Christian is to think out of Christ in every situation. It’s never possible to bracket our Christian life out as something that happens on Sundays, or concerns our private piety. To be a Christian is to think about science, politics, every facet of our lives in the light of what it is to be *en Christo*. If we are re-created to be *en Christo*, if our being is defined by our participation in the body of Christ, then every facet of our lives has to re-thought in that light.

I had the privilege to spend two years in a North American based research group, with Miroslav Wolf, Nicholas Wolterstorff and two others, thinking about the implications, the ramifications, of reconciliation — of this reconciliation — for our political engagement. I think it means this: We shouldn't advocate anything, not least in politics, that doesn't reflect what it is to be in Christ. You don't pray one thing and vote another. There's got to be integrity and consistence in that. Christians (and this is what it means to be the salt of the earth) should work for reconciliation at the horizontal level everywhere they find themselves.

For example, if you're a Christian in politics and you're seeking to engage with terrorists or situations of conflict, you have to allow the truth of that verse to infuse and inform and direct your thinking in every respect. Does reconciliation mean ignoring terrorism or aggression? Emphatically not. But instead of simply enacting revenge or retribution, we should have an eye to thinking what is it that we can do, what is it we can (if we are politicians) inspire in our voters that will lead to genuine reconciliation, because that's what God desires. What can we do that will generate healing and a restoration of good relationships?

To be a human being is to be created in the image of God, in the *imago dei*, as we often hear. We are to image, to reflect, to correspond, to who God is in all that we are. That's in the Torah, the Jewish law, the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord thy God who has brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Therefore, as I am unconditionally faithful to you and have been, so must you be faithful to me, have no other gods before me, and be faithful to each other." That is to image God, to be in the image of God, that's what the *imago dei* is talking about. It's not talking about some innate human capacity. It's talking about the form of human existence corresponding to God's relationship to us.

Jesus summed up the law as to love God, and our neighbors as ourselves. He was talking about something that should impact every facet of our existences. To be lights in this world, to be the salt of the earth, is for Christians to have the courage, sometimes against the stream of popular opinion, to work for reconciliation, restoration, healing, and to think radically and creatively as to what is going to bring that about.

If every Christian in the West were to think out of the Christian faith, just imagine the priorities that would be manifest in our political decision making. This is controversial — we like to keep religion and politics

separate. I don't see any Christian endorsement of that. If every politician in the West who was voted into their office by Christians were to seek to enact those insights, the world would be a massively happier place, and the West could be seen as committed to reconciliation, to healing, to being concerned for the poor, for prioritizing, liberating two-thirds of the world from the extreme financial hardship and the disease and so on that causes so much grief. If that was what the eyes of our critics, our enemies saw when they looked to the West, a group of nations committed to making, to creating a reconciled world characterized by mutual care and concern, we'd be far more influential, there would be much more peace in this world.

There's always going to be evil. We're still left with situations where there's always going to be, I'm afraid, terrorism, hostility, and greed, and sometimes (I'm not a pacifist, I'd love to be) we've got to take actions to try to ensure the best possible outcome for all concerned (though, as Stanley Hauerwas suggests, we've got to respect pacifists, because they have a strong doctrine of divine providence).

In everything we do and however we do it, the aim, the goal, must be *shalom*. Not just our own peace and well-being, but the peace and well-being of our enemies. The gospel is radical. The incarnation has radical implications. It should impact every facet of the way we live, vote, think, spend our money, and behave. Nothing would be more exciting than if the church had the courage, and it does take courage, to be that radical...

JMF: Christians don't ever seem to come close in making that happen as a worldwide body. There are so many denominations, sects and splits. They don't get along with each other; they're divided against each other. How do we account for such division among Christians when we're called to such radical living together as the body of Christ?

AT: You've put your finger on the tragedy of contemporary Christian existence. It's a terrible witness that the body of Christ... We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic church. That's an article of faith to believe, that there's one church, because there's one body, just as there's one Christ, there's one body of Christ. To the extent that we are Christians, we are one, and we must be conceived as being one. Does the world see one body of Christ? One united communion of the body of Christ? I'm afraid it doesn't. It sees a lot of Christian individuals driven by pride, very often—sometimes at war with each other. Look at the tragedy of events in Northern Ireland; look at what we've seen in South Africa. The German

Christians—Hitler couldn't have come to power without the support, I'm afraid, of the *Deutsche* Christians, the German Christians.

You question why things are the way they are? Here's a one-word answer: sin, or pride (which is the other side of the same coin). Many people want to go for a kind of ecumenism, which means that we form big bodies and we form federations – where the churches talk to each other and they've got good relationships with each other. What would our Lord want to see? He'd want to see one body of Christ characterized by radical communion and a coherent collective witness which has real integrity. He'd want to see love and forgiveness and mutual understanding. The church is divided because it doesn't have the mind of Christ. Christ only has one mind (unless we're going to delve into dramatic debates). The mind of Christ which is in Christ Jesus should characterize the body of Christ, and therefore to be an evangelical, to be a Christian, is to strive for that.

Look right and left, look at the people who belong to churches with whom you disagree, and you've got to say to yourself, “that is a tragedy, and what can we do together to find ways of not just being or possessing the mind of Christ, but embodying it within the world, because the divisions in the church are a terrible witness.” When I was involved in missions (Howard Marshall and I used to run missions together) I went around doors and the continual complaint was, “How can you Christians offer good news to the world? You can't even agree amongst yourselves.”

JMF: Where we see communion and union in the body of Christ is among individuals and among pastors of various denominations who come together for working together, and they bypass what amounts to the institutionalism, the entrenched structures of churches and so on. They work around that in ways that reflect the body of Christ in individual ways. This is where we see what needs to be seen.

AT: That is what it is to be true to the gospel. It also means that we have to work within our churches to bring about change — so we can find constructive ways forward together with other churches and have high aims. I think denominational division of the kind we have at the moment is a handicap. To be evangelical is to be ecumenical. The sad thing is, ecumenism and evangelicalism have often been polarized.

JMF: They originate at the heads of or in the context of institutionalism, which itself is not Christianity but institutionalism.

AT: Precisely. We've got to move, to get beyond institutionalism.

JMF: It happens with people on the ground who are living out their faith...

AT: Usually the problem is establishment religion or civil religion. For example, in Scotland...very often, to be a Scot is to belong to the Church of Scotland, as I do, and to be part of that establishment. Establishment religion is not participation in the body of Christ. I don't think there's any place for establishment religion. We're called beyond that, and we must do all we can to liberate the gospel from those forms of civil religion.

JMF: In the micro context of a family, where perhaps a husband is abusing a wife — this is not uncommon — and sometimes the church tells her that she needs to reconcile with this man who abuses her, and so ...do we sometimes confuse the forgiveness and the reconciliation of the spirit with some kind of requirement to go back under the authority of this person who is bound to abuse her again?

AT: We should never advocate in the name of reconciliation a situation of sustained abuse. That is to turn reconciliation on its head, and as I am trying to explain, reconciliation is about being given to participate in what is Christ's. Abuse within a family context is widespread; it's a massive problem, not least within the Christian church.

When there's abuse going on, the church has an absolute obligation (apodictic obligation) to stop that, to put an end to that abuse. How could we possibly give and communicate good news to a woman who is being abused by a husband by telling her to acknowledge his authority or anything of that kind? That is not the gospel. The gospel is to affirm the dignity and humanity of that woman, and do everything in our power to liberate her from the powers that would oppress and exploit, in this case, perhaps a violent or abusive husband.

I often think that the church should be much more outspoken about the problems of abuse within family life. One of the tragedies, sometimes, is this aligning of God's fatherhood with human fatherhood and suggesting that fathers are somehow superior. Then they talk about the divine wrath! I know one Calvinist theologian who thinks he's got grounds for what I think is fairly abusive discipline of his children, because he's got to enact, as the image of the Father, "godly discipline." He takes the belt from around his trousers and belts his children. That is precisely what Jesus was opposing. Every facet of Jesus' ministry was opposing that.

Family life and marriages should be contexts of *shalom* where people should be liberated to be free to be themselves, to know what it is to be

loved. A family is not being a family in truth unless it's being the body of Christ in truth. The body of Christ is a radically inclusive, affirming, liberative communion. We've got to take these issues seriously. It is not surprising that feminist thinkers have been so concerned about abuses that have gone on within (let's face it) often very patriarchal forms of Christianity. These have only emerged because we've failed to be true to the gospel, as to Jesus' clear injunctions. We've got to work continually to oppose those forms of sin.

JMF: In the time we have left, would you mind sharing some personal reflections about your father, J.B. Torrance, and your uncle, T.F. Torrance?

AT: I was incredibly privileged. I was brought up in a wonderful home. I remember my father once said to me, "In the light of Matthew 23 (that statement about calling no man father) and in the light of the gospel," he once said to me, "Alan, biologically I'm your father, but Christianly speaking, you and I are brothers." As I was growing up, there was discipline, I'd get into trouble and he'd discipline me, but never in a way that it wasn't — and didn't make his love for me unambiguously clear.

From my later teens on, my father always treated me like a brother. Because he believed, if we're going to think out of Christ, *en Christo*, in Christ, that is who we were. We had the most wonderful relationship. Even when I was 16 or 17, he'd discuss all sorts of family decisions with my sisters and myself — which is quite unusual to do in Scotland, which is a very traditional culture. If we were going to buy a house or the way we'd spend money, we'd all talk about it as a family, and my parents would involve us in major family decisions. It was a radically inclusive relationship. But for dad, what was always transparent was the fact that it was his Christian conviction that was informing every facet of his treatment of us.

There are some remarkable memories. I'll just take one that stands out, for this is a wonderful incidence. Christmas was always a very formal time in our family because we used to get together, all the aunts and uncles and so on, and we all dressed up in our Sunday best. Boxing Day, the day after Christmas, was fun, very often, because all the same food was there, but then we'd be there together as a family and relaxed, and it was a great fun day. On one particular Boxing Day, we all sat down to lunch and there was a turkey and all the trimmings, and all the remains of the Christmas provision was distributed amongst all the family.

We sat down, and dad had just said prayers, and there was a ring at the front doorbell. I thought, “Who comes to the front door at 1:00 on...” Dad and I went to the front door, he opened the door, and there was a tramp. It was freezing cold out there. He said to my father, “I’m terribly sorry to bother you at this time, but I was wondering if you could provide me with some bread...it’s a difficult time to get food over Christmas.” Do you know what dad did? Ushered him into the house right straight through to the dining room and put him at his place in front of his food. All the Christmas food had been distributed.

Dad went through to the kitchen and got some bean and egg together... that was dad’s lunch. That tramp ate dad’s feast. He made that tramp feel as if he belonged in the family. My dad lived his life, and with that mind which is in Christ Jesus, and my mother was a great partner in that. It was a privilege.

My uncle Tom, T.F. Torrance, is a wonderful, wonderful uncle. I lived with him for a year. When I was at university, my parents moved, thus I lived with uncle Tom. It was a year of enormous intellectual stimulation – we had fabulous discussions. He had a spectacular sense of humor – we laughed till tears came down. He would pray for me. On one occasion I had broken up with a girlfriend and I was very distraught, and he took me into his study and he prayed with me. So I was very privileged.

These are both men who are theologians, totally committed churchmen that had a vision of what it was to share by the Spirit in the incarnate Son’s communion with the Father. They sought to see every facet of their lives in that light. Earlier, you mentioned ethics. Ethics, like worship, is a gift of participation by the Spirit in the incarnate Son’s communion with the Father. It’s interesting that *worship*, and worth-ship, *ethics*, are the same word. There should be no dichotomy between them. In other words, every facet of our human life is a gift by the Spirit of sharing in the incarnate Son’s communion with the Father.

THE GRACE OF THE FINISHED WORK OF CHRIST

Michael Morrison: David, it's a pleasure to have you here.

David Torrance: Thank you. It's a privilege to be here.

MM: I'd like to begin by finding out who you are. I associate the name Torrance with Thomas and James, and you're the third brother?

DT: The third brother. Yes. The youngest.

MM: You have all studied theology and written on theology.

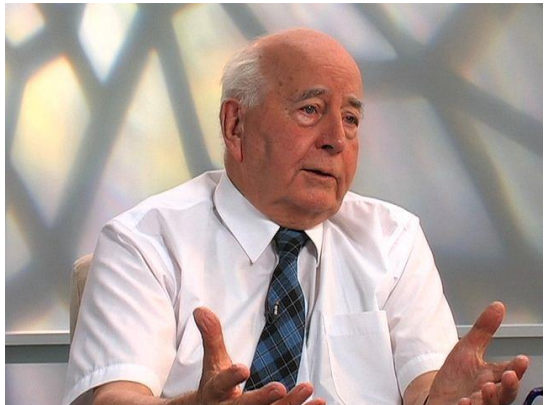
DT: My brothers have. I...rather more modestly, I'll put it that way.

MM: You've helped in writing some of the books, haven't you?

DT: Tom and I edited 12 volumes of John Calvin's *New Testament Commentaries* from Latin to English. That was a big effort. That's still in print. That was quite a while ago. Various other articles and so on in journals.

MM: But you didn't go into an academic teaching role like your brothers did.

DT: No. I embarked on the same course at university...went through



classics, honors philosophy, Bachelor of Divinity, specialized in Dogmatics and Christology, as they did. I also went on and studied on under Karl Barth and Oscar Cullman as they did. Then I began to question what I called an academic career, to the parish ministry. I thought I was called to parish ministry, and I believe that's so. I've enjoyed it immensely.

The joy of parish ministry

MM: What's been the most enjoyable part of your work?

DT: When people are converted, they discover the reality of salvation and new life in Christ—it's a tremendous joy. It's a tremendous privilege to be allowed to be present when someone comes to Christ, or again, when people's faith is deepened and they come to a new sense of freedom in Christ. I don't think there's any job that's more satisfying than ministry. I didn't believe that at one time. It was quite a struggle for me to enter the ministry, but having entered it now, it was a marvelous calling.

MM: Many pastors, in the U.S. at least, drop out. There's a high turnover rate because of the demands of the job. You've had a different experience as a parish minister. What's the key to your role in leading a parish? Why do you see so much joy in it, whereas they might see a burden?

DT: The key to the ministry is to keep your eye on Jesus Christ—Jesus the Son of God, Jesus who became man, who lived, who died, who rose again, ascended. Here we are face to face with God the Father, God the mighty Creator and our Redeemer. If he is central in our ministry, then our ministry should grow more exciting and fresher as the years go by. Take your eyes off that, and we could try and carry though the responsibilities of ministry on our own strength, and people fail.

Put it a different way: I feel strongly that (I think this to myself) if you look at ministry today, probably 90 percent of all our preaching is telling people what to do. We lay tremendous burdens on the congregation. Our congregations get weary and tired, and many slip away. The ministers themselves get frustrated and leave. They're trying to go ahead in ministry, but under their own steam, using their own efforts, their own resources.

I believe strongly that in the ministry we are called to proclaim Christ, the person of Christ. We can't separate the person of Christ from his work and the atonement. That's what we are here to proclaim, so that predominately, our preaching should be the person of Christ and the atonement. If we keep our eye on Christ and seek to present Christ to the

world...this is something exciting, something living and alive...we see people coming face-to-face with God in Jesus Christ. That is an exciting thing. I thoroughly enjoyed the ministry. I still do.

Christ has done everything for us

MM: How would you describe what Christ has done for us? Why are people so excited about it? I could have my word for it, what's yours?

DT: He's done *everything* for us. When Christ came into the world, we read in John's Gospel, he said, "I have come that you may have life, life more abundant, life to the absolute full." When we come to Christ, we are coming face-to-face with God, we're entering into the family of God, but we're discovering life itself, and that's a good thing.

MM: Does that mean I don't need to do anything?

DT: No, I wouldn't say that. God has done everything for us in Christ. Christ has come, Christ has redeemed us. When Christ on the cross said, "It is finished," that was a triumphant call, the triumphant shout of a victor. He's done everything for our salvation. All we can do is accept it.

Many years ago (I mentioned that I was involved in mission) when Billy Graham carried out an "All Scotland Crusade" in Edinburgh in 1955, some 2000 people went forward in his crusade in Edinburgh district. I was heavily involved in the follow-up. We had classes for them for 12 weeks. We took away 800 or 900 in three residential conferences.

I became involved in conversation with a man who was an office-bearing elder in the church, a fine man. He said, "I've done everything that Billy Graham has asked. I came forward, repented, prayed, asked Christ into my life." He said, "I never seemed to have got there." As I listened to him, I said, "You know what you've got to learn? Nothing at all."

He was startled. I said, "You've got to learn to do absolutely nothing, because when Christ said on the cross, 'It is finished,' he's done everything for your salvation, and there's nothing left for you to do except to say *thank you*, and to go on and on saying *thank you*. Your thanksgiving is your acceptance." I still see that man in my mind's eye as it broke home to him. You could see his face relax, and he laughed. The whole burden had departed. He was set free to live, and to share the gospel with other people.

MM: He had been trying too hard.

DT: One of the disasters of the Christian church today...I love the church, I grew up in it...is that we tend to say, God has done his part in

Jesus Christ. Christ has come, he's died, he's redeemed—now it's over to us. We call on people to do their part. We say: come, repent, believe, pray, worship, read the Bible. But we're throwing a tremendous responsibility back on the people.

MM: Do this, do that.

DT: ...so that their salvation, to put it crudely, we're saying that salvation is partly what God does and partly what you do. That's wrong. It's entirely of God, and all we've got to do is to thank him, and that must be a wholehearted thanksgiving. It's a total letting go, a total surrender.

MM: If we realize what a gift it is, then we are thankful.

DT: Absolutely. It is a total thanksgiving where we thank God with our whole being. The Psalmist said that in Psalm 103: "Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and all that is within me, bless, praise, his holy name." It's that thanksgiving where we're letting go... we accept the wonder of what God has done in Christ. We're receiving new life. In that freedom, there's joy.

MM: If he's done everything and he gives that to us, theologically, that's grace. People misunderstand grace, though.

DT: Grace is a tremendous outpouring of the love of God in Jesus Christ. God, our Creator, came in incredible love to give himself to us in Jesus Christ—to give himself in his love, in his forgiveness, in his continuing redemption. If we were to stand under a waterfall, we'd be drenched, we'd be soaked. You and I stand under the waterfall, as it were, the outpouring of God's love and grace, of his forgiveness, of his redemption. That's grace, the outpouring of the love of God, because we don't deserve anything.

We deserve nothing. But God, as love, comes and gives himself to us, forgives us, redeems us, gives us life, through the Holy Spirit brings us in, we are adopted into the family of God, able to call God Father. Know that we are in Christ, sons and daughters of God, heirs of the everlasting kingdom. That all is a free and abundant gift. That's grace.

MM: You said not just that he gives forgiveness, but he gives us *himself*.

DT: We can never separate the grace of God from the person of Christ. One of the great, dare I say, sins of the church through the ages is to separate the person of Christ and the work of Christ and separate Christ from grace. The medieval church was tempted to believe that grace is something that the church possesses, something that the church can dispense. That's nonsense. We can be possessed by Christ, but we can't

possess Christ. Grace is wrapped up with the person of Christ and across the work of Christ, because we can't separate them.

The covenant of grace

MM: You talk about grace as God giving himself to us. But he also gives us forgiveness, and he gives us a promise of what he's done, of what he will be for us. That's kind of a covenant that he makes with us, this covenant of grace. In Reformed traditions, a covenant of grace is a key term. Maybe you could explain more about what it means.

DT: Covenant grace is exceedingly important. Ultimately God made a covenant of grace with all mankind, and that covenant embraced all creation. Within that covenant, God made an inner covenant with Israel when he called his people of Israel into partnership with himself for the redemption of the world.

In Jeremiah 13, we have this astonishing statement – God says, “As a man would bind a belt around his waist, I have taken my people Israel and bound them onto me around my waist.” He will never let them go for the working out of his salvation. In a wider sense, God has come and made a covenant of grace with all humankind in order that he might redeem humankind, in order that he might work out his salvation. That covenant of grace is where God, who is absolutely holy, comes in love in tremendous condescension and binds to himself a sinful people. Israel was a sinful people, a representative people of all of us.

In a wider sense, God has bound all of us to himself—an eternal bond of grace so that we can't escape the grace of God. We can't escape the embrace of God. This is a great mystery. The fact that God in all his holiness bound a sinful people to himself meant that Israel suffered, because in their sin they rebelled, and yet God in his love would not let them go, because he's determined to strip away their sin and redeem them. In that extraordinary painful situation, Israel passed through a situation when she had shattered herself on the rock of God's love.

Ultimately, that's what we're faced with on the cross because that is gathered up in Jesus Christ. In Christ, God has bound the whole world to himself so that when Jesus is a particular man, he's a representative man linked to all creation in an everlasting bond. He's taken hold of all humankind so that when Jesus died, we all died. It's one of the things I've often pondered. In 2 Corinthians 5, when Christ died, we died. What does that mean? It means that our natural death...well, there's no such thing as

a natural death. We die because Christ died. We're joined to Christ in his incredible bond of grace. The fact that Christ rose again means that all of us will rise again in the resurrection.

Here's the mystery—that sin has interposed between us and God so that, as Jesus says in John 5, whereas we are all resurrected, “some will be resurrected unto righteousness, some unto condemnation.” Grace is where God comes in love giving himself to us. Not only giving himself to us, but becoming us and remaining himself holy, and yet at the same time becoming *us* in order to redeem us, to cleanse away our sin, and to give us new life, that we might enter into the fellowship of God in Jesus Christ.

There are many aspects of creation, of grace. For us to accept us it, it must be whole-hearted...it's an all or nothing. It's a letting go in thankfulness, and then we accept all that God has done, all his love, we accept life, and joy, and salvation.

The importance of forgiveness

It equally means that our lives must be transformed, if we forgive one another. If we don't forgive one another, we're not able to receive the grace of God. That I find important, because in the ordinary practical ministry, you meet that again and again. There are divisions in the church. Church people, Christian people, find that they cannot forgive their neighbor. That lack of forgiveness means that there is a barrier between them and God. It will hinder their faith. It's the spirit of evil. Grace means that we receive the love, the forgiveness of God, but in receiving it, we must allow the grace of God to flow through us, and we forgive one another.

An interesting case of that: Some years ago I had a meeting in the headquarters of our church in central Edinburgh. It was a morning meeting, and I agreed to meet my wife afterwards for lunch. Our meeting ended early, and I was standing just outside the church offices waiting for my wife. I was idly dreaming, my mind was far away, and I suddenly heard a voice accosting me and saying, “Are you a holy man?”

I had never been called a holy man before, and my first inclination was to laugh. But he was a man, an Indian, looking at me, very serious. Instead of laughing, I said, “Well, I try to be a holy man.” He told me a story. He had come over to study engineering. He had come from a strong Hindu background; I think he had been Brahman. He had been converted in Scotland, and he said for a while he was full of the joy of the Lord, and in

a week's time was due to be baptized. But something had happened, and all the joy had departed. He said, "What's wrong with me?" Quite a challenge.

I said, "Only God knows. I can make a few suggestions. You alone will know whether any of these suggestions ring a bell and are true for you. Maybe you stopped praying, maybe you stopped reading the Bible, stopped going to church, perhaps you've been disobedient to God and done some things wrong, perhaps you can't forgive someone who has hurt you."

He suddenly said, "That's it." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "That's it. Forgiveness." Someone had done something or said something or hurt him badly, and he couldn't forgive.

I didn't ask him what the situation was, but I said, "If that's the case, you can forgive. That has come in between you and the Lord, and you've got to allow God to work through you and give you the grace to forgive. Forgiveness is not a human quality. You can't, out of your own resources, forgive someone who's hurt you. Forgiveness is a gift of God. All you can do is to tell the Lord the situation and ask God to give you the gift to forgive. If you do that, you'll find peace with God."

So I said, "Shall we pray?" We stood there and prayed together, and off he went. About three days later I got a lovely letter from him. He said he'd gone off, found this person, and been reconciled. He said all the joy of the Lord was back, and that's very important.

MM: It reminds me of the Lord's Prayer, where Jesus said if you do not forgive, you will not be forgiven.

DT: Absolutely.

MM: You're saying that even though God does everything for us, our relationship with others somehow is clogging the pipeline or something or God's gifts don't reach us...

DT: Very much so. That is a common factor in the parish ministry. In one parish I was talking to one of the people, and she told me that she had never talked to her daughter for 12 years. I said, "You can't say the Lord's prayer, you know." "Oh, but you don't know my daughter." (She lives in a different part of the country.) I said, "No. I don't. But I don't really know you, do I?"

I said, "Whatever the situation, God has forgiven us for everything, and we don't deserve it. It's a free gift. He loves us. He's forgiven us. That means that he's asking you to show that forgiveness to your daughter,

whatever the situation. You're commanded by God to go and phone your daughter and to tell her you love her and forgive her." I said that rather frank. Two days later she called me over and told me, "I talked to my daughter the first time in 12 years, and things are put right." Yes, it lies at the very heart of the Lord's Prayer and is very basic... It's a practical thing in the ministry.

The other important thing about grace, forgiveness, is that forgiveness is prior to repentance. God forgives, and we are called to receive that forgiveness, but he doesn't forgive on condition that we repent. Conditional repentance has crept into, I suppose, all the churches. Sadly, it's crept into my own church in Scotland.

Calvin and Knox, our Scottish reformer, followed the teaching in Scripture that God comes, and he's forgiven us in Christ, and we are summoned to repent. We are summoned to receive. But because of sinful human nature, we have turned it around that God forgives *if* we repent—on condition. So in the church in Scotland we have what we call a *Book of Common Order*, and that is an outline of suggested services for various usages and forms of worship. We have another *Book of Common Order* for use in what we call the courts of the church. The minister is ordained, inducted to a parish, and so forth. In those services, say for an ordination of a minister or induction to a charge, there is what we call a preamble, a statement of what's happening, and we have the words that "God offers forgiveness upon repentance." Every time I hear that, I squirm. Forgiveness upon repentance. Forgiveness if you repent. It's conditional. No.

In my own experience, I joined as a soldier in 1942, a long time ago. Before going abroad, I served for a period in England and used to join a small group, about 12 or 15 other soldiers, for friendship, Bible study, and prayer. Despite my Reformed upbringing, I was somewhat influenced at the time by this presentation of the gospel, which is conditional repentance. If you repent, God will forgive you.

That troubled me, so I found myself praying and trying to confess all the sins that I could remember, to receive forgiveness of God. In this process, my prayers got longer and longer as I tried to remember and confess all the sins. I found myself probably confessing sins I hadn't really committed because if I don't repent, how do I get forgiveness? Then the question came, but what about the sins you don't remember? I tried to answer that by saying, "Lord, have mercy on me. I am a sinner." That

covers a lot.

But then the question: How do you know you're repenting? I had no answer to that, and that really troubled me, because if I didn't repent, I would have no forgiveness. How can I be sure? Sometime after that I was reading Romans 6 in Greek (I studied Greek in school) and it hit me powerfully. If you take verses 2-6, the aorist tense, that's a past tense, that when Christ died, something very decisive in repentance happened: I died with him. And when he rose, I rose with him. That happened a long time ago, before I was born, 2000 years ago.

It hit me powerfully that Christ had died, he had risen, he had forgiven me before I sinned, before I was born. It was all done and completed. All I was asked to do was to receive it in thanksgiving. If I didn't receive it, I was lost. We're not compelled to receive it. Hell is real. But the fact that all I was called to do was the thanksgiving, was a tremendous relief to me. You are just full of joy, the assurance, and never again did I doubt it.

MM: You accepted that *you* had come to the point where you see in parishioners that was so exciting, whenever they come to that realization that God has done it for them, for all of us...already.

DT: Right. Last April I was preaching on the subject of grace and the fact that God has done everything for us and all we have to do is thanksgiving. I was preaching in the morning with a lay preacher, what we call a reader, taking the evening service. Shaking hands at the door after the service, this man, all he could do was laugh. He said, "I've been set free. I've been set free. I've been set free." He just kept repeating it. He said, "Set free after 30 years." He didn't explain, there wasn't time to explain, people were going out shaking hands with him.

We had a coffee after the service. I went into the church hall and again he said, "I've been set free." He said for 30 years he had had with him the lack of assurance. He said, "I came to the point that I felt I had to give up. How could I preach? How could I try to help other people when I'm not certain myself?" But he said, "I've been set free." He was full of joy. He said, "This woman, you speak to her, she's been set free as well." I find that moving. It's where we in the church have failed to present Christ and the finished work of Christ. I feel it very strongly... I found it in my own life, and I try to preach it.

NOT I, BUT CHRIST

The faith of Christ

MM: You've been a parish minister for many years, and you've seen God's grace being given to people in the parish, and you see how people respond to that with faith. I'd like to ask you about what faith is.

DT: Faith is very important. I hesitate to use the word, a theological term – faith is bipolar. Are we justified by Christ's faith or by my faith? We're not justified, I'm not justified by my faith. My faith can go up and down, and sometimes be almost nonexistent, sadly. I'm justified by Christ's faith, the faith of Christ. My faith is important, but my faith is really a response to the faith of Christ. The primary thing is Christ's faith.

When we look at the New Testament, Galatians 2:20, I am crucified with Christ, but the life that I now live I live by the faith *of* Jesus Christ...*of* the Son of God. I don't know of any modern translation of Scripture that uses that translation. Every modern translation of Scripture that I know of says "faith *in* Christ." That means to me that the translators have altered the Greek to make faith *in* Christ. If it's "faith *in* Christ," in Greek you'd have a preposition and the dative, *in* Christ. But the Greek is not that. It's the genitive: *of* Christ. So...the life I live, I live by the faith *of* the Son of God.

That comes out many times in the New Testament. In Romans 3, Paul has been talking about the righteousness of God apart from the law, which is by the faith *of* Jesus Christ. Modern translations say faith *in* Jesus Christ. But am I justified by *my* faith in Christ? Never. I'm justified by Christ's

faith. My faith is a response to that. So if you say “the faith of Christ,” that’s the Authorized Version, we’re laying the whole weight of our salvation upon Jesus Christ.

If you think back to the Old Testament, the great lesson of the Old Testament, which Israel found hard to learn, was that salvation is entirely an act of God. God delivered Israel out of Egypt. They couldn’t deliver themselves out of Egypt. That was entirely an act of God.

Such is human sin that very shortly after that, Moses went up on Mt. Sinai, he was away for 40 days...they prevailed on Aaron to make them a golden calf. We have these words, “Here are the gods which brought you out of Egypt.” That golden calf, you might say, they were paying lip service to the fact that their deliverance was an act of God, but it was an act of their own human ingenuity and strength. That’s a great sin — that by their own strength they could deliver themselves. The great lesson they had to learn was no, they’d been saved entirely by an act of God.

When God gave his word that was revealed through Moses, he gave them the laws of worship. All those laws of worship which accompanied the word were to teach Israel they could only worship God in God’s way, and therefore these laws of worship are given meticulously. The tent, in every detail, the furniture of the building, every detail of worship, in the sacrifices and the great feasts were given to them. They could not worship in their own way, they had to worship only in God’s way because each of these forms of worship and sacrifices are symbolic, representing God breaking through to make atonement for the people.

They are given circumcision. They were a sinful people, and yet a reminder that despite their sin, God, the Holy God, had entered into a covenant of grace binding them to himself. That circumcision, that perpetual reminder that they were sinful, a perpetual reminder that despite their sin God had bound himself to them in a bond of love, was a symbol anticipating the day when God himself would come and break through to be cut off, circumcised for his people.

The great lesson all through the Old Testament was: salvation is entirely of God, not of us. That’s the great lesson that’s picked up in the New Testament, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, encapsulated, if you like, in that phrase, “The life I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God.”

Take the two parables in Luke 15 — the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin. If we ask ourselves who suffers by the loss...there’s no indication the sheep was the least bothered by being lost, and certainly the coin wasn’t bothered because it couldn’t feel a thing. It was the owner who

felt the loss. It was the owner who suffered. It was the owner who took the initiative, who came in search of the lost, and who searched and went on searching until he finds, and then rejoices.

We have in those two parables a gathering up of the whole story of the gospel. It is encapsulated in those two parables. Here is God who feels the loss of this world, of humankind who are lost to God — not lost in the geographical sense, but lost in the sense that men and women are no longer living in fellowship with God. God feels that loss. He suffers. God takes initiative. God comes and searches and searches, and that search takes him to the cross and to the resurrection, and God rejoices. Those two parables set up the whole story of the gospel.

It shows that the gospel is totally different from every other religion in the world. Every other religion is concerned with man seeking to obey certain rules and regulations in order to achieve salvation. It's what man can do, how man can work out his salvation. The gospel is entirely different. It's a joyful announcement that God has come in Jesus Christ. God has searched, in the cross and resurrection. Here God finds and restores and God rejoices. That's a glorious thing.

So that little phrase in Galatians 2:20 rounds out a number of passages in the New Testament. We are saved by Christ, by Christ's faithfulness. We've got to respond, we've got to receive, and that is a wholehearted receiving. It's a wholehearted surrender.

MM: That's our faith that comes in?

DT: That's our faith, but our faith is a response to his faith. Jesus' faith is prior.

MM: But if we are saved by his faith, don't we have to do anything, or has he done it all for us?

DT: He's done it all for us. Absolutely everything. There's nothing left for us to do but to accept in thanks. If you come and give me a present, a gift, what can I do? I can answer, "No, I don't want that" and turn away, or I could say, "Thank you" and simply accept. God comes to us and offers himself to us, he offers his forgiveness, his gift of life. All we can do is accept it or reject it. As we say thank you, that's our acceptance.

MM: Doesn't the New Testament say that we *should* have faith in Christ?

DT: Indeed. We are called to believe. But what does that mean? Faith isn't something that we produce out of ourselves out of our own resources. It's a response to his faith, and it's the gift of God.

MM: So I can't take credit for it.

DT: Paul says that “by grace are you saved through faith, and that not in yourselves, it is a gift in God so that no one can boast.” As a church, and again I take this personally as a minister, we have not clearly got that across in our preaching and proclamation. Far too often we present what Christ has done. We say Christ died for you, has forgiven you, now it’s over to you to accept. You pray, you repent, you read the Bible, and so on. We’re laying a burden on people to do something. Salvation in that context is partly what God does and partly what we do. We cooperate — and that is totally wrong. We can do nothing at all except accept it in thanksgiving.

MM: If Jesus has done it all for us, would we say that he has prayed for us? Has he done our response for us?

DT: Everything for us. Absolutely. Many evangelicals limit Christ’s salvation to the death of Christ. They say that Christ died for us and that is something apart from us and because of his death, we can be forgiven and receive salvation. As my brother James used to say, that if you’re sick, a doctor can come, he can diagnose your problem, this is your illness, write out a prescription, give it to you, go away. You take that medicine, you get well. Far too often, that’s the kind of gospel that we preach. Christ has died, Christ has risen, and there you are, you get on with it.

MM: Like the forgiveness is some commodity that’s handed over to us.

DT: It’s not like that. Christ has done everything — he’s given himself, and his life for us. That’s what we’re asked to receive. We can’t separate the work of Christ, the death of Christ on the cross, from the whole ministry or the resurrection, but sadly, many Christians do. In a great deal of preaching we often do.

The life of Christ

MM: The Gospels have a lot more information in them than just a story of the death of Christ — they’ve got a lot about his life as well. What are those stories there for us? What are they showing us about Jesus’ life for us?

DT: We can’t separate the person of Christ from his teaching and from his work. The whole thing belongs together. Calvin used to use a phrase that we’re not presented with a naked Christ. He comes to us clothed in his life, death and resurrection. It’s all important. He lived out his life for us, and we’re asked to receive him in all his fullness.

Put it this way — that when God became man, we’re faced with an incredible miracle where God broke into this world. It’s a staggering fact

that he came down to our level in Jesus Christ, and he took our flesh and blood. He remained God and at the same time, he became man. Not only an individual man, which he was, but a representative man, where he identified himself with each one of us — with you, with me, with all of us.

In identifying himself with us, you might say he did two things. He took our sinful life with all its faults, failings, sins and sicknesses, and he brought on the condemnation, died, and took it all away. At the same time, in becoming man, he sanctified our human life and turned our human life around, living a life of perfect obedience or righteousness. In the resurrection, he gives us himself, he gives us that new life, his life and our life. It's a total thing. We are totally letting go of our old life with a total receiving of this new life. There are no half measures. Paul says, "Be clothed with Christ in his righteousness."

MM: It's not just his life before the crucifixion and resurrection but his life afterwards as well.

DT: He rose as man, and ascended as man, and he reigns as man, and he's our high priest as man, and that's important. The whole of our life, it is not I, but Christ. In every situation, in every area of life, we've got to learn to live that out in such a way that in every situation, it's not I but Christ.

New life in Christ

MM: Once we realize that and respond to that, how does life change for us? What difference is it going to make in our life? Can we live a rotten life until we die and just before we die say yes, I'd like to sign onto the program?

DT: Three times in the epistle to the Romans, Paul is answering questions that were put to him — can I sin that grace may abound? He says no, that's impossible. To receive Christ means that we've shared in his death — death to our own life, death to all our sins, that we might share in the resurrection. We can only enter the kingdom of God through death and resurrection, and that's a total thing. It's a death to our old way of life, it's a death to our sin. If we have received Christ, sadly, we'll go on sinning, but death is no longer the power that reigns over us. We can't go on sinning. John brings that out in his epistles, "We can't go on sinning and yet believe in Christ," in other words, if we go on sinning, we don't really, in a deeper sense, believe in Christ. We're not really followers of Christ.

MM: Is that what the Bible is talking about when it uses the word *salvation* — that it's not just a ticket into heaven but it's this entire package

of taking on Christ, of dying, of rising — is all that encapsulated?

DT: Yes. It's a receiving of a totally new life in Christ. We receive Christ once and for all, and we go on and on receiving Christ as a continuous process. It is a total thing. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters. You can only serve one or the other." If we seek to receive Christ as our Lord, he is the one we serve. There's no half measures. As long as we are here on this earth, none of us are perfect, sadly, we go on sinning. But the Lord is our Lord and king. He is dominant. So he picks us up, cleanses us, renews us — day by day we start afresh.

MM: Some days I don't feel very fresh or new. It feels like the old person is still there. How do these go side by side?

DT: That's true, but we don't go by our feelings. We go by what is real. When Christ gave himself to us, he gives himself to us. That's something very real. We've got to keep looking away from ourselves to Christ. If I look inward upon myself, it's only darkness. There's no certainty. We're full of doubt. It's when I look away to Christ and say yes, he is life, he is light, he is salvation, there is joy, there is assurance. Life is a constantly looking unto Christ. As long as we look unto Christ we are able to share in the victory of the cross and the resurrection. As we look unto Christ we are able to manifest something of the real life and power of the Holy Spirit.

MM: You talked about the resurrection of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in us. Is that the way in which we are sharing in the resurrection of Jesus now?

DT: Yes, it's through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, you might say, is Jesus' other self, although the Holy Spirit is distinct from Jesus, and yet the Holy Spirit is Jesus' other person. The Holy Spirit comes to live within us, to reign over us. That's Christ living in us. As the Holy Spirit comes, he seals within us the finished work of Christ, the new life of Christ, so that Christ is there, and Paul says, "It's not I who live, it's Christ who lives within me." He lives within...by God, the Holy Spirit.

Forgiveness

MM: You say that the forgiveness that we give others, it is really the forgiveness of Jesus working through us.

DT: It has to be. If we're not forgiving other people, then there's a blockage. The Holy Spirit isn't able, isn't working, isn't flowing through us. He demands it, to receive that love and forgiveness, that we show Christ's forgiveness one to another and forgive one another.

I was chaplain to a fairly large hospital in my last parish, and they had one wing for people who had a nervous breakdown. Doctors and nurses used to sit with patients. I would go in and chat to them all. One day I went into the sitting room, and there was a woman, maybe about mid-30s, sitting on a couch looking at family photographs. I sat down and she showed me her photographs — son and daughter about 12 and 14.

I kept wondering why she was in the hospital, and I looked at these photographs, and I said, “You love them.” She said, “Oh, very much so,” absolutely she loved her son and daughter. She showed me a photograph of her husband, and I looked at him and said, “You love your husband.” She said, “Oh, very much. He’s a marvelous man and it’s a great privilege to be married to him.”

When we were finished, I looked at her and said, “Why are you here in hospital?” She said, “I don’t want to live.” I said, “You don’t want to live? You’ve just shown me the family photographs, your son and daughter and husband, you tell me you love them.” She said, “Yes, I do. I have a marvelous husband.” “Why don’t you want to live?” She said, “I have no idea, but I’m terrified to be alone. If I’m alone, I’m going to do something violent, and that’s why I’m here in hospital.”

I asked her the question which I often ask as a minister, “Have you had a happy childhood?” She said, “No, not at all.” She told me one of these sad, dreadful stories, that her parents were both alcoholic and separated when she was 5. Her mother had married an alcoholic who physically and sexually abused her. Out came this terrible, ghastly story, so I felt pain as this woman told me this story. I said, “I’m terribly sorry.”

I said, “Could you ever forgive your parents?” She said, “Never.” I said, “Have you ever thought that there is a relationship between the fact that you can’t forgive your parents and you don’t want to live?” She said, “No, I’ve never thought that. No one, no doctor has ever suggested it.” I said, “I’m suggesting there’s a real relationship. You’ve been sinned against. I’m pained by your story, you’ve suffered, you’ve been wronged, and what can I say? I’m horrified and sad. But God has forgiven us everything, and we deserve nothing. But to receive God’s forgiveness, it does mean that we have to share God’s forgiveness with other people and forgive them.”

Then I said, “You can’t forgive them. You’ve been sinned against, you’ve been hurt dreadfully. All you can do is to ask God to give you a gift which you haven’t got, and none of us have, but a gift to forgive these parents of yours.” So we talked away — she was a nominal member of the

church in another parish. At the end I said, “Would you like to pray?” She said yes. So I prayed with her, committed her, and this sad story, to the Lord, and asked God to give her the gift that she might forgive her parents. The result was dramatic, and the hospital discharged her within the week. To forgive is healing. It allows the Holy Spirit to flow through us, giving us life, the life of Christ. That’s the important thing.

MM: Forgiveness doesn’t mean that the initial act was somehow okay.

DT: No — it was an evil thing, a ghastly thing for the parents – their behavior, the treatment of this daughter, for her to be sexually abused. It was totally wrong. But from her point of view, it was a real grace to be able to give in that situation. That’s what God demands.

MM: The gift wasn’t so much for her parents as it was for her.

DT: It had a profound effect on her, in healing. But she had to forgive her parents. Hopefully, that will bring a sense of healing to them where they might be able to turn to God.

NOT MY WILL, BUT YOURS

Missionary life in China

J. Michael Feazell: I wanted to ask you about your childhood, your story, how you came to be interested in ministry, how that came about, and what it was like to be in the Torrance household.

David Torrance: I was born into a very privileged home in the sense it was a very committed Christian home; both parents that were missionaries. My grandfather was a small-dairy farmer. But father, as it were, broke away. He went into the ministry. He went to China, and he there was a minister evangelist for 40 years. Mother went out also as a young missionary, and they met in China and married in China. So my family, six of us, were all born in China. I'm the youngest of six.

Those were turbulent days in China. West China was ruled by warlords. One might also call them brigand chiefs, because each had their own army, they fought, they plundered, they killed. Life was turbulent. But in that context of missionary serving, father served. His base was Chengdu, 1500 miles upriver from Shanghai, and from there he worked up into the mountains toward Tibet.

It was a life of faith, tremendous commitment to Christ, and we always had family worship. I never remembered a time in my life when we didn't have family worship — when the family came together, they were reading from the Bible, they prayed, and that carried us on through our childhood, through our student days, until finally we married and went our separate

ways. We still continue, when we come together, but there's only two of us left in my family now. We still would meet and pray together.

Prayer was an important thing in our household. We always had it. I don't suppose our family would have survived, literally, without prayer, because, as I mentioned, these were very turbulent years when the family was in China. When the family left, there had been severe rioting. A missionary friend of my mother was beheaded in the street near the home. They rioted, wanting to break into our home. But we were wonderfully protected...there was a tremendous faith in God.

The Bible was central in our family life. When I had reached my sixth birthday, Mother showed me the calendar and said there's seven days a week, there's 52 weeks in the year. If you read three chapters of the Bible every day, five on Sunday, you'll read it through in a year short of a week, you'll read it by Christmas. She said that when you take the Bible, always pray and ask God to speak to you through it. When you hear God speaking to you through it, you'll know that this is the word of God.

She said, form that habit, because when you grow up many people will say all sorts of terrible things about the Bible and dismiss it, but when you have heard God speaking to you through the Bible, you'll know that that is God's word. Nothing will shake it. So the Bible played an important part in our whole upbringing. I was never given any doctrine of Scripture – I was simply told it was the word of God, and if we prayed and asked God to speak, he would speak.

In addition to our family prayers, books played a big part of our family life. My youngest brother, Tom, always called my father the evangelist of the family, and he called my mother the theologian of the family. They guided us in our reading so that they introduced us to a lot of Christian works in our school days and discussed the Scripture, discussed doctrine, theology, in a simple way. It was very much part of our upbringing and family life.

JMF: What was it like for you as a child and with your siblings living in China? Under the circumstances of the dangerous conditions politically, what sort of freedom did you have to go far from the house or to be in the city alone, or what was it like?

DT: I was too young when I came home from China – I was three. The older members of the family remember it vividly because they went to school there. Apart from the turbulence, it was a marvelous country in which to grow up. There was a freedom which people didn't enjoy here.

Father had a mule and a horse, and that was part of the family, so the family went to school on horseback. Father used to complain. He said that once Tom got on that mule, he would no longer walk – that mule insisted on galloping. Now, not many children go to school on the back of a mule and a horse.

JMF: Especially a galloping mule.

DT: Tom was mischievous. He was called by the Chinese a mischief. It had its dangers, but it had its freedom and its excitement.

JMF: There must have been a number of people who were glad you were there ... You mentioned that there were riots later on. Where did the animosity come from?

DT: On one hand, as people came to Christ, they were friendly and loyal. Dad, for the last 25 years of his ministry, he was agent for the American and British Bible Society. Not that he looked after printing or anything of that sort (the Chinese did that), but he was superintendent (when he retired there were many tributes to father written in Chinese...I have some at home on the wall) ...and one of the things that means a lot to me is that in his last year, he and his co-laborers distributed over a million portions of Scripture in West China. When he retired, the church said that no one had done more to forward the gospel in West China.

On the other hand, you had these brigand chiefs, and it was their way of life. But after 1917, the Communist revolution in China, the Communists began pouring in rifles, weapons, and communistic, atheistic literature. The weapons came into the hands of these brigand armies, and also the literature. That aroused a tremendous or increased an antipathy to foreigners and the Christian faith. That's what led up to the final rise, when the family came home.

They took a difficult decision. Father was fluent in Chinese. He had quite a knowledge. After he came home, Father and I were invited by a Chinese noble, an emperor, if we would have a meal at his home. His parents had come over and fled from Communist China. The mother had no interest, and the father very little, so this noble wanted them to meet my father. He said to me he could not get over my father. He said when his back was turned you would not know that he was not Chinese. He had quite a remarkable knowledge.

He went back alone, for seven years; that was quite a sacrifice for the family. We remembered him and he kept in touch...we wrote every week. Mother insisted that each one of us write to him, and he wrote to us, so

that despite the gap, it was still, you might say a remarkably close family, and once again there were great answers to prayer.

For example, just after father went back, the family settled for a short period near Glasgow in the west of Scotland and then moved to Edinburgh. Mother went to the local church, attended a local prayer meeting of about 27 led by one of the elders. She said she didn't know anyone there, but the elder said, are there any subjects for prayer tonight, any people you would like us to pray for? Mother said yes, her husband was a missionary in West China and she had a deep feeling that he needed prayer at that moment. She said it was lovely that one after another in that room prayed for my father though they didn't know him.

Mother wrote to father and told him, and he wrote back and said, could you tell me the day of that prayer meeting and the time of day? It so happened on that particular day and the very time of day, his life was spared, in the sense that a communist army... (I say communist; I don't know how much communism they really do, but they were influenced by their atheistic literature and nationalism)...came up to this mountain village to search for my father and a fellow missionary, and they searched every house in that village bar one. They walked past the door at the same time as that prayer meeting in Glasgow. The family saw many answers to prayer like that. Prayer was very much part of the family life of all of us.

JMF: How long was he separated from the family during that period?

DT: Seven years. It was difficult... Father opened the Christian work in West China up among the tributaries of the Yangtze River, the Min was one of the main ones, and among people called the Qiang [Sichuan province, west of Chengdu]. I suppose he would be the first Western missionary ever to enter those parts. He had the language, he had the dialect, there was no one else to take over. He felt that God wanted him to continue this work and to establish it, so he went back. The church there was smaller perhaps than in other parts of China, but it nonetheless became deep-rooted.

Shortly after he came back, he received a parcel. He opened it (and I was there in the room with him), and he was a bit astonished at first. It was a Chinese Bible, but he had several Chinese Bibles. When he opened it and he looked at what we would say the back cover...but that is the beginning — they start in what we would say is the back and work forward — there was a story of that Bible. This Communist had come up to this mountain village, it was a Christian village. They would take the grain, the

food, and they'd burn it – tragic things – to try to wipe them out. They would burn every Bible. The Christians had forewarning, and they took the Bibles and buried them in a cave, and when the Communists passed over, they dug it up again and sent one of the Bibles to my father. The story was inside the cover with the words that just as this Bible has been resurrected, the church in China will be resurrected, which I found moving.

I had that Bible in my possession for a number of years, but when my brother Tom went back on one of his visits to West China and up to those villages where my father worked, he took it with him because of the shortage of Bibles, and he gave it to the son of the man who sent it to my father. I was sorry to part with the Bible, but they needed the Bibles and that was the right thing to happen.

Moving into ministry

JMF: How did you then begin to or become oriented toward ministry after your father came back?

DT: I believed in the Lord all the days of my life. A living presence of Christ was real to all of us in the family. Prayer was real. I read the Bible every year (but nowadays I read it three times a year). The faith was real to all of us. The Christian life was real. The turning point for me was the army. I did a year at university, did classics for a year, and then joined the army in the end of 1942. I felt I would say yes, I would enter the ministry, but I didn't want to be a minister.

I moved through different units in the army – in wartime you're shifted around according to where you were needed. I was part of special assault troops doing beach landings. We did a lot of rock climbing, explosives, and on and off boats. We were the British Army and they were Americans. We were due to go to the Channel Islands, because that was the only part of Britain that was occupied by Germany. We were on standby, so we knew that it tomorrow, next week, we may be sent over...

I remember saying to myself, many people were not going to come back, and I hope I don't come back, because if I come back, God will put me in the ministry. Quite mad, absolutely mad when I was young, and I felt no, I'd rather not come back than be put into the ministry. I had a deep feeling underneath that by hook, by crook, God would make sure I came back, because he was determined to put me in the ministry. That hung over me as a tremendous cloud.

JMF: Why did you not want to go into ministry?

DT: I suppose it was an anomalous situation, because the Lord meant a lot to me. I continued to read the Bible; I carried a Bible in my pocket in my army uniform and had it with me all through the army life. A passage which really troubled me was Acts 2, that here the disciples, Peter and the others, were preaching, and some in the multitude thought they were drunk and laughed and scorned at them. Somehow or other that horrified me. I didn't want to be up there on a platform and be mocked. Perhaps I was strange. I lived in this anomalous situation where I read the Bible, I prayed every day, the Lord meant a lot to me, but I was afraid to let go.

There were a number of incidents that happened that spoke powerfully to me. We were in a training scheme in the hills north of England. I was in a tent with another three lads. In that type of army exercise, you don't get into pajamas, you lay down in your uniform, your coat, you're allowed to take off your pack. When I thought they were asleep, I pulled out my Bible and started reading it, and one of the lads who wasn't asleep said, "Dave, are you reading a Bible?" I said yes. "Why not read it to us all?" I knew God was speaking to me. They weren't Christian folk, they didn't go to church; one of them was a hard swearer. They listened attentively, and I felt very humble. I felt God saying, you are called to speak the gospel.

In this assault brigade where I had said I'd rather not come back than go into ministry, there was a church three miles away. I walked down there, and came back. I had a letter to my parents, and I hunted around for a postbox. I asked another soldier where there was a postbox. He said, "I'll show you." He took me, and we got chatting, and he asked, "You want a cup of tea?" So we had a cup of tea. He said, "What have you been doing?" I said, "I've been to church." I didn't say anything more. We were in the same assault brigade but in a different unit. He had done about two years at university and we got chatting away. We finally agreed that we both had a Saturday afternoon off, next Saturday, so we would meet and go sailing.

When we came in, he said to me, "When I saw you last week you had been to church. Are you going to church tomorrow?" I said yes. He said, "Can I come with you?" That happened for three weeks. We went out on Saturday afternoon sailing, went to church, and when we were coming back the three miles, he suddenly turned to me and said, "Dave, you're a Christian." I said yes. He said, "You've never talked to me about Christ."

That shook me. I felt God was saying I put you here, this is what you've got to do. That spoke heavily to me. He was one of those remarkable men

who you shared the faith and he simply accepted...he believed. He was a university man. I had to give him a Bible. I don't think he had ever in his life been to church before. Yet you just shared the faith and he believed, and he entered the Christian faith in the mildest way. I felt very much the hand of God in me.

There was a third incident... I went to India and met on the boat a man I was very attracted to. He had been at university for four years. He was an atheist, or I should say an agnostic. We had many vigorous discussions on his humanism, which I felt was wrong. Apart from his humanism, we got on well together and we shared a tent together when we arrived in India. In the tropics it's noisy — all sorts of insects and creatures, and I was lying in my bunk in the tent and he came in. He saw me, and I knew he took a swipe at me and he said, "Oh this marvelous world we're in."

I was a bit, to use an army term, browned off. He disturbed the peace of my evening, and I said, "Shut up." I said, "You're talking dunces and you know it. Sit down." Very blunt, very rude. He sat down and was quiet. Then he suddenly said, "I'd like to become a Christian." That shook me. For weeks we had discussed and not a single suggestion that he wanted to, was open to the faith. We knelt and we prayed. He committed his life to Christ.

I felt that God's hand was on my shoulder and said this is what you're called to do, and you'll do it. It should have filled me with joy. It troubled me. There were other experiences. At the end of the war I had a marvelous leave climbing up in the Himalayas, came back, picked up smallpox, which wasn't very helpful.

JMF: In the Himalayas?

DT: On the way back. In smallpox, your temperature goes up, it dips down, and it goes up a second time. The second time is usually fatal. It's an interesting experience. I was in the jungle division, and I was put in a little hut by myself. It made me feel like a leper, all isolated, no one came. It didn't bother me in the slightest, and I wasn't downhearted in the slightest. I never thought I would die, although I knew I was pretty ill. I had the most incredible experience of the presence of Christ — sheer joy and thanksgiving. Maybe I was delirious, but I knew the closeness of Christ. I was filled with a sense of thanksgiving that I'd never had before.

I recovered, went back to my unit, because although the war was over, this was maybe October '45, the east was in a turbulent state, so the armistice, if you call it that, didn't mean a great deal to some of us. India

was in uproar... To split India/Pakistan, two million people perished in those riots, never reported. Malaysia, Indonesia, the east was in turmoil.

I began to think, by the end of the year, the time is going to come when I'll leave the army. What am I going to do? I knew God was saying the ministry, and I said no. I'll be a medical missionary. Didn't want to be a doctor – anything rather than a minister. I was quite happy to go out. I'd seen enough of the poor and the destitute to spend my life with the poor and the destitute. For three days I was in total turmoil. I don't think I could talk civilly to someone. I might punch someone in the nose, which I didn't do, you'd be court-marshaled in the army if you tried that.

I had a tent to myself. I approached that tent, I can't put it into words, I knew God was there. As I entered that tent, I knew God was saying the ministry, and I said no. Hard to put into words, I felt physically that God had caught me by the scruff of the neck and said all right, you'll never again have any peace of mind, and no joy. I knelt down on the ground and said, "All right, Lord, I'll be a minister, it's your lookout." That was my words. It was the most disgruntled prayer I've ever prayed.

Something incredible happened. That whole cloud that hung over me vanished. It was like the birds were singing, and the ministry, I couldn't get over this, became very attractive. I was staggered that whereas I had hated the thought of the ministry, I now really looked forward to ministry and wanted to be a minister.

When I left the army I came back to university. I did four years of philosophy degree, then on to theology. I felt that God was with me in the ministry. I've often looked back to that because there are times in the ministry I don't think there's anything more rewarding than the life in the ministry. What could be more rewarding than to see people come to faith in Christ and be converted, to see people helped, comforted, filled with the joy and freedom of the Lord? It's been a marvelous life, a marvelous calling. It's a tremendous privilege, but at times difficult. Many a time I've said to the Lord, you made me a minister, and it's up to you to do something about it.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER IN PASTORAL WORK

JMF: When you first became a pastor and then through the course of your ministry, what are some of the experiences that stand out? What kinds of things did you find that churches need, that individuals need, and what did you have to have, and be as a pastor, to serve in that day?

DT: In the Bible, in Acts chapter 6, when a dispute arose about the expressing of some of the supplies to the poor, the needy, of the church, the apostles said, it's not right for us simply to give ourselves over to the practical affairs of distributing the poor, and they appointed seven deacons and he said (which I think is very important), "we will give ourselves to prayer and ministry of the word."

Looking back at my college days, although I had a very fine teacher, in college days we were each divided up. We each had a pastor. About 12 of us were given to Professor James S. Stewart, who is well known, a very godly man, professor of the New Testament...and we had a Bible study. He met with us individually, he met with us in a group, and he met with me individually. He was a very shy man, but he got there, he said, "What did you read from the Bible before you came to college today?" I was reading Exodus, I told him. He asked us, did we say our prayers? I don't think that's done today. I admired the man immensely.

We are called, as ministers, to be ministers of the word in a ministry of prayer. Sadly, in the ministry, we pass over that question of prayer, but it's

there. The apostles said, we appoint deacons to look after the ministerial side so that we can devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. I find that very important. I had three parish churches. I had a period of evangelism, and then three parish churches. In my second parish, although there were great rewards — I saw people converted — nonetheless there were great difficulties in that parish, and I found myself having to pray an hour every morning before breakfast for that parish. When our prayer life flags, our ministry flags, even if we do all the right things.

I came home to it very early in the ministry. I remember preaching a sermon on the atonement. People were moved and stirred. I was a probational minister at that time. I didn't have my own parish and I was called to preach in another church. There, it went entirely in the wrong way, and I preached the sermon without prayer, and it fell flat. I felt rebuked, that this is God's word, there's nothing automatic about it. It's so important that at each fresh occasion we give ourselves to the Lord and we pray for the Holy Spirit to work.

That came home to me powerfully when I was still probationary. I was a post-graduate student and I was invited to preach in July in a glorious summer weekend over in the west of Scotland, the west highlands. They said they'd put me up in a hotel, and I'd do services. I went in the wrong way, a lesson I never forgot. I put six sermons in my bag and went off. I went early after lunch, I arrived at the hotel, and I thought I'll have a quick look at my sermon and go for a long, five, eight mile walk in the sunshine in the west highlands — it's a lovely country. So I prayed, opened my bag, pulled out six sermons, read them, and I couldn't preach them at all. I felt frustrated, so I knelt down again — my parents always knelt when they said their prayers at home — and prayed and asked what God wanted to say. It came to me clearly — the resurrection. That bothered me.

I read through my six sermons again, and they were further away than ever. So I knelt a third time and prayed, and this time it was absolutely clear — the resurrection. I thought no, I've got to have one of these sermons. I read through these six sermons, and I couldn't preach them at all. The one thing that really kept, the resurrection...so I said, all right then, it will have to be resurrection. I felt frustrated, because now I would have to sit down on a glorious sunny afternoon and write a new sermon on the resurrection.

But in my state of frustration, nothing would come. I sat there in my frustration thinking of this sunshine, the warmth, the west highlands

vanishing away. Here I was, how would I prepare this sermon? At 10:00 at night, I had one sentence on the paper, and I said, “Lord, if it’s the resurrection, you have to speak to these people. I have nothing to say.” I went to bed, slept, got up in the morning, my mind was still a blank. I said to the Lord, “Lord, if it’s the resurrection, you have to do something about it.” I went to church early and met the session clerk, who greeted me and said, “Could you make the intonations?” Because last night, their beloved senior elder died, and he wanted to break the news to the congregation. In some astonishing way, that sermon just flowed. I felt very rebuked.

A few years later, I was in Oban, again this time in the west highlands. I was sitting in the car. We were going to go to an island, Lismore, but my wife was shopping. As I was waiting, the session clerk came out on the pavement, so I rolled down the window and we greeted one another. He said, “Yes, I remember you. You’re the minister who came all prepared on the occasion that our senior elder died.”

I said, “Would you like a coffee?” He and I went for a coffee. I said, “Could I correct... I’m afraid I went to your church entirely in the wrong way. I did not go prepared. But by the miraculous hand of God, he took over that situation because I did not go the right way.” I’ve never forgot that lesson. The ministry is not like a normal job. We can’t just write a sermon. It may be doctrinally, theologically, correct, a good sermon. But we have to go with the Spirit of the Lord, and we have to pray. I take seriously those words that the apostles said, “We will not handle the administration. We will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

The focal point of the ministry which I’ve always tried to keep before me is preaching, proclaiming the word, teaching the word, and the pastoral work — meeting people face-to-face. I’m not very good at administration. I’ll do it, but I don’t particularly enjoy it, and often I have let it go, because people are what matters. Your preaching and your pastoral work go hand-in-hand. When you’re meeting people, I always, as a minister, had a reading and prayer. I’d visit the homes, visit people in hospital. I always felt it was right to read something of the word of God and to pray.

Again and again, I’ve found that the real pastoral work opened up after you prayed with someone. You can meet a family, you can greet them, you can ask about their welfare and about their children, their holidays, but once you’ve had a prayer, then they open up and the real pastoral work begins. We are here to share the gospel, to help people come to Jesus

Christ. As we meet face-to-face, we are there to help people come and meet the Lord. That's the key of our ministry.

The vicarious humanity of Christ

JMF: Let's shift gears and get into pastoral ministry a bit. The same principle seems to apply to the Christian life itself. Let's talk about what we call the vicarious humanity of Christ and how that works in a person's life and how God deals with sin and with righteousness in the life of a believer.

DT: You used the word *vicarious*, which is a Latin word used by theologians. It means someone acting, speaking on behalf of someone else, for their benefit. This is precisely what God came to do in Jesus Christ — he came to take our place, act on our behalf, and work out a great salvation.

Many Christians, unfortunately, many evangelicals, restrict the atonement to the death of Christ, and therefore interpret it in a legal or judicial way. They're correct to do so. There is a judicial element there, that Christ died for us and he rose again, and the virtue is that our guilt is removed, we are set free. But if we *restrict* the atonement to the death of Christ, then many problems arise. We are saying that the death of Christ is not part of the whole ministry of Christ and is separate from the resurrection. If we restrict it to the death of Christ, we are also throwing people back on themselves, their own resources, and almost inevitably, they become legalistic.

JMF: For an average person listening to what you're saying, let me try to recap and you tell me if I'm saying it correctly. It's common for Christians to think, and many times they're taught, that the key element of Christian faith is that "Christ died for your sins, therefore believe in him and your sins will be taken away — now go your way and do the best you can to be a good person." The focus is on the death of Christ paying the penalty for your sins and therefore removing your sins, and it stops there, as though that's all there is to it, but there's far more to it than that. Is that somewhat what you're saying?

DT: Indeed. If we restrict the atonement to the death of Christ, it creates a multiplicity of problems. Often the great tendency there is to want the blessings of Christ rather than the person of Christ. That is a problem which we see in the liberal world, like Bultmann. It's equally a problem in the evangelical world — a tendency to want the blessings of Christ and not the person of Christ. A key phrase in the New Testament is the little phrase, "in Christ," the Greek, *en Christou*, in Christ. That phrase, "in

Christ,” in Jesus Christ, in the Lord, occurs something like 132 times in the New Testament. So if you ask me what is salvation, how are we saved? Yes, we are saved by the work of Christ, but by *union* with Christ. We can’t separate union with Christ and the work of Christ any more than we can separate the work of Christ and the person of Christ.

JMF: You’re saying that most of us want to receive the blessing of having our sins forgiven, but we don’t want Christ to be part of our life, in fact *being* our life, we want the pain of sin taken away, but we’d rather...now that you’re done, would you please just stay next door?

DT: That’s common, and it runs through all the churches. It is unbiblical. If you were to ask me, “How would you sum up Paul’s doctrine in his epistles?,” I would have to say that we are saved by grace and union with Christ. We’re not simply saved by grace, we’re not simply saved by union with Christ, it’s the two together — union with Christ and salvation by grace — because God came down — an incredible, staggering fact — that God came down to this earth and took flesh and blood as the man Jesus, although remaining God.

As man, he entered into our humanity. He was a particular man, and yet also a representative man at the same time. As he entered into our humanity, he took all our sins, all our weaknesses, all our sufferings, and he died bearing the connotation. But he did more than that. In taking our humanity, your humanity, mine, he became you, he became me. He sanctified our humanity, he turned it roundabout. He perfectly obeyed God the Father on our behalf. He prayed to the Father on our behalf. In the resurrection he offers himself to us. He offers us this new life, his life for our life, your life, my life, renewed, sanctified, so that to receive salvation is to receive Christ, to receive the new life of Christ. It’s a total thing.

To receive Christ is to receive the fullness of God that Paul talks about — the fullness of the Spirit. It also means on our part a total surrender, a total letting go. There’s tremendous joy in that because it means that in so far as Christ has done everything for us — he is for us in every situation in life, in every event in life, in every occasion. There’s no situation in life that we face but Christ is there, and it’s always “not I but Christ.” Not I but Christ when I have a great decision to make, not I but Christ when I worship, because worship means that Christ alone is the one who worships the Father, he alone enters the presence of the Father. When we are united with Christ, Christ is with us, in us, we are in him. In Christ we enter the Father. So it’s in Christ we can worship, in Christ we pray. We don’t know

how to pray. We try to pray in our own efforts, and prayer is then a frustration. We try to pray and set aside times we pray, we know how we fail. But Christ prays. If we keep our eyes on Christ and remember that all through life, every step of life it's not I but Christ, we're on the victory side.

Many years ago I had a friend who became a minister, who in turn had a close friend who was a professional footballer. His friend, a footballer, was a Christian. But he thought of the Christian life in terms of football. He said one day, it was like me trying to play football. Jesus was standing at the touch line watching, and every time I came near the goal, I missed it. It was frustrating. But something marvelous happened. Jesus and I changed places. I now stand at the touch line. I watch Jesus playing, and he scores the goal every time, and all I can do is stand and cheer. It may be a simple story of a professional footballer — that to me is the Christian life. The whole of the Christian life is centered on Christ, it's in Christ, it's a union with Christ where Christ takes over because he's accomplished everything for us — for our forgiveness, for our redemption, for our reconciliation with our Father, our entry to the Father's presence, our entry to the kingdom of heaven.

JMF: So in speaking of faith, faith is in Christ himself, not in specific things or actions per se, but in him. It isn't even a matter of our faith, we are actually entering into *his* faith.

DT: Absolutely. Faith is a way of being related to Jesus Christ. Our faith is important. Without faith we are lost. You can come and give me a gift, and if I say no, I don't want it, I go without it. God comes to us with his gift, and we can say no, we don't want it, and we're lost.

A story that means a lot to me is of the announcement to Mary of the birth of Christ. Here was this young maiden, and the angel came and announced to her God's will for her life. He announced that she would have a child. That child would be born of God and would be the Son of God. Mary said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." She responded, saying, "Yes Lord, let it all happen just as you want it." Mary had the freedom to say yes, and she said yes. She had the freedom to say no, in which case God would have chosen some other young woman. The marvelous thing is that Mary said yes. But when she said yes, that's all she could do. She couldn't create that child in her womb — that was a miraculous happening from God.

When you and I first come to Christ, God comes, he confronts us, he

says, “I love you, I’ve forgiven you, I’ll give you all the fullness of God, I’ll bring you into the fellowship of the Father.” All you and I can do, like Mary, is say, “Yes Lord,” or “No Lord,” “Thank you Lord.” Our thanksgiving is our response to God’s glorious announcement of his love, forgiveness and salvation. It’s very important. But what matters is that our faith is a response to Christ, to his faithfulness, but it’s not a work.

Far too often we throw back the responsibility to men and women. That’s utter frustration. We get weary. Ministers, I’m afraid, approach the same way. They throw themselves into the ministry — I speak as a minister — it could be easy to let our devotional life, our time with the Lord, slip into the background. We try to go on under our own steam and our own effort, and we utterly fail.

JMF: What often is asked is something along this line, “You’re telling me that Christ has done everything necessary for my salvation and that everything I experience he is doing for me and through me, and that sounds like I don’t have to do anything, and Christ does it all. I don’t see how that’s consistent with the Scripture. It just sounds like some kind of universalism.” How do we respond to that?

DT: It depends what people mean by the use of the word universalism. On one hand it might mean, and rightly mean, that God loves the whole world and that when he came in Jesus Christ he redeemed the world — the salvation, the offer of salvation, is for the whole world. In that sense, I’m a universalist. It does not mean, however, that all people accept the salvation of Christ, that all people are saved. Sadly, no. The Bible never says that — we are free to accept or reject. God doesn’t send anyone to hell. He weeps over this world. Jesus wept over Jerusalem. He loved the people of Jerusalem and was sad that they were rejecting him. Because they’re rejecting him, they would suffer, and suffer terribly. If we reject Christ, we reject his salvation, we reject life, we’re lost. That’s the horrors of hell. I believe in hell. If we talk about the wrath of God, the wrath of God is really the wrath of the Lamb. God doesn’t want us to perish. He doesn’t want any sinner to perish. He loves everyone. The glorious thing is to be able to go to anyone and say that God loves you and God has forgiven you and he wants you. But we have to respond, and if we don’t, we’re lost.

Responding to Christ

JMF: What is the nature of our response?

DT: Our response is, as I have said, a response of thanksgiving. It's an acknowledgement. As a pastor, I have often asked people to read certain portions of Scripture. When I've asked them to read a passage of Scripture and I've gone back to that home, they told me they read it. There are certain passages I use a great deal. Psalm 51 is a prayer of confession where David, a man of God in a remarkable way, called a friend of God, nonetheless sinned. The Bible doesn't gloss over the fact of his sin and that he committed adultery and murder in the sense that he was responsible for the death of Uriah the Hittite.

I've talked to people and we've got so far, and I've said, "Will you read Psalm 51," and I've found that they're converted on that Psalm, that God has spoken to them through it. I've generally said, when I've given them Psalm 51, to read another Psalm, one of the Psalms of thanksgiving, maybe Psalm 103 or like that. I remember being on mission and speaking to a couple of young people, aged about 21, on the street, inviting them to our meeting. I thought he was very aggressive, and if I had mentioned the name of Christ again I think he would have physically assaulted me. So I said, "Can I invite you to a cup of tea?" And she came. He was a young person that I don't suppose had ever been to church. But I tried to share the faith over the cup of tea, and I said, "Can I ask you to read Psalm 51?" She woke me up at 7:00 in the morning. I was still in my pajamas. She was on her way to work. She asked me about this Psalm, and that was her conversion. She was given words to pray. People come in different ways — some impressed by the love of Christ, a great many by an acceptance of the reality of sin.

Many years ago I met a brilliant student. He'd been done with school and was embarked on an honors course at university and said that after that, he hoped to go on to ministry and added the words, "But I'd like to go to a liberal college." That bothered me. Something didn't quite ring true. I felt compelled to pray for him. The more I prayed for him, the more I felt an extraordinary compulsion to pray for him. I found myself praying continually for this chap. Finally it came to the point that for a fortnight I saw him every day either for a coffee, or an occasional meal.

Then I asked him to read 1 John chapter 1, and he told me he read it and as a result he could no longer pray. That bothered me. I prayed a lot about that. Then I phoned him up and said, "I asked you to read 1 John chapter 1, and you told me you did. Having read it, you told me you could no longer pray." He said, "Yes." I don't find it easy to talk to a person —

frankly, my knees shook. I felt I had to. I said, “The reason is because you’re a sinner, and you won’t acknowledge it. You want to gloss over it. It says if we say we have no sin, we’re a liar. The truth is not in us. It equally says that if we confess our sins, he is just and willing to forgive us our sins.” So I said, “Your problem is that you’re a sinner, and you have to confess it.”

I thought we parted company. The next three days if he saw me he’d cross the street. He wouldn’t come near me. I thought, “That’s the end of that relationship.” Then he phoned me up and said, “Who’s been talking about me?” “No one’s been talking about you.” He said, “Yes, why did you say what you did? You’ve been talking.” I said, “I haven’t mentioned you to a single mortal soul. I never mentioned you to a member of the family.” He said, “Then why did you say that?” I said, “I’d been praying for you. I felt God wanted me to say it.” He said, “Can I come round and see you?” So he came around and he told me his story. He had got into bad company and asked if I would pray for him. I said, “No, not unless you’re prepared to confess your sins.” He says, “Yes, I am.” So we prayed, I prayed, he prayed. I can still see his face — the sheer joy of the Lord. He said, “I feel all the joy of my childhood is back.”

Some people come that way. Others come in a different way — they’ve had problems, they feel the love of God has helped them, very often an illness. They’ve been comforted, they’ve been helped, or miraculously healed, and they see the hand of God. Everyone’s different. As pastors we have to learn to love people, to befriend people, and everyone’s different. There’s no uniform way of going about things.

But we have to pray... I found it helpful as a pastor when I was visiting a parish, the home of a parish, to have a brief word of prayer before knocking on each new door — that somehow God will take over and I didn’t know what to say...would God just say whatever he wanted to say. You just relax, you try to love your people, to enter into their joys and sorrows and interests and family life. And yet within that situation try to help them to an understanding of God.

ALREADY FORGIVEN

The Christian life

J. Michael Feazell: Reverend Torrance, it's a joy to have you back with us. I want to ask you to draw on your many years of pastoral experience to talk about a topic that has to do with how a Christian lives in light of the fact that they are union with Christ, and how a pastor should work with a congregation in light of the sin that so easily besets us and that we're surrounded with. How do those things work? We know that we're complete in Christ, we know that we're in union with Christ, we know that it's the vicarious humanity of Christ that makes us who we are. Yet, that doesn't mean that we can just not put any effort into serving God obediently. How does that work together?

David Torrance: That's a searching and important question. How do we live the Christian life? How do we, as pastors, help people live the Christian life, or indeed, to receive Christ? I think that's what you're asking. What I feel strongly about and I would say to myself as a minister (because I am part of the church in all my faults)...

Too often we say to people, "You must live the Christian life with the *help* of the Lord or with the help of the Holy Spirit." I think that's wrong. I have a car about three years old, and if it breaks down I'm not going to take it to the garage and say, "Could you lend me some tools so I can fix my car," or I'm not going to say, "Will you help me and give me a hand?" I hand him over the car. He fixes it. We can't come to Christ and say, "Lord, will you help me live a good life, will you help me, guide me, in

this line of activity.” He is Lord. We have to surrender and hand over everything.

That is our problem of the Christian life. How do we hand over everything? It’s vital. I always find it amazing, staggering, that the almighty God came to this earth and became a man. He became a particular man, a representative man, and yet at the same time remained God. Jesus is man and he is God. As man, he has come because in the end we can do nothing. We are helpless. We’ve been caught in sin, we are bound by sin. If you take the parable that Jesus told about the strong man, he said, “No one can enter the house of a strong man and plunder his goods without first binding that strong man, then he can take his goods.” In our natural state, we are overcome by the power of sin, which is a real power, and we are helpless. But God has lovingly come down, broken into our situation. He has, in Jesus, bound the strong man. He died on the cross and he has risen victorious.

But he has done more than that. In binding the strong man and setting us free, he has lived out on our behalf a new and a perfect life, a righteous life, and he wants to give us that life. As we come to Christ and open our lives and we ask Christ to come, he comes as our Savior, he comes as our Lord. He comes to give us that new life so that we receive forgiveness, we receive redemption, we receive reconciliation with God. It’s a marvelous thing because with Jesus ascended, we are made to ascend to the Holy Spirit. We are made to enter the presence of the Father and we are welcomed by the Father into his family.

What I always find staggering and amazing is we look at John 17...we are made to share in the fellowship of the Trinity itself, that God treats us as if we are Christ. But that’s only because in Christ we become new creatures — new men and new women. Jesus has lived our life for us in a double sense, that he took away our sin, our life...but he sanctified our life, turned it around, made it holy. So day by day, month by month, you and I, as we open our eyes to Christ, keep our eyes in Christ, are appropriating Christ in every situation in life.

I think it’s a disastrous thing to have people pray, “Lord, will you help me to do this?” Who’s in charge? If God helps me, I’m in charge. I can’t treat God as my servant or the Holy Spirit as my servant. He is the almighty God. He is Lord. I, myself, can do nothing. So every step, every day, every moment of the day has to be a looking unto Christ and surrender to Christ, but rejoicing, rejoicing that Christ is in control. Paul can say, “It’s not me,

but it's Christ who lives in me." That's what we've got to try to get over to our people. The sheer joy, freedom, release from the shackles of sin, the sheer release from all the worries, fears and anxieties is a letting go of God.

Personally, I had a happy marriage. We celebrated our 50 years. My wife was a doctor. She was, before we married, a missionary doctor in Africa. We came up to university together and ...my career was broken because of the army and the war. We met when she came home on furlough. She would have gone back to Africa, but she didn't go back. We married...had a happy time. But latter day she wasn't well. She had Parkinson's suddenly, and she died. People said, "What did you do?" I never thought of tomorrow. I never thought of the future. I felt we were in the hands of God. God loves her, he loves me, and we had a very happy time together.

Her illness brought us closer together. I had to do an awful lot for her. She passed away in peace. It's hard to put into words... I remember vividly the day two and a half years ago. It was a lovely sunny day, and after lunch I asked my wife what she wanted to do. She said she would like some sunshine, so I took her out in her wheelchair and we sat in the sun. We came back a little late, at 5:00, and that night our youngest daughter came in, we had a meal... Normally she would go to bed at half past eight, but this time it's half past nine. I helped her get ready for bed. We had prayers—we always had prayers together. I kissed her, told her I loved her, helped her to bed, and a quarter of an hour later, she was gone. She was restless. I said, "Would you like to sit up?" So I helped her sit up. She was in my arms as she passed away peacefully.

It sounds strange to say, but I had a tremendous feeling of the love of Christ and the presence of Christ that she didn't suffer, she had no prolonged illness, didn't have to go to hospital. She departed—it was in the hands of God. I felt the kindness of God. People would say, what about the future? I never thought about the future. We were in the hands of God. He is our Lord and master, and we day by day looked to him, thanked him that he's our lovely, glorious Savior. He's our Lord. He looks after tomorrow. Maybe that's oversimplified, but I feel that's the way I try to live so we don't have the worries, the fears.

On one occasion, she wasn't doing well and full of anxiety. I directed her to that passage in the Sermon of the Mount, "The birds of the air, they don't care about tomorrow, the heavenly Father feeds them." She told me a long time later, it was a great help and comforter, that the Lord provides. Yes, life can be difficult, it can be hard, we can face the dark and stormy

days, but we know that the Lord is there. Not only is he there, but he is our mighty Redeemer and Lord who has total control over the whole situation.

In the ministry I tried always to direct people to Christ. The most disastrous thing to do would be for the church to draw attention to itself, and what the church is doing. Sadly, the church is good at doing that. But our task is to turn people away from us to Jesus Christ, and as far as possible to turn them away from their problems and throw them to Christ.

Dealing with sin in our lives

JMF: If I have a sin or a destructive habit that I'm struggling with or that's bringing me down, or that is not the kind of behavior that reflects one who is in union with Christ, what is my role? How do I deal with that, and what is the pastor's role? How does the pastor deal with that sort of thing in the congregation?

DT: We all have these problems, sadly, we're all sinners, and as a pastor, I'm a sinner. How do I go about it? If there are bad habits, what do you do about those bad habits? Sadly, there's a lot of illness in the world, and what do we do about that? We have to look to Jesus Christ. When Christ came and gave himself for us on our behalf and died for us and rose again... We have that great shout of triumph, the shout of the victor, "It is finished." He had accomplished everything for our salvation, everything to solving all our problems and anxieties of life, perplexities... He has done everything for our complete physical healing. There's nothing left to do. So we look to him and thank him for what he has done in the finished work of Christ, that he is the answer.

I attended a conference on prayer and healing on the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd of July. I responded warmly to that conference, and I've never witnessed so much physical healing ever before. I responded because when someone comes who is sick, he doesn't pray, "Lord, here's this person, he's sick, he's got cancer, please, take away the cancer." He said when that person comes – this is what he does in practice – you try to help that person look away from their problem, away from their sickness, or if it's a bad habit like drugs or whatever, look away from that problem and look to Jesus Christ and look to the cross and the fact that Christ has died and has risen, and say, "Complete victory belongs to me in the light of what Jesus has done. Complete deliverance belongs to me from this evil habit because of what Christ has done. Complete healing belongs to me because of what Christ has done, thank you Lord," and go on and on saying thank you. As you thank the Lord, the miracle happens.

It might sound simple...it is very simple. But the gospel is very simple. It's you and I who make it complicated with our sinful ways. Or the church makes it complicated. In that conference of prayer and healing, he had sessions on Thursday night and Friday night. Friday morning was ministers and leaders, Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon, then we had a prayer. There were some marvelous healings. That's all we did. Those who were asked to join in that prayer, and I shared in it, to help people to look at Christ, the finished work of Christ. He would say: "Now you say, 'Because of what Christ has done, complete healing belongs to me, complete healing, because of what Christ has done, thank you.'" There were some remarkable healings. When we approach our people and they share the problems, we try to do that.

Take a common situation in a parish ministry — broken marriages. I've tried all my ministry to visit people whose marriages had a problem. I find that to be the most difficult side of the ministry because of hardened hearts. I've equally found some incredibly lovely stories of people who have been reconciled and whose marriage was healed. That has always upheld me and comforted me. I've had many failures at that and some lovely answers to prayer.

I've always said, when two people have a marriage problem, and I could see very vividly in one parish...a couple, they were in their 60s, married over 40 years, and he happily went off with another woman. I went back and forth between husband and wife for over three months, and I thought I was almost battering my head against a wall, because these are not easy situations. I tried to tell them that both had to first and foremost kneel at the foot of the cross and receive God's forgiveness for themselves. They had to think of their partner, as a wife not to think of a husband who had gone off with another woman, but to kneel at the foot of the cross and receive God's forgiveness for her life and receive the whole fullness of Christ, the life of Christ.

I told him he had to abandon the other woman. I said, "You've got to kneel before the foot of the cross and receive Christ. Only as you both die to yourselves, you'll be raised up as one new person. And after 40 years, it means you start again from the beginning. But as you both kneel before that cross and in the light of all that God has done for you, forgiveness, he will raise you up with new life." I went off on holiday. When I came back, they were side-by-side in church. They were there every Sunday. They were the last people to say goodbye when I left that parish.

It's trying to help your people... We're all sinful...I can't look down at that, I'm in the same boat as a fellow sinner sharing as a fellow sinner with my people. But helping them to look away from ourselves, from our sins, from our problems, or from our physical illnesses to Christ, to the finished work of Christ, what Christ has done in his life, in his death, his resurrection, ascension, absolutely everything... that finished work of Christ. When we think of the atonement, it is the entire ministry of Christ...his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost. We are reliant on Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

JMF: Is there a time for the pastor to admonish the congregation about some prevailing sin?

DT: Yes. But we have to be very conscious that *we* are sinners. We are not standing on a pedestal. We are fellow sinner. We're seeking to come together and to ask God's forgiveness.

When I entered my first parish, the ministry had gone wrong. It's sad when the ministry goes wrong. Everything is turned around about. Office-bearers wouldn't speak to one another, they were at loggerheads. In my first board meeting, I walked in, and they were there before me, standing in a circle... The two leading office-bearers were in the center, about to have a physical assault to one another. I had to strive into the middle and push the two apart. I wondered as a young man, what do I do now? I've never been taught about boxing in Christianity.

They were a bit appalled that here is a minister having seized two men, pushed them apart. I said, "Now we begin our board meeting." This is my first board meeting in the church. It was the fastest meeting I had ever had, because no one would speak — it was over in half an hour. I was asked for a quick session meeting with the superior body, so I said to one of the elders, my session clerk, my leading elder, "What's the problem?"

He got up, and I would say blew off. For about 20 minutes he told us all the problems, the animosities, the back-biting, and all sorts of dreadful things. I had to silence him after 20 minutes and thank him, and ask the other elder to say what was on his mind. He marvelously stood up and apologized. I looked at that, thanked him, and read the passage from the Bible, "Little children, love one another." I didn't know what to do. That's all I could think about.

I said, "We have sinned against God. Here we are, office-bearers of the church, striving. It's God's church, and we're quarrelling. The Lord is grieved with us! We are absolutely sinners." I included myself. I said, "We have to pray and ask God to forgive us." So we prayed and asked God to

forgive us. Every one of us, “bring us together.” Then I shook hands, and they went away. I went home that night with a headache wondering what sort of church I had come to. For the next 18 months I preached through the Sermon on the Mount, preached on requests for forgiveness...we receive forgiveness as we give it. I said to them I would never appoint to office anyone in the church who was not at peace with God, without peace with everyone in the church, with everyone in the parish. In the end they came wonderfully together, and those two elders who fought became good friends. Another two, who hitherto wouldn’t speak, asked to share the car together in visiting their district.

You stand with them as a fellow sinner. You together ask God’s forgiveness, and you try to speak about the marvelous love of God and the fact that God is sad that we quarrel. He loves us, he’s forgiven us, he wants us to come enjoy that love and love one another. We can’t beat around the bush, but it’s not easy.

JMF: You mentioned thanksgiving as part of the repentance process. In asking for forgiveness, we already know we have forgiveness, so in one sense we are giving thanks, aren’t we, for knowing that we’re forgiven, but we’re giving thanks for the forgiveness even as we ask.

DT: In the small Bible class, one of the teenage girls, a lovely person, said, “How often must I ask for forgiveness before I receive it?” I said, our Lord says in the Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us our debts, our sins.” We ask, but we don’t go on asking. That would insult God — that we don’t believe that God loves us, that he’s forgiven us. Christ *has* forgiven us. So we come and ask, “Lord, forgive us our sins,” but as we look to Christ we thank him that he *has* forgiven us, forgiven us before we sinned, and before we were born. I find that a staggering thought. I always tried to say to my people, You must ask for forgiveness every day, but having asked for forgiveness, always say “thank you” that you *are* forgiven.

JMF: So the asking is like a participation in the fact of forgiveness.

DT: Absolutely. It’s a sharing in Christ’s finished work. Paul says, “In all things, in all times, in all circumstances give thanks to God.” We’re not good at that. But it’s important that we pray at all times with thanksgiving. If we don’t pray with thanksgiving, we have no faith. We’re not believing, we’re not accepting the marvelous love of God.

JMF: Paul gives admonition in Scripture, but he always does it from the context of “this is who you already are in Christ, this is who Christ has made you be, and therefore act like it.” He never turns it around and says, “You’re behaving badly, and if you don’t stop it then you’re lost.”

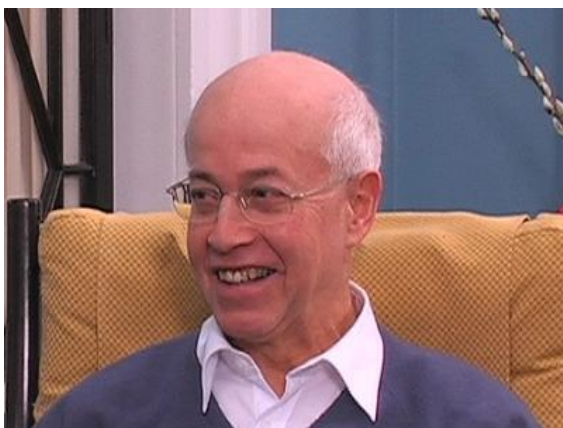
DT: Absolutely. Perhaps the severest forms of judgment we see in the gospel are out of the lips of Jesus. He was frank. When we look at the cross, we might belittle our sins. We might think it doesn't matter. I say to people, "You look at the cross, you look at the fact that sin was so serious it took everything that God himself had got, to remove our sin and deliver us." I think of that great cry, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" There you see the depths and the horror of sin. Sin is real, but thank God that we're delivered from it. Our church needs to be cleansed, I pray every day that our church will be cleansed, purified. We must — but we thank God that there is complete cleansing, complete deliverance.

CHRIST HAS FAITH FOR US

Introduction: *You're Included* traveled to Scotland's esteemed University of St. Andrews for a special Thomas F. Torrance conference marking the launch of the book *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*. This is the second of two volumes consisting of Torrance's lectures on Christology at New College in Edinburgh, Scotland from 1952 to 1978. Edited by retired theology lecturer Robert T. Walker, the two books have been called clear, accessible, deeply rooted in Scripture, and the most comprehensive presentation of Torrance's understanding of the incarnation and the atonement ever published. As a nephew of the late Thomas F. Torrance, Walker gained an intimate understanding of Torrance's theology, studying under him and hearing his lectures in person.

In the 500-year-old senior common room of St. Mary's College, St. Andrews' renowned divinity school, J. Michael Feazell, [then] Vice-President of Grace Communion International, interviews Robert T. Walker.

JMF: You're editor



of two very important books by Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement* and *Incarnation*. They're having a great impact, and we'd like to talk to you about the project, how it came to be, how it developed, and you're the person to talk to.

RW: I got a phone call from a classmate that I shared a room with at New College when we heard these lectures, and he asked me if I would be willing to edit the lectures. He had persuaded Thomas Torrance to get them published, and Thomas Torrance had given him the manuscript, or his son had, with a note saying that these needed an awful lot of work before they could be published. And Jock thought I was the best person to do it, so I said yes. But I had no idea how much work was involved in doing it.

JMF: You started in what year?

RW: 2003 or something. Thomas Torrance, my uncle, was almost 90 by that stage, and his short-term memory was failing a bit... he also had a stroke and so he couldn't have done the job.

JMF: So it involved collecting the notes from the class...

RW: No, because by the end of his career, he read all of his lectures from a typescript. He'd often stop and speak off the cuff, and those were often the best parts. But the lectures or such were all typed out and duplicated for us. Later they were photocopied. Somebody put them onto computer disk, so I got hard copies and the computer disks to work with.

JMF: It wasn't long before you realized that you'd need two volumes.

RW: That's right. When I looked at all the material, and what wasn't there that I knew he'd given us handouts on, and there was a missing lecture that I remember hearing, a whole chapter, I realized pretty soon we needed to have two volumes.

JMF: How many people were involved in helping you with the project?

RW: Mostly myself. Jock Stein, the editor of Handsel Press, who had initiated the project, was a great help. On any points of difficulty, just to check that I'd interpreted it right, I checked with Tom's brother, David. So it was mostly myself.

JMF: As you went through and put together this material in a form that would be a book, you began to see that the lectures as they were prepared and presented are a little more accessible, easier to read for the average person, than Thomas Torrance's earlier academic work, his published work.

RW: Yes. They're lectures, so they're the spoken word, and they come across better, they're more alive. When he writes, it becomes a little more polished. He writes extremely well, but it comes across differently. These lectures are easily the most accessible way into his thought.

JMF: They're also very thorough. As I recall, you mentioned that they're covering pretty much the entire range of his theological thought.

RW: They cover the doctrine of Christ, the incarnation of God becoming human, the Old Testament background, the whole life of Christ, the atonement, justification, reconciliation, redemption, resurrection, ascension, coming again, doctrine of the church. Yeah, they're pretty full.

JMF: You also put together a synopsis at the beginning that goes through everything that you're going to see as a reader as you go through the book. You can get an overview from the beginning.

RW: Right. The synopsis is all the headings lifted out of the book and put together at the beginning. That gives a good guide to the contents in addition to the index.

JMF: I found it easy to find a topic that I wanted to read about. It's easy using that synopsis or the index or together. It's easy to locate a particular area of interest. You also included a glossary of terms. It's user-friendly, both of them. What kind of feedback have you received from those who have been reading it?

RW: Everyone says that they're very readable, and they've been surprised because Thomas Torrance has a reputation of being difficult at times. I heard these lectures. They were unbelievably thrilling and stretching—most exciting thing I've ever heard in my life, and ever will, because we heard the lectures every day but Wednesday, when there were no lectures. The content was deeply moving, inspiring, and thrilling. I was keen to make them as reader-friendly as I could in breaking up some of the longer sentences, adding lots of headings, explaining the meaning of terms that the students of the day didn't have to have explained, but the early reader does, and making it reader-friendly.

JMF: In talking about how exciting and thrilling the lectures were, what is it about Torrance's theology and his approach to these fundamental issues of the gospel and of Christian theology that make it so thrilling and exciting, so fresh, so worth reading?

RW: It's deeply biblical. He was brought up to read the Bible three chapters a day and five on Sundays. He continued to do that all the way through his life. He read it two or three times each year. He is steeped in the Bible. That, plus he has this Christo-centric view. He interprets it in the light of his goal in Christ, and Christ as the atonement of sin and the heart of the Trinity. With that focus, he's able to connect Christian doctrine to biblical passages. So you suddenly see some connections and new meanings in the Bible, and then it brings alive the Christian faith.

I felt, why aren't we taught this in the churches? That's the reaction I

get when I teach it to a student. They say, “Why didn’t we get this in church? Because we should.” This is what they got at the Reformation, under Luther or Calvin. I find it hugely stimulating, enriching, and exciting.

JMF: What are some of the areas that we don’t get typically in church? A person would say Christ is the center of the Bible and he ties everything together, but what are they missing, that this theology is bringing out of the Scriptures?

RW: I could answer that for several hours, but for example, the way in which the importance of the person of Christ, who he is, that he is God, fully God, and yet fully man. We don’t make enough of his being fully man, and not just that, but that he is the union of God and man in his own person. He’s one reality. There’s not a God Jesus and a man Jesus. There’s one Jesus. In his person, he is the union of God and man.

Because that union that was forged and made at Bethlehem is unbreakable, humanity and God will never be separated — they’re one in Christ. That’s the heart of the Christian faith and our salvation. We are joined to Christ because he shares our humanity. Christ is God, he’s joined to God. Because of that union, that’s the heart of our salvation. That’s the ultimate meaning of all the great “I am’s” of John’s Gospel. That’s one aspect of a deeper biblical emphasis that we don’t get.

JMF: Most Christians seem to think Jesus came, was a human being, and died for our sins. Then, when he was raised, he goes back to being God. We don’t typically think of him as still being a human, fully God, fully man. We think of him as fully God again, but what is the significance of him being fully human? Why does that matter to me and my Christian faith and my walk with Christ?

RW: It matters hugely, and it’s common to think that he’s no longer a man. But if he’s only God, then we’re here on earth, he’s up in heaven, and there’s a distance. Whereas if he’s still man, if he’s still bearing our humanity, then he’s the one who prays for us and knows what we feel like. He takes our prayers, our human prayers, and presents them to the Father. Because he shares our humanity, that’s an unbroken link with him.

JMF: You said he takes our prayers and presents them to the Father. So would that mean that we don’t need to worry about whether our prayers are good enough?

RW: Right. We pray, and we’re called to pray, but our prayers are never what they ought to be. He is the one who has taken our fallen humanity and perfected it. He takes our prayers and makes them his, and presents them to the Father. That’s the emphasis of the letter to the

Hebrews, that he is our High Priest. Paul also says that if we've been saved by his death, how much more will we be saved by his life? That is very significant. You're saying if we've been saved by his death, how much more will we be saved by his risen life in heaven. Christian life is sharing in Christ's risen life. If Christ is not risen as man, then we don't have that risen life to share in.

JMF: What does it mean to share in his life? Usually we think of that as "We need to follow his example. We need to obey as well as he did, and that's sharing in his life." That doesn't sound like what you're talking about.

RW: It's a lot more than that; that he has become man in our place for us, to act as man for us. In his human life, he's fulfilled everything that we ought to be doing. It's not a matter of trying to copy it, it's the fact that he has already done it for us and it's ours, so that his human life, his response to God, is our response.

That comes out strongly in Galatians 2:20, "I've been crucified with Christ. I live, yet not I but Christ who lives in me. And the life I live in the flesh I live by *the faith of the Son of God* who loved me and gave himself for me." Properly understood, this faith is not our faith in Christ, and it's not our faith that saves us. It's *Christ's* faith that saved us; it's his humanity. We put faith in his faith or in his human life, in his human righteousness. That's the content of our salvation. We don't rely on what we do — we live out of his fullness, his prayer, his life. We live in union with him.

JMF: So the passages that speak of "We're already seated with him in heavenly places, we're already seated at the right hand of the Father with him, we already have passed into eternal life," we can take them seriously.

RW: Absolutely.

JMF: So our acts of obedience, although they don't merit salvation for us, are our participation in the righteous... Like the prayer you mentioned (he takes our prayer and makes it his own, so that it is effective), he takes everything we are and do in the same way, then.

RW: Yes. We are called to live out the life that he has lived for us. The only reason we can live it out is because he has already done it for us.

JMF: We're living out something that's already so.

RW: Yes. We're living out the salvation that he has won for us.

JMF: It's not a matter of going around worrying all the time whether we'll make it, let's say, into heaven or that we'll measure up in some way.

RW: No. The gospel is the incredible realization that Jesus is not only God coming to rescue us, but he's also God coming to be man for us, even

to make our response for us. When we make a response, I'm not making an extra response to God in addition to what Christ has made for us — I'm letting Christ's response to his Father be mine. I'm resting on his faith. We need to have faith, but it's not faith in *our* faith — it's resting on Christ and his human righteousness and his faith.

JMF: So we trust in him, not in ideas... Like you said, we don't have faith in our faith. Often, our faith is weak, but we don't have to worry when our faith is weak — we can trust that he has perfect faith for us.

RW: That's right.

JMF: So we're trusting in him completely. Someone might argue, yes, but if you believe that, then there's nothing to keep you from behaving badly, from being disobedient, since you would say, "I'm already taken care of in Christ, so therefore I can live in whatever destructive way I want and I'm still safe in Christ." How do we respond to that?

RW: That's a key question. Paul answered it at the beginning of Romans 6. In chapter 5, Paul said we are saved. It's been done. At the start of chapter 6 he says, "Does that mean we can sin? We've been saved." He says *no*, because for one thing, if we sin, we're bringing ourselves back again under the slavery of sin. But secondly, if we have been saved, we have been made *new*. If we sin, we're saying we haven't been made new, but we're acting a lie against what Christ has done for us and we're falling back into sin.

The fact that we've been saved doesn't mean we don't do anything; it's the opposite. It liberates us to live out the life that's given to us in Christ. We often think (this is the way Tom Torrance used to put it), some of God, some of man. He does his part, we now have to do our part. He always emphasized it's not like that. The way it works is: all of God means all of man. The fact that God has done it all, his part and our part, that liberates us to become ourselves in him and to live to the full out of him, because we're not worried about our having to do it. We're living out of Christ.

JMF: How do we deal with the fact that we still sin? Even though we are in Christ, we fall short. How do we cope with that?

RW: We'll continue to sin until the day we die. But it's not what we do that counts, it's what we are in Christ. We are in the process of being cleansed, slowly. We never reach perfection. In fact, often the more we know Christ, the more we know our sin.

JMF: It does seem like that.

RW: At the same time, we trust more in him. It's not a matter of living out of ourselves and the concern with how good we are or how good Christians we are, it's a matter of living out of Christ, with Christ and out of

him.

JMF: That brings to mind the passage in Hebrews 4, “Since we have such a great high priest, therefore we go to the throne of grace to find help in time of need.” It seems to be saying, like you said, because he’s already done everything for us and made us who we are in him, that when we fall short, that grace drives us to the throne of grace to find the help we need. That takes away all the fear, anxiety and worry about salvation, doesn’t it?

RW: Yes, it liberates us.

JMF: It almost sounds too easy. It sounds too simple. It sounds like good news, but it’s so good that it can’t possibly be so.

RW: (laughing). That’s right. When somebody hears the gospel for the first time... I love Martin Luther’s phrase. He said it’s like a cow staring at a new gate. This can’t be true — is it? That is the impact of the gospel when we first see it. We’re liberated. You are freed from thinking, “I’ve got to do this.” Christ has done it for us. When we understand that, that is the beginning of faith.

JMF: That would drive you toward sin?

RW: No.

JMF: That would drive you toward joy, and toward the faith that you have to live it out.

RW: Yes. Torrance used to use the analogy that when his daughter was young, he would walk with his daughter. She held him tightly, but his hand was around hers. She’d often stumble. What mattered was not her feeble grasp of him, but his grasp of her. That’s the same as Christ. It’s not our grasp of Christ that counts, it’s his grasp of us.

JMF: Yes. That raises the question of confession. We’re told to confess our sins, and yet we’re already forgiven and our sins are taken care of. What role does confession play in the process?

RW: On the cross Christ took all our sins and nailed them to the cross. There are numerous verses that speak about, “If when we were enemies we were reconciled by the death of his Son, much more, having been reconciled, we are saved by his life.” The passages indicate it’s been done. We’ve been saved.

We do need to confess our sins. That’s partly for our sake, that in the process of confessing, we don’t bottle them up. We bring them to the surface in the light of what Christ has done for us. Our confessing them is part of the means by which what has been done already for us in Christ is actualized in our lives. We come to know the power of sins forgiven, if we can put it like that. He has already put away our sins, and yet we still live as though we have them. But by confessing them we bring them to the

cross so that their having been put away on the cross is verified to us.

JMF: So we're taking part in the thing that's already so. We're participating in the reality of the forgiveness we already have. That changes the way we approach confession. In my life, early on, I had the idea that God might not forgive me, so I would have to ask more than once and I would keep doing it with more and more fervency and intensity until I could feel that maybe I was convincing myself of the reality of it... It was as though I was asking, or let me say begging, a boss for a raise or something. It was like begging that God would forgive me until I felt like he had. Even then, I wasn't sure that he did. Why would he forgive me anyway, because this is probably the 100th time I've asked about the same thing.

RW: Yep.

JMF: So that changes the whole... we can confess our sins knowing we're forgiven. It's almost a joyful thing.

RW: It should be joyful repentance. We don't repent *in order to* be forgiven. It's forgiveness that leads us to repentance and to joyful repentance. That's a proper way to understand it.

WHY THE INCARNATION IS GOOD NEWS

J. Michael Feazell: What is a Christian missing out on if they don't have an incarnational understanding of the gospel?

Robert Walker: The first thing they're missing out on is that they do not know that God has come all the way to us where we are, because incarnation says that God has become man. In other words, he's no longer distant. He's come in person, into space and time, to do our salvation, to meet us face to face in Jesus. If we don't have a proper understanding of the incarnation, that God became man, then we don't know that God is really with us. But also, we don't know that he's become man *to save us*. The fact that he's become man means that he has come all the way to what we are and achieved our salvation for us as man. So on two counts, we're not aware of how much God has united himself to us.

JMF: A lot of Christians think of Jesus as a role model — he came to show the way. We have popular songs, “He Came to Earth to Show the Way,” for example. What's wrong with just seeing him as a role model?

RW: If we think he's come to show us the way, that implies that “the way” is different from what *he* is. In that view, he would say, “that's the way, walk in it,” and he shows us. But he's much more than that — he *IS* the way. In John's Gospel he says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” What he's done *is* the way. He is the way and so there's much more than just *showing* us the way. He has done everything for us, and we come to the Father through him. So he is the way who has done it for us.

JMF: That would still fit with the role model, if we think of it in terms

of following him — if he's the way, then do we follow him and just try to do what he did?

RW: In a way. But it's more than that, because he has done it for us. We can't comprehend it in the sense of trying to do what he did, because of our sin. The Christian life is living in unity with him, and so, living out of what he has done for us. Rather than trying to copy what he has done so that it's *our* doing it, he's become man to do it *for* us, so we make what he's done ours, and we live out of it. We do the same thing but not in our strength trying to do it all over again. Through union with him, because of the Spirit living in us, we find ourselves beginning to live the way he lived.

JMF: We talk of the Spirit and doing it in the Spirit, but we can't see the Spirit. So how do we know that the Spirit is at work in us?

RW: We're familiar with light. When you go into a room and it's dark, and you flip a switch and the light comes on. We actually can't see light, but we can see what light lights up. And it's the Spirit that gives us the eyes to see Christ and makes Christ real for us, so that if we know Christ, then we know it's through the Spirit. The Spirit is the One who opens us up to live out of Christ.

JMF: You say that he's already done it for us. If that's so, then what are we trying to do? If he's already done everything necessary for our salvation, what is left for us to do for ourselves?

RW: In one sense, nothing, but in another sense, everything. It's to joyfully live out the life that he has re-made for us. If we think of it in the sense that he has come and taken our fallen, dying humanity that wastes away and gets older and dies and then disintegrates in the grave...he's taken our life, he's remade it in his own life. That's what the resurrection is about — that's the remaking of our life. He gives us our new humanity. We're living out our new humanity that he gives us. We're not trying to copy him. We couldn't — we couldn't rise from the dead.

JMF: That's the trouble, isn't it? We try to do what Jesus says, but we fall short, and we may be successful to some degree, but we fall short and then we feel guilty, anxious and fearful about how can we be part of the kingdom of God? How can we be saved, because we fall short and because we're not following Christ as we should? We're fearful. But incarnational theology, seeing the gospel in the way you're describing, doesn't push us back on how well we perform, it sounds like you're saying.

RW: It points us to Christ, and so that we see his humanity, the life that he lived as our life. We don't see that he's done something and we have to copy it — we see what he's done; that is our life. He was born for us, his

birth at Bethlehem is our new birth. When he died, that was our death. When he rose, that was our resurrection. When he ascended into heaven, he took us with him.

This is what Paul says — and that’s the meaning of faith — that we understand that he so came into our place to live for us, that everything that he did is ours. We live out of that. That takes away all the strain and burden and gives a new dimension to Christian living. We live in his strength, not in ours. We are released to live to the full, and yet we’re not living in our strength, we’re living in Christ’s strength. That liberates us to live fully.

JMF: Then the gospel is not about calling people to good behavior — it’s about letting people know and calling them to a new identity — who they are in Christ — to a relationship with God in Christ, and it’s a whole different point of the gospel, isn’t it? (Don’t we usually think of the gospel as being a call to straighten out your life?) In other words, you’re a sinner, and did you know it? Now that you know you’re a sinner, you need to be forgiven of those sins, and so we’re forgiven, we’re told to behave better, and the Holy Spirit will help you and Jesus shows the way — and the whole goal is a better me through good behavior.

RW: Yes.

JMF: But the gospel is not about that.

RW: No, it’s much more than that. It’s not just that God has come to show us what we ought to do — he’s come to do himself for us what we ought to do. He’s taken our human life and he’s remade it. What he gives us in Christ (this comes over especially at the Lord’s Supper or the Eucharist), is our new humanity. Our task is to live out our new humanity. We don’t start by trying to remake ourselves. We have been remade in Christ. We live out the new identity, as you put it, in union with Christ through the Spirit.

JMF: So the gospel’s declaration is that you’ve been made new, therefore live like it. Not “live good, so that God will give you the kingdom.” That’s the opposite of what we typically hear. It’s putting the cart before the horse instead of the other way.

RW: That’s right. The word *gospel* means “good news.” It’s not the good news that we have to make ourselves better. The good news is that we *have* been made better, already been renewed.

JMF: It’s almost like...the gospel is good news if you can achieve it. But sorry, you never will. You can try very hard, though, and that will make you happier. That’s not good news.

RW: Usually it *won't* make us happier, because we know we can't do it.

JMF: It couldn't be more frustrating... we give up or whatever we do.

RW: Yeah. The exciting thing about the incarnation is that God himself came to do it. He did it as man, and that immediately takes us into the doctrine of the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Spirit. That opens up a richer dimension to Christian thought and living.

JMF: How does it do that?

RW: For one thing, this is what God is — the real God is Father, Son, and Spirit. We're used to thinking of God as a single being out there far off. But when we know God in Jesus Christ, we discover that God is Father, Son, and Spirit, and we come to know the real God for the first time. Calvin says if we don't conceive God as Father, Son, and Spirit, then we don't really know God. It's partly coming to know the real God.

The real God is a communion of love. The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father — they live in the communion of love with the Spirit. That is the nature of God — the three persons of God. That doesn't mean there are three Gods. There's one God, and yet he is Father, Son, and Spirit, and they exist in relation.

When we begin to think in that way, then we begin to think of ourselves not just as individuals — an individual here and a separate individual there. We begin to think of ourselves in the human race as interconnected persons in relation. So it has an implication for a much richer and deeper sense of community. A lot of people are a bit scared of the doctrine of the Trinity, but I don't think they need to be.

JMF: It's into that, that Christ brings us — if we're one with him, if he comes and takes humanity, us, into himself, and he's in that eternal communion of love, then we're in that eternal communion of love with him. That's the way things are. It's been done, he already did it.

RW: That's the miracle of the Ascension. When Jesus ascended still wearing our humanity, he took our humanity into the heart of God. So there's now a man in the heart of God. He's still human. That's our destiny — to live in fellowship with God.

When we think of people, we automatically think of people as complete individuals, and you are a different individual from what I am. If somebody knows you, they don't have a clue what I'm like. But with the Trinity, it's different, because the persons are so interrelated. They're different and they remain different. They're each totally God — the Father is completely

God, the Son is completely God, the Spirit's completely God — and yet they live in such a close relation that when we look at the Son and see his face, then we know what the Father is like. The Son is the image of the Father.

You are different — if someone looks at you, they don't know what I'm like. But it's the opposite when we look at Christ. He's the image of the Father. He is the Son of the Father. To know the Son is to know the Father, and Jesus says that. Phillip says, "Show us the Father, and we'll be satisfied." Jesus says, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father." Especially through John's Gospel, when we listen to words of Jesus and we're drawn into his relationship with the Father and we begin to cotton on somehow, slowly, through the Spirit we begin to think in this deeper interpersonal way. We begin to understand something as a relation to the Father, and that's the heart of the gospel — the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit that he has come to share with us.

JMF: When we talk about Trinitarian theology, are we talking about something complicated, or something simple?

RW: It's both at once. The simplest things are often the profoundest things...or put it the other way, the profoundest things are often the simplest things. There's a profound simplicity here. The person with the simplest faith can understand the Son, and the Son being the image of the Father and the Spirit. But this is something that stretches our mind. That doesn't mean that we have to be intellectual or brilliant academically, because it's not that kind of understanding. It's more a different way of thinking. There's a deep simplicity, and yet at the same time, it's profound.

"Complicated" is the wrong word. People often worry that theology is not for them, or the Trinity is not for them, because they haven't got the mind to understand it. But the thing with God is that God makes himself known to us. It's back to the thing about faith. We shouldn't think of our faith — have we got enough faith? We shouldn't think of enough reason — have we got enough reason, enough intelligence, to understand? It's more of who the God is we're trying to understand. If we focus on him, he gives us understanding — he makes himself known.

Often, when we learn something new, if it's really new, we don't know it. How do we learn something we don't know? It might seem impossible. But we all do. We all make breakthroughs. Slowly, gradually, the pieces fall into place. If we have confidence in what we're trying to understand and in the person who is making himself known, we hang in there and

listen and wait, and God gives us understanding. We're led deeper into this way of thinking – especially, I think, through reading John's Gospel.

JMF: With some of the most simple things, such as if you go outside in the evening and look at the sunset and the stars, you can appreciate the profound beauty, and you're drawn into that. You have that sense of inspiration and beauty whether or not you ever study sunsets and stars and how they work (and many people do study them — everything from sensory appreciation, how we process things we see, to how stars are made). There are many things you could learn more about from a sunset and a starry evening, but you don't have to, to stand there and appreciate it and be taken up by it. It's the same whether you know more about it or not. It's still itself. I wonder if the gospel is somewhat like that. There's a simplicity in Christ in simply trusting Christ to be our all in all, and if so, he is everything he is for us and with us, in us, whether we study more about it or not. It's something we can explore forever, joyfully, and never come to the end of.

RW: That's right. The more we know Christ, the more we are drawn into understanding his riches. Paul says that we should be mature in our thinking and have a reason for the hope that's in us. The lecture to the Hebrews says similar things. It's part of our calling, too, in knowing Christ, and being drawn into this profound adoration and love and worship, to do that with the whole of ourselves, and that includes our minds, so that we come to understand deeper.

It's not academic; it's a different way of understanding that we all have because we're all made to know and we're all made in the image of God — to know and understand and think more deeply than we think we're able to — that's given to us. My grandmother was Tom Torrance's mother. She was an evangelical with a profound simple faith. But for Tom, she was the theologian in the family, simply because of her spiritual influence — not through any academic thing learned.

JMF: If we want to understand the gospel in a truly gospel way, for what it is and for what the truth of the gospel is, or even if we want to help somebody else understand it, what is the bottom line? What is the simple thing we need to and can know, whether we ever pick up a theology book?

RW: That God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself and that through what he's done as God and man for us, our lives have been renewed in him, and he gives us a new humanity.

JMF: So our faith, the thing that we're asked to believe, is something

that is true for us whether we believe it or not, even before we believe it.

RW: That's profoundly true. Paul said, "While we were enemies, we were reconciled." Even while we hated God, before we heard the gospel, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son. The gospel is the message of what has happened for us in Jesus. When we hear it, it's good news. It's like the story of the Japanese soldier, in I think it was the Second World War, who was marooned on an island. No one knew he was there. He didn't know the war had ended. He was discovered 20 years later or something. They told him, "The war's ended." The good news. The gospel is hearing the good news that God has done it.

JMF: Some people don't want to commit themselves to the gospel because of the way it's presented. They're given something that really isn't the gospel. They're given this idea that you're going to enter into something where you will need to achieve salvation by doing certain things. You've got to repent of your sins, and then you can't be sure if you've repented of all of them exactly. There are so many barriers, it seems, that keep you from being able to experience joy or rest. What we often hear is not a gospel of rest — it's a gospel of anxiety — you're in big trouble and you better do something to get out of that trouble, or God is going to send you to hell. We're looking for a way to avoid hell, but we have to do something that we're not even sure we can do, in order to avoid hell. It's confused... We're saying this good news — God loves you, so receive him, but he's going to send you to hell if you don't, because that's how he *really* feels about you.

RW: To put it that way is not the gospel. But what you said is what many people believe. The gospel is that God has come to make himself known...by making himself known, that inevitably exposes us for what we are. There is a judgment on us, that we are not what we ought to be. But God has taken his own judgment on himself, and has undone our sin and put it all in the past, and risen into a new life in the resurrection. That is ours now through the gospel. We are called to live out the new life that Jesus achieved, that he lived out in his life and achieved in a permanent sense in the resurrection.

JMF: That's good news. It doesn't require fear — we can rest.

RW: Yes, that's right.

JMF: I want to ask one last thing in the minute or two we have remaining. If there's one thing that you would want people to know about God, what would that be?

RW: That he loves us and that he is love in himself — that's his very nature. He loves us so much that he has even entered into our hell for us on the cross. He's taken our godforsakenness and undone it, and cleared away all the barriers between us and him, and united us to himself. He has taken our flesh, our dust, and made it his. He is now a man in Christ. He's done all that for us. He's now with us, one with us.

JMF: That's a good reason to receive the gospel.

RW: Indeed.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF JESUS' RESURRECTION

J. Michael Feazell: As you were working on the project of editing *Incarnation* and *Atonement*, what were some of the memorable moments during the process?

Robert Walker: It's hard to answer that, because I'm not sure there's any one particular moment. But working on the whole thing, it was deeply moving, and I felt this is precious, this is wonderful stuff. I heard all the lectures, but coming back to it, it just swept over me again. All sorts of things I appreciated struck me with much greater force. It's been a wonderful experience and very rewarding.

JMF: Do you remember a couple of those that stand out?

RW: For example, this emphasis on the resurrection and the meaning of the resurrection. Normally we think the gospel is the cross, and then the resurrection is kind of an extra. But in many ways, it's the resurrection... you can't separate the two. There's a verse of Paul, "Jesus was put to death for our sins and raised for our justification." Raised for our justification. It's the resurrection that makes us righteous. The cross puts away our sins, but it's the resurrection that makes us righteous.

The resurrection is an almighty event. It's not just the raising of a body from death, it's the beginning of a new creation — the beginning of the renewal of all of space and time. For Torrance, it brings out the fact that the resurrection is forgiveness. It's not just the proof of forgiveness, it *is* forgiveness, because in the Bible, sin and death are linked. So for God to

undo sin, means to undo death. That means the resurrection is God's undoing sin. It's raising somebody up who has taken our sin out of the grave, so that is our resurrection.

That's why Paul says, "If Christ is not raised, we are still in our sins." Something like that, which we often bypass, it just hit me with renewed force... There are all sorts of nuggets like that in the book.

JMF: It turns everything on its head, doesn't it? Instead of hoping our sins are forgiven if we repent well enough, it gives us full assurance of salvation because Christ has already done everything. What a joy, what rest, what peace.

RW: Yes. The resurrection of Jesus is our forgiveness in action. They're identical — God forgiving and God raising Christ, they're the same thing.

JMF: You mentioned the resurrection as the new creation, as the starting place for everything — there are implications for the universe, for the whole creation. Could you elaborate on that?

RW: The incarnation means that God has taken part of the stuff of the old creation — our body — and in it has died and undone sin, so that when he rose, that was the beginning of the new creation. The early church fathers had an analogy — they said that when a baby is born, the head comes out first, and that's the hard part. But once the head's come out, the rest of the body will follow. They used that of Christ — he's the firstborn, the first fruits, and he's the head that's come out first, so the rest of creation will follow in what's happened to Christ.

That means the renewal of all space and time. The physical creation will be renewed in Christ, reconstituted under him as the new head. That's the unbelievably cosmic dimension of the New Testament, and that comes out extremely well in Torrance's writings. The resurrection is not just somebody being raised from the dead, it's the beginning of the reconstitution of everything — the beginning of heaven on earth.

JMF: That would imply that we don't know what space and time will be like in the resurrection, once we are immortal. What will that look like — as something not like what we experience now, perhaps?

RW: We can't say. But we can say that it will be this creation, these bodies of ours. We'll recognize each other, so there will be continuity. Yet what it will be like when the creation is freed from sin, death, corruption and injustice, we can't say. It will be far more wonderful and glorious — we can only look forward to it. The Bible says that it does not yet appear — we cannot yet see what we shall be like, but we know that when Christ

comes again, we'll be like him [1 John 3:2]. It speaks of Jesus now having a new and more glorious body, a body which no longer dies.

JMF: After his resurrection he appeared to the disciples several times, including on the seashore, cooking a meal and eating it with them. Yet this was a resurrected body that he was appearing in and he was able to enjoy food and fellowship.

RW: Yes. I like those stories, because dead men don't rise from the dead, so it's striking that the first reaction of the disciples is...they don't believe it. The risen Jesus meets some of the women, and the women tell the disciples he's risen, and they don't believe it, and they're afraid because ...is this a ghost? No, it's real.

The fact that Jesus is raised, he's the beginning of a new creation. In the 40 days that he was on earth, the new creation was overlapping with the old creation. When he ascended, we can no longer see the new creation that is there in Christ. We know it by faith, we know it because we meet and know Christ through the Spirit. We know the reality of it, and that's what gives the New Testament its tremendous sense of victory, triumph and looking forward to what we will be. It's not "pie in the sky" – it's the renewal of this wonderful creation.

JMF: We're saved by grace through faith, and the Scriptures tell us even that is not our own. Luther goes to great lengths to explain that we must not look at faith as another work, because we're not saved by our works, so faith cannot be a work. How do the eyes of faith work? What is faith, and how are we to see this new creation and believe and trust Christ that we're in it? Where does this faith come from, and how is it not a work?

RW: It's God's work, but it's something that really happens in us. We come to see and understand and believe, but the nature of that is that we know that it's through God's work that we came to understand, because this is not something that we could do for ourselves so that we really believe and understand.

Torrance uses the analogy of the virgin birth. Mary did nothing to conceive Jesus. Joseph was set aside. There was no human input, Christ was born, a man. Something happened in Mary and she gave birth. All she did — she was told it would happen, and she said, "Amen." Faith is a bit like that — that God has become man for us — to believe, to do everything for us — and we say amen to it. Our amen is the way it happens in us. We've understood that it's for us, and we say amen. We live out of what Christ has done for us. Something real happens in us. It's a real understanding, in that it's God's work.

JMF: So our job is to believe what is so. He is, therefore we don't have to be afraid.

RW: Yes. To believe the gospel, to rejoice in what Christ has done for us — not just as God but as man.

JMF: Your degrees are in philosophy and theology. How does Trinitarian theology bear on philosophy?

RW: I did a degree in philosophy and found that very useful. It gives a conceptual understanding, which isn't necessary, but it helps to understand theology. I enjoyed my study in philosophy hugely. When I did theology, it was going somewhere. There was a purpose, there was a truth, there was a reality, and the heart of the reality in the Christian faith is the Trinity, God in Christ. That gives us a grasp of reality as it is, so that having that grasp at once deepens and enriches our understanding of the rest of the world — of science, of philosophy, et cetera. The philosophy helps to understand it.

At the same time, the theology enriches philosophy. Trinitarian theology gives a deeper dimension. Theology helps us think in a profound way because in the gospel we know God. In theology we are knowing God not just with our feelings, our hearts, but with our minds. Our minds are inevitably deepened and stretched. So for me, there's a link between that and the fact that, I think it's true to say, most of the good philosophers today are Christians, which is a remarkable fact.

JMF: Academic work and working on a major project like this is not all you do — you're involved in outdoor sports. Can you tell us about that?

RW: I am very fortunate. Edinburgh University has an outdoor center on Loch Tay, that's a lake in the Highlands — a fabulously beautiful setting. I've worked there almost every weekend of the year except for July and August, and four or five months a year to mid-weeks as well. I teach kayaking, canoeing, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, hill walking, sometimes sailing and windsurfing. I love that. It's out in the open air, it's exercise, it's doing what I love and sharing with people. It's an ideal balance to the academic work, to theology.

JMF: We have just a little bit of time remaining, and in that time I wonder if you would mind sharing some of your personal observations, reflections on your uncle, Thomas F. Torrance.

RW: I got to know him much better at the end of his life, having been asked to edit these lectures of his after his stroke. He was unfortunately in the hospital and in a nursing home for the last few years of his life, and I visited him once or twice a week, so I got to know him very well. Things

that come across — he is very personable. He took an intense interest in people. When he died, a number of fellow students wrote or phoned his brother and said that what they remembered about Tom was not his academic learning, although the amount he knew was incredible...what they remembered was his pastoral concern for them as students.

He was a minister. On the pastoral side he was always very strong, so he was a unique combination — a minister, a pastor. He prayed for his students, he prayed for all the family each day, he read the Bible each day. That's the pastoral side, you've got the academic side. His knowledge of field after field of history, of theology, was just amazing. He knew science. He had incredible energy, he worked at great speed, and he held all these things together. He was a unique synthesis of theology and life. His experiences in the war... that would be an adventure book in itself.

I used to try to get him going on some of his war memories, because even though I'd heard them, it was good to hear them again. One time he was out on patrol with the soldiers. He insisted on being with the soldiers whenever he could, and they gave him skis. This was in Italy, in winter. And skiing down, one of his skis came off. It was badly fitting, and it clattered down the hillside. It made a noise and alerted the Germans and they began firing at him. So he had to ski down on one ski to avoid enemy fire.

There are numerous occasions when his life appeared to have been saved by a miracle. They'd be sheltering down in a trench and the person on the left and the right would be killed. Or he'd sleep in his Land Rover at night and then one night he, for some reason, didn't sleep there, and the next day there was a bullet hole right where he would have been sleeping.

He was a man of tremendous energy. He came back from the war and said, "Mother, I'm not cut out to be an academic. I'm a man of action." He had this tremendous energy.

JMF: Tell us about your mother. She's his sister, and I'm curious about how it was to live with someone who came from such a family.

RW: It was an immense privilege. There were six children — three sons and three daughters. They were all given to the Lord before they were born, or dedicated, and the way that worked out was that the three sons all became ministers and the three daughters all married ministers. It was a tremendous privilege to have that theological understanding in the family.

My father was a medic. Going out as a missionary to Africa, he trained as a minister. He was a great sportsman. He played hockey for Scotland and he was good with his hands...and I combine both. I love sport. I like

doing do-it-yourself. But in many ways the heart of me is theology — it's knowing God, understanding the Christian faith, helping communicate it to others.

We were made to use our minds and know God with the whole of ourselves, and most Christians, we tend not to use our minds about God, so we miss out on a lot. But human life is, in all its richness, is about being part of the world, about doing things, so sport for me happens to be my work, but I think it's important for people to be active in some way, to use their bodies, whether it's in sport or painting or woodwork, because we're made to be physical beings, and so to me, it's good to combine the two.

JMF: If we know who we are in Christ, there's no separation between secular and spiritual, as it were ...

RW: No, there shouldn't be. That's part of the meaning of the incarnation — that God has become man. In the Bible, in the Old Testament, the human being is body and soul as a unity. The Old Testament has no concept of a soul apart from the body, so when the body dies, that's it, we're dead. In the Old Testament the soul is thought of as a living body, a body with breath in it. That's why the resurrection in the New Testament is so fundamental, because if we're not raised, then that's it.

God loves this physical world — he made it as physical, and he's come to save it as physical, so he became a physical being, he became man, and he rose in the body. Jesus is forever bodily. We will forever be human. In some religions, we stop being human, we become god, we lose our individuality. But part of the glory of the Christian-Hebrew tradition is that God loves us as we are, men and women, children of flesh and blood, and we will forever be human.

JMF: Did Tom Torrance ever talk about pets? I receive questions frequently, and I know C.S. Lewis had made some statements about it. Did he ever comment on...?

RW: He was a keen horse rider when he grew up in China. He taught the mule to jump. The mule had never done that before. And he skied. He and his family always had several dogs, so they loved their pets and used to take their dogs for a daily walk. When you'd go to the house there's this furious barking, all the dogs were barking and waiting to welcome you.

JMF: Did he have any feeling on whether there is a reunion with pets in the resurrection?

RW: I never heard him on that, but to me everything that we enjoy in this creation will be somehow renewed over there for us, perhaps in a different form. There's a lot in the Bible about the renewal of the earth,

and the meek will inherit the earth, the new city comes down from above. To me it's wrong to think of heaven as a separate place "up there." Heaven is the future state of the earth, which will be so much more wonderful than it is now, because it will be freed from all sin and crying and tears, and just wasting away or death.

JMF: Final question... If God has redeemed or is reconciling everything through himself, "whether things in heaven or things on earth," as Colossians says, through Christ, or in Christ... I don't know why people are concerned about the devil and demons, but did Tom Torrance discuss the resolution of the devil and demons in terms of the new creation?

RW: He had a strong and vivid sense, as the New Testament did, of the reality of evil powers, and Christ's whole life was a battle with evil. He used to say that evil is essentially parasitic. It cannot exist in its own right. It can only exist as an attack on what is good, so that God has made this creation to be wonderful and good. Somehow the mystery of evil is that there's this force which attacks and tries to destroy it. But Christ has overcome it.

Torrance used to use the analogy of two grindstones rubbing against each other. One is going one way and the other is going the other, and they're rubbing sparks off each other. One is saying, "I love you" and the other is saying, "No, you don't," and that for him was his picture of hell — that God remains love, God has redeemed the whole of creation, and the whole of creation is being renewed. The mystery is that some people, as far as we can, according to the Bible (and the Bible is our only authority and guide), have the freedom to say no, and they will say no. They refuse to enter this reality, and so they're on the outside, the fringe. He has a good understanding of the nature of evil and the powers of evil.

JMF: The wheels give a great analogy because that's what happens, is sparks, and it erodes you as you continue to say no to who you are, to your actual identity of who God has made you to be in Christ. Yet it is kind of scary to receive something that you're unfamiliar with.

RW: That's right, because it means we're no longer self-centered, we're no longer in control, we're no longer turned in on ourselves. We need to learn to look out, to live for others and with others, and that's the new life that God holds up for us in Christ. Some people resist — I don't know why, it's illogical, it's daft. Why would we want to persist in death when we can have life?

HOW GOD BECAME KING

Gary Deddo: Professor Wright, thank you for taking some time out here at Saint Andrews [Scotland] this morning and joining us for the *You're Included* interview series of Grace Communion International.

NTW: Good to be with you.

GD: I like to spend some time considering themes that you address in your recent publication, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospel*. At the outset of your book, you tell the reader that you think there's a serious problem at the heart of the Christian faith and practice as you've experienced it. You say your increasing impression is that most of the Western Christian tradition has forgotten what the four Gospels are really all about. That's provocative. Could you elaborate on that statement



and tell us what we have forgotten?

NTW: I've often wondered since writing that whether I was overstating it, but looking around and listening and attending church and talking with friends, I want to stick to it. At the heart of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is this enormous claim that something actually happened there at the beginning of the first century through the work and death and resurrection of Jesus, something happened which has transformed the world.

We have tended to slide that downhill into being Jesus simply providing a system of salvation which enables us later to leave the world or to escape the world in some way, either by our spirituality in the present or by a salvation which will take us entirely away from the world in the future. Whereas the four Gospel writers, living as they did within the world of second-temple Judaism, believed that through Jesus, the one God of Israel, the creator of the world, had acted to reclaim the world, to redeem the world, to rescue the world, not to enable people to leave it behind.

This idea is scary for most people in the Western world, because for the last 200 years, Western thought in general and Christianity along with that has tended to think in terms of splitting apart things that are "worldly" (whether we call them political or social or whatever) and then "religious" (or spiritual things) over there. So we have read the Gospels through a grid of interpretation which is systematically and at every point denying one of the main things that the Gospels are trying to affirm. I don't know how to say that except by doing it rather sharply: I think we've all been getting it wrong.

GD: Could you recall for us some passages in the New Testament that point out the emphasis or the importance of Jesus and the kingdom and his kingship?

NTW: A passage which many Western Christians know well (because they may hear it read in church at Christmas time and so on) is the beginning of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God."

What John is doing in that passage — hooking up with what he does in his story of Jesus' resurrection — is to tell the story of Jesus as the story of a new Genesis, a new beginning. Genesis is all about the creation and about God's beautiful world, and the story John tells in his Gospel from beginning to end is not about Jesus telling people to leave the world behind and go somewhere else, but a story about how in and through Jesus, the one God of creation is rescuing creation and enabling his people to live as new-creation people. That's a way of telling the story which I never heard

when I was growing up in church and when I was being taught as a student. We need to recapture it.

This comes to a climax in John's Gospel in that extraordinary scene in chapters 18 and 19 – when Jesus confronts Pontius Pilate — here we have the kingdom of God squaring off against the kingdom of Caesar. But it isn't Jesus saying, "Well, all this kingdom stuff is a waste of time." It's Jesus and Pilate arguing about different visions of kingdom, truth and power.

We see that also in the beginning of Luke's Gospel, in chapter 2, where Luke spends some time setting up the chronology in terms of the Roman emperor of that time, Augustus Caesar, who was emperor when Jesus was born. Luke describes that in detail, that Jesus was born in Bethlehem because Augustus Caesar wanted to have a census so he could get more tax and do all that stuff which was standard practice at that time.

Anyone living at that time and a Jew living at that time would know this story – of somebody being born in the royal house of David in Bethlehem precisely the moment when the Roman empire is flexing its muscles – is bound to lead to a sense of, "Which kingdom are we going to go with, then?" The story ends for Luke, not at the end of Luke's Gospel but the end of Acts, with Paul announcing God as King and Jesus as Lord in Rome openly and unhindered, and Luke says to us, "You do the math, you figure out what's going on here."

One third example: In Mark 10, when James and John say they want to sit one at Jesus' right and one at his left, Jesus explains, not only do they not have a clue what they're talking about, but that there are two different ways of doing power. The rulers of the nations, he says, boss people about and bully them and so on. He says, "We're not going to do it like that – we're going to do it the other way – by the power of servanthood. The Son of Man didn't come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

In other words, the gospel isn't about an other-worldly dream, it's about a different way of doing stuff in and for *this* world – because it's God's world and God loves it and has come to rescue it. One of the most famous verses in Scripture, John 3:16, doesn't say: God so *hated* the world that he sent his Son. God so *loved* the world, and that's the whole purpose – God is re-claiming his rights as Creator over the whole world.

GD: What about Jesus' parables of the kingdom? Do some of those point in the same direction?

NTW: The parables of the kingdom are fascinating because at one level, they are illustrations, just like you or I might toss into a sermon or a

talk, an illustration happens to occur to us while we're on the way to church or whatever. But they're much more than that.

Those parables of seed and growth play back in the minds of Jesus' hearers (and we have to remember that most of them, the main texts they had in their minds were the Old Testament Scriptures). They play back particularly through the prophetic images about God sowing his people, about God sowing Israel, making it a fruitful place, etc. But they play all the way back to Genesis 1 again, where you get the lavish account of God creating plants with seed in them bearing fruit and so on.

The idea of plants coming up and bearing fruit is a new-creation idea, a new-Israel idea. If you track it through Isaiah and Jeremiah, it's a return from exile idea – these all nest together and fit together, so that though what Jesus is saying is a direct challenge to these people who are listening to him now, that challenge resonates with a sense that this kingdom vision is about God doing the new thing which is going with the grain of the original creation but now making it much more fruitful.

You see this in the miracle stories when Jesus multiplies loaves and fishes. It isn't that he says, "Forget eating loaves and fishes entirely, I got something totally different." These are signs that the God of creation is doing new things, he's on the move in a new way.

GD: I think what you are bringing out here is that we can't fully appreciate what the New Testament means until we read about its connections to the Old Testament. Could you say a little more about that need to be familiar with Old Testament and its background?

NTW: If one doesn't know the Old Testament, one doesn't have a chance of understanding the New, because again and again, and you see this in the Gospels, the way they told a story is not just with the odd glance over their shoulder – that something interesting happened back there and this is an odd reference. Like I might drop a reference to a Shakespeare play into a speech or a book I was writing or something that is just for decoration. Some people think the Old Testament is just a back decoration. It's much, much more than that.

The Old Testament – whether we read it in the English translations from Genesis to Malachi or as you do in the Hebrew from Genesis to Chronicles (they ordered the books differently) – whichever way you do it, it's telling a story, and the story is going somewhere, and it stops short. The end of Chronicles, the end of Malachi, it's pointing ahead, it's as though we've got a 12-chapter novel and we've got nine or ten of those chapters, or maybe nine and a half. Or as I've sometimes said, take a Shakespeare play, it's as though we've got three acts of the play, and we're

waiting to see what's going to happen in the 4th act, when it all really works out.

The Gospels are written very cleverly – quite different, all four, each one in its own way is taking that Old Testament narrative and saying, the story that I am telling you, the story about Jesus, is where that story was going. It doesn't look like what you were expecting, but this is where it all had to go.

It is, in modern terms, this-worldly – the Jewish story is about God promising Abraham a family and a land, and then all the bad things that happen when they get it wrong, messed it up and all the rest. In the New Testament the family gets expanded so that it includes people of all ethnic backgrounds, not just the Jewish people. The land gets expanded, as you see in the Acts of the Apostles, so it's now the whole world.

That sense of a narrative which suddenly does this new thing is powerful in the Gospels. I suspect that 90 percent of Christians in today's world haven't thought that, let alone tried to read the text in that way.

GD: So Jesus is fulfilling the expectations and hopes of Israel in many ways. Sometimes it seems we've too narrowly construed the kind of fulfillment that Jesus is bringing about. It has kingdom dimensions and time and space, and "on earth" dimensions.

NTW: Yes, and of all the Scriptures that the people of Israel in Jesus' day would know, what would they know most? Possibly the Psalms. Think for instance of the Psalms in the 90s – "The Lord is King and has put on his glorious apparel and he is taking his power and reigning" and "the Lord is King let the earth be glad thereof." You get those wonderful psalms like 96 and 98, which say that the mountains and hills and the sheep in the field are all going to sing for joy because Yahweh is coming to be king.

Perhaps most decisive of all, in Isaiah 52, "How lovely in the mountains are the ones who say to Zion, your God reigns" – that is, your God is becoming King. How does that come about? We go from the end of Isaiah 52 into Isaiah 53, which is an extraordinary picture of the suffering servant, who is the obedient representative of Israel taking the weight of sin and sorrow upon himself. Then in Isaiah 54, there is new covenant; in Isaiah 55 there is new creation. It's an extraordinary sequence, and I think that Jesus and the Gospel writers have that prophetic sequence in mind: The kingdom of God through the work of the servant, resulting in the total renewal of covenant in creation.

GD: How would their understanding of Jesus as Son of David or Messiah fill out and inform what we hear Jesus saying in the Gospels?

NTW: The word Messiah (or Christ, which is just a re-translation) is

often misunderstood, not least by Christians who have short-circuited the argument over the last two or three hundred years, particularly the question that Western cultures ask is, Is Jesus divine? People have taken the word “Christ” and assumed that it meant *divine*. Then it comes as a shock to people when they’re told, “It means Messiah, and as far as we know, first-century Jews didn’t imagine that the Messiah would be in any sense divine.”

We see in the New Testament a swirling mass of different Jewish ideas. There was no one identikit picture of what the Messiah would look like. Jesus takes the variegated expectations of the time and remolds them around himself. We can see other figures doing the same thing in the same period. Jesus draws those Messianic expectations (which are fuzzy and ill-formed) onto himself, and through his own work, he does this stuff in a new way, so he doesn’t appear like the “warrior messiah” that some were imagining. He doesn’t appear to be wanting to rebuild the temple, as some people thought the Messiah ought to do. (That’s why the Herod family were trying to legitimate themselves as kings of the Jews, by doing stuff with the temple.) Jesus, on the contrary, seems to be *attacking* the temple and warning that it is under threat of immanent destruction and so on.

But his followers see that he is obedient to a deeper Messianic vision rooted in Israel’s Scriptures, one which is producing an extraordinarily different sort of messianic victory. Instead of beating the pagans in an old-fashioned military battle, he is beating the darkest enemy of all, death, which is caused by human rebellion and sin. Jesus is redefining the messianic agenda around a deeper vision, his understanding of what the real problem is – which has to be dealt with by the King when he comes.

Many Jews looked at Jesus (in his lifetime and when Paul was preaching about him) and said, “That’s not the sort of messiah we were expecting, thank you very much.” But the early Christians nevertheless said, “The resurrection of Jesus is the declaration by the living God that he really is the Messiah, and hence this is the redemption you were expecting, even if it doesn’t look like you thought it would at that time.”

GD: Another important element needed to follow the Gospel writers’ story regards the nature of this kingdom and Jesus’ redefinition of it. Jesus’ kingship relates to the idea of righteousness – the righteous kingdom (and God’s righteousness is a theme in both the Old Testament and the New Testament). How would you define biblical righteousness (because we can think of that in purely spiritual or moralistic ways)? How does that notion of righteousness relate to Jesus being King in the kingdom of God?

NTW: Part of our difficulty with the word *righteousness* and its

cognates – righteous and justify, etc., which is the same root in the Greek or Hebrew – is that we don't have one English word or set of words which map directly onto the Hebrew words or the Greek words that we find in the Old or the New Testament. This is a common problem with many words, but this is one of the big ones.

The Hebrew word *tsedaqah*, the word we normally translate as righteousness, is like a large ocean-going freight vessel which carries a lot of freight from different bits of Israel's Scriptures and Israel's history. In contemporary English, we don't have any vessel big enough to carry all that freight. So when we say "righteousness," we have to educate ourselves to think back into what that word would carry.

It's complicated, because many of the Jews of Jesus' day would read the Septuagint, the Greek translation, but the Greek word *dikiosyne* carries *some* of the content that *tsedaqah* would, but for a Greek speaker, it would also carry quite a lot of Plato, who had written about *dikiosyne* as justice. It is hugely complicated in the New Testament, and the word moves this way and that, from writer to writer. The center of it is something to do with God's righteousness, something to do with God's faithfulness to his people, to the relationship he's established with his people, which we call the covenant relationship. But because God's intention for his people is that they would be the genuine humans, the real deal, then the word has (inescapably) what we call an ethical content as well. They wouldn't have dissociated covenant from ethics – those two go together. God says, "if you are my people, then this is what it's going to look like."

So we separate these things out and ask, is this a status, is it behavior, is it spirituality? The answer: it's all of those but more. When you learn to think in the way that the Psalms do, talking about Yahweh's righteousness, or again, Isaiah 40-55, the passage is full of talk about the fact that Yahweh is righteous, so you may be in exile now, but you can trust him, because he is righteous, he will restore you, he will rescue you, he will bring you back. But then you have to be a people who not only embody but reflect that righteous quality.

The New Testament is drawing cheerfully on all of that as part of this overall picture that if God is becoming King, then that is both a revelation of his faithfulness to creation and covenant, and a summons to all those whom he is calling to live as part of that, to be God's righteous people — both as the status they are given by God's grace and then, as Paul says in Romans 6, in the way they behave.

Part of our problem in the last two, three centuries in the Western world is that we have separated status and behavior in a way that the New

Testament writers wouldn't have, so that we want to emphasize the one or the other, but it's difficult to do both at the same time. The New Testament doesn't seem to suffer from our inhibitions at that point.

GD: Sometimes the notion of righteousness is related to the notion of justice (in our Western parlance anyway). Righteousness is often understood as rewarding the good and punishing the evil. God's righteousness would be fulfilled, even if that's all God accomplished, that he rewarded the good and punished the evil. It seems to me you're talking about something more than that.

NTW: Yes. When I think about the way the Bible treats the righteousness of God, I think of a passage like Daniel 9 – the great prayer of Daniel in exile, where he says, “We’ve been here a long time, and we know why this happened, it’s because you [God] are righteous.” How does that work? It’s because we were in covenant, we broke the covenant, so because you are righteous, you were obliged to punish us. Go to Deuteronomy 27, 28 — God was obliged to punish his rebellious people by sending them into exile.

Then Daniel says, “However, because you are righteous, now is the time for you to rescue us and bring us back.” In other words, the covenant was not simply a quid pro quo: “you behave like this, this happens; you behave like that, that happens.” The covenant was God setting up the family of Abraham as the family through whom he was going to rescue the whole world. (That’s how Paul expounds the Abrahamic story in Romans 4 or Galatians 3, for instance.) God knew from the beginning when he chose Abraham, that this family was going to mess up. These people were themselves part of the problem as well as part of the solution.

So the story gets complicated, morally, theologically – but when it all comes into land in the New Testament, we find that the notion of God being like a just judge who punishes the evil and rewards the good is not totally removed, but we go beyond that into the extraordinary idea that God's righteousness is about his grace and mercy — and his over-flowing faithfulness to a purpose, which is to say, “The whole world has messed up, but I love you so much that I’m going to take that on to myself, and deal with it, so that there can be new creation, forgiveness, and new life for anyone who is hearing this message and is able to respond.”

GD: So the idea of new creation and restoration is intrinsically related to righteousness. [NTW: Absolutely.] If God merely stopped short of that and didn't provide us renewal, then that would be a different notion. But because he's righteous, he renews, he restores, recreates...

NTW: One of the fascinating things which the New Testament holds

together (which we often manage not to) is the dealing with evil on the cross, making the way therefore for new life to happen. Because it's evil which is stopping the new life happening (as we all know in ourselves, that when we mess up, when we sin, when we rebel, that stuff which ought to be flourishing in our lives then doesn't). That happens cosmically, and God takes the weight of that evil upon himself in the person of Jesus, and that's what the cross is all about.

But if it just stops there.... (Some Western piety has done that — think of the great work of Johann Sebastian Bach, *The Matthew Passion*, *The John Passion* — we almost have a theory of salvation stopping with the cross. Bach didn't have a very big theology of the resurrection — interesting, in his Lutheran world.) Sometimes, we've allowed ourselves to think you can tell the story with the resurrection as kind of a nice happy ending, as an afterthought. But the point is, now that sin has been dealt with, new creation can begin. That's where the kingdom of God comes in.

GD: In another of your books, you talked about God's commitment to "putting things to rights."

NTW: Yes. I think is a British-ism, that we talk about putting things to rights. If my bicycle has been messed up because of an accident, I take it to the shop and they will put it to rights — they will fix it. Or if my radio is on the blink, then somebody will fiddle inside, and we say, he'll put it to rights. I think in America you often say, will put it right, we'll make it right.

I like the phrase "put it to rights" because that has a little echo of "rights" as in the sense of justice, and the way I've often put it is (this relates to the doctrine of justification in Paul) that God's eventual aim is to put the whole world to rights. It's to sort the whole world out. That's in the Psalms, Isaiah, Genesis, Deuteronomy, etc.

Part of the means whereby God does that in and through Jesus Christ is to put *people* right. Justification serves the larger cause of justice. It is not just about me needing to be right with God. (I do, and that's important, and that's central — when I look in the mirror, I need to know that that's there. But God doesn't stop there.) He says, "I'm putting you right so that you can be part of the team which is working on the putting-the-world-right stuff," because that's what, by the Holy Spirit, God is intending to be doing in and through us.

GD: It's clear in your book that you think an emphasis on going to heaven doesn't do complete justice to the message of the gospel in the New Testament. What's the problem with setting out the gospel in that way — going to heaven — and is there a way to correct for that?

NTW: This is a big and deep one, and I struggled with this when I was in my late teens and early twenties, because I’ve grown up going to church where the emphasis, the assumption was, if you are a Christian, you get to heaven, and if you’re not a Christian, then watch out, because you probably won’t get to heaven. Much of Western Christianity has been stuck on that. This is a medieval thing.

An anecdote may help. I was once in a worship service in the Sistine Chapel in Rome, with that great picture by Michelangelo at the far end. I was sitting next to a Greek Orthodox archimandrite. (It was an ecumenical row we were on.) He pointed at that painting and said, “That’s not how we do it in the Greek East. We don’t tell the story like that, with some going to heaven and some going to hell.” Because for them it’s all about resurrection and new creation. They’re not necessarily universalists, but the emphasis is not on “some this way, some that way.” It’s on the newness and the new creation and the life, rather than the either/or.

What we then find is a problem: If you grow up with going to heaven as the ideal, people envisage heaven as outside space and time and matter. But, excuse me, we have Jesus being raised from the dead, and we are promised that we will be raised bodily from the dead. Most devout Christians believe that without ever stopping and thinking, how does that work together?

The answer is, as any first-century Jew would know, that *resurrection* means a two-stage, post-mortem reality, that you don’t go straight from death to resurrection. Jesus himself didn’t go straight from death to resurrection. Jesus was in the tomb, and then was raised on the third day. He talks to the brigand beside him on the cross when he says, “Today, you will be with me in paradise.” Because in that world, *paradise* is not the ultimate place you go to be. Paradise is the temporary resting place.

Just under two years ago, my father died. I had the privilege of taking his funeral, and it was a wonderful sense — he was a devout Christian man — of giving him over to God, to be rested and refreshed and restored, a big sigh of relief, against the day when one day, he will be raised from the dead, when we all will be, when God makes the new heavens and new earth.

When we talk about going to heaven, okay, but the New Testament doesn’t usually do that. Hardly any passages in the New Testament use that language. In Revelation it talks about the souls being under the altar and saying to God “how long?” They’re on a holding pattern, in a waiting mode, and the eventual thing is the new heavens and the new earth, which will be like this world, only more so.

God made space, time and matter – and he loves that stuff. He said in Genesis it was very good. He wants to do it even more, so the new world which God will make will be like the present one, only more so. Where the dead are now... If they belong to Christ, Paul says, they are with Christ, which is far better. But that is not the end of the story. There's resurrection still to come. Getting that two-stage story into people's heads when they have a whole lifetime of thinking of "one step straight into heaven and that's it," that's difficult. Fortunately, if you read the New Testament, it becomes clearer and clearer.

GD: Thank you so much. We're out of time, but I know our viewers will be prompted with this interview to look at your book *How God Became King*.

HOW GOD BECAME KING (PART 2)

GD: Professor Wright, thank you for joining us again here in St. Andrews. I'd like to follow up with a few more questions that are derived mostly from your book *How God Became King*. I'm particularly interested in the connection and relationship between heaven and earth. Often we think of them as separate, and we're going to heaven and leaving earth, but you want to bring out the relationship and the connection. Can you say something more about that?

NTW: A few years ago, in 2005, I was working on another book called *Simply Christian*. I found myself having to explain certain things in a way I hadn't before, and I did it in terms of the temple in Jerusalem. When they built the temple in Jerusalem (and when they had the wilderness tabernacle before that), the idea of the temple was *this* was the place where heaven and earth would overlap and interlock.

That seems counterintuitive to most people in the modern West. The reason for that is: ever since the Renaissance, Western culture has become more and more Epicurean, in terms of ancient philosophy. Epicurus and his follower Lucretius split apart heaven and earth and said that the gods are somewhere far away, are not bothered about us, are not interested in us, and we just do our own thing, and the world rambles along under eternity. That's Epicureanism. Much of the modern Western world has been Epicurean. Thomas Jefferson said, "I am an Epicurean."

The Enlightenment of the 18th century is built on the principle that God and the world don't basically mix. The Bible is built on the principle that they're designed to, but, because the world is in rebellion, that's a complex and contested idea. Nevertheless, the point of the temple in Jerusalem, and the reason why the main thing you do there is sacrifice, is because God wants to get together with his people.

Then the extraordinary thing happens in the New Testament: Jesus behaves and talks as if he is somehow almost the temple in person, a living, breathing temple. Paul says (even more extraordinarily) to the Christians in Corinth, of all places, that because God's Spirit now dwells in you, you are the temple of the living God [1 Corinthians 3:16] and therefore, you have to figure out how to handle that, what comes as a result. That is hugely challenging intellectually, personally and ethically, but that's how it's meant to be, that God and the world are meant for each other. Heaven and earth are meant for each other, not meant to be pulled apart. In Jesus and the Spirit, that's what we're supposed to see happening.

GD: They touched, came together.

NTW: They touched, they merged. In 1 Corinthians 15:28, Paul says, God will eventually be all in all.

GD: The problem for some people is when we read that Jesus said his kingdom was not of this world. That's often interpreted in a certain way and you're trying to bring out a different, a particular way of viewing that. Could you say something about it: what did he mean when he said, "my kingdom is not of this world"?

NTW: Part of the difficulty here is in the translation. The phrase "not of this world" has been used to mean it's an otherworld sort of thing, in the sense of nothing to do with space, time and matter. Nothing to do with politics and mess of this world.

The phrase in Greek is "my kingdom is not *ek tou kosmou toutou*. *Ek* means "out of" or "from." Jesus is saying, "my kingdom isn't the sort that grows in this world of itself." It's not the sort of kingdom that grows in this world, like the ancient Roman kingdom, like many modern empires.

This is the next line that Jesus goes on to: by violence. He says, "If my kingdom was the sort that grows in this world, then my followers will be fighting to stop me from being handed over. My kingdom is not from here." The point is his kingdom is from God, from heaven, but it is for this world. It isn't *from* this world, but it's *for* this world.

That's why, when Pilate sends Jesus to the cross with ironically the

words “King of the Jews” above his head... (Any first-century Jew would know that that has to do with this kingdom vision from Psalm 2 and so on, which is “the king of the Jews” whose dominion will be from one sea to the other and from the river to the ends of the earth. This is not about another worldly kingdom.) Pilate (like the centurion at the foot of the cross in Mark’s Gospel) is saying more than he knew: Jesus is the true king of the world, and that’s what begins properly with the resurrection.

GD: So “not of this world” means “it’s not of that sort or of that kind.” It doesn’t mean it’s of another world and place.

NTW: Exactly. It comes from God’s world, but God’s world, heaven, was always meant to intersect with our world. If a kingdom merely grows in this world, it will do its business by violence and death, and it will die. God’s kingdom is a new thing coming in, but it is for this world, to make it a world that God wants it to be.

GD: How would you see that working out in the life of the church and the people of God? How do we go about living in Christ’s reign here and now on this earth?

NTW: The most important thing is worship. Most Christians worship, because they go to church on Sunday, or they say their prayers or whatever, but very few reflect on what actually happens when you worship. When you worship, you’re saying to God with your innermost being, “You are in charge. You are the King. You are the Lord, and we are available for your use, as it were.”

This is a scary, risky and dangerous thing to do, but that’s basically what one is doing. When you’re worshiping, you are adoring the God in whose image you are made. In the New Testament, Paul and others say things to do with that. It means you get remade in the image of God, so you become somebody who can reflect God into the world, perhaps in ways that one is not aware of oneself. That’s what worship ought to result in.

Therefore, as Christians are worshipers, they ought to be kingdom bearers. They ought to be stewards in God’s world. Jesus said, “You are the light of the world”; that’s how we are supposed to be. Without worship, that won’t happen. With worship, it begins to happen, but it takes more than that — it takes teaching and thinking through how the practice is going to work out.

GD: Could you give us some examples of where you think the church (or a branch of the church or individual Christians, or organizations) has done a good job of making this apparent?

NTW: There are positives and negatives. As with Jesus in his work and then his confrontation with Pontius Pilate, some of the kingdom work is positive, planting new things, planting seeds which are going to grow. Some of it is negative, confronting the past of the world with the fact that they're getting it wrong.

My successor Bishop of Durham, Justin Welby [now Archbishop of Canterbury], was recently in the news because he was in the business world before he became a priest and then a bishop. He is now one of the church's representatives to speak into the world of banking and commerce. He made a speech recently (which got the headlines) pointing out that the way the banking industry has run was purely for the benefit of the banking industry. It was called the service industry, but it wasn't actually serving anyone. That is a classic example of a wise Christian who understands what he's talking about, not just shooting his mouth off to somebody he doesn't like (which is always a danger), but actually naming an issue in our society which has been a major sore point, putting his finger on it in the name of God—not in order to say you silly people, whatever, but in order to produce the serious prophetic critique which we need, the positive as well.

From my time in Durham I saw a lot of this. It was one of the poorest areas of the U.K., and there were churches that didn't have a great deal in terms of big theological education telling them how to do it. They were worshipping people who look around at their local communities. In one case a church in one of the poorest parts of the northeastern England saw that there were a lot broken homes. There were single mothers with young kids, but the mothers were out at work; the kids were running wild on the street. The church with minimal resources started an amazing child daycare center which became a flagship project that other people from around the country looked at. They said, We never thought of doing it like that, but how did this work, and how did you solve that problem, et cetera.

That's how it often works: two or three people (maybe even one person) out of the life of worship, prayer and Scripture study see that there is something which needs to be done. They say, "This seems impossible, we will pray about it, we will work it, we'll go and talk to the local council." When they do it, it cascades. Other people say, "we could do that" as well.

My favorite example (not recent, because I was involved in it) is the Hospice Movement. Fifty or 60 years ago there wasn't a hospice

movement as we now know it. It was because Cicely Saunders, a Christian with a bit of steely eye who wasn't going to take no for an answer, knew that the care that people were getting in hospital when they were dying was not good, that the doctors would just give them up. So she started St. Christopher's Hospice in London. The government didn't want to help, the medical profession weren't interested. She raised the money herself. There are now hospices all over the Western world which really flowed from that and have given hope and comfort and solace to millions of people. That's within my lifetime that's happened, and that's a sign of God being king even here even now—paradoxically, even in the midst of death bringing signs of life.

GD: They're not necessarily grandiose. You might think the kingdom of God is going to be heroic and grandiose and these aren't.

NTW: Exactly.

GD: It can take simple forms.

NTW: It's precisely not grandiose. That's why the parables are often about a tiny seed which then will grow into something. The book of Zechariah says, Don't despise that they're small things. Again and again I have seen kingdom projects, you might call them, which started amazingly small—with one poor person in a poor rundown church who gets this idea that when she or he is praying, God seems to be saying, "I want you to go and do this." "That's crazy, how could I make a difference?" It is extraordinary: one or two or three people saying prayers, worshipping, attentive to the needs around them. It's extraordinary what God can do.

GD: Another theme that you bring up in your book is the theme of suffering as a part of demonstrating the kingdom and participating in Christ's reign. Can you say something about that?

NTW: We're not good at suffering in the Western world. The whole Enlightenment project was about, "We have grown up now, we have more meds and we have modern technology, therefore we shouldn't have to suffer, so we'll vanish suffering." The trouble is that there's lots of suffering in the rest of the world, and some of it, sadly, we have inflicted on the rest of the world; there's all sorts of issues around that.

There is the danger as well, which is there in the second century already, of Christians embracing martyrdom a bit too eagerly, and wanting to throw themselves on to the fire, or have themselves taken off to be fed to the lions. The church has navigated that, but it goes back to the sense of the way the world is at the moment. If the world is run by kingdoms from

this world, which do what they do by bullying and by violence, and the church is called to make its way in a totally different way, there is bound to be again and again a point of conflict.

We saw this in the churches in Eastern Europe under communism, but we see it in plenty parts of the world today, where the people who are bearing faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ are stamped upon, denied access to jobs, or whatever it may be, and that sadly goes on. There is a question as to whether in the Western world the church ought to be suffering a bit more than it is, because the church ought to be bearing witness to the kingdom of God against the way the Western powers work. People in the Middle East look at the Western powers and think, “They’re Christian nations.” We who live in the West know that that’s not the case. Our nations are not run on gospel principles, and so it’s a challenge to the church.

However, anyone in the Western world who seeks to follow Jesus and be loyal and works for his kingdom and his gospel is going to face suffering sooner or later. It’s going to happen through sickness, family problems, financial difficulties, or whatever. Suffering comes in all shapes and sorts and sizes, and it’s usually messy, and usually it doesn’t mean that we can say, “I am suffering this because I am a Christian, so I can feel good about this.” Sadly, it’s not like that.

Second Corinthians 4 is the passage I go back to again and again where Paul basically says we are cast down but not destroyed [verse 9]. We are at a loss, and yet not completely lost. At the time, it probably did feel that we were completely lost, that we were killed, that we were overthrown. It’s only with hindsight that we look back and say, “That’s strange—we went through a dark patch there, and somehow we’ve lived to tell the tale.” Again and again, it’s in those dark patches that often God is most powerfully at work. It doesn’t feel like it at that time, but having lived 63 years now and trying to follow this out, I can say again and again in my life, and that of many people who might have the privilege of ministering, that’s how it’s been.

GD: Thank you again for joining us, and I encourage our listeners to get your book *How God Became King*, because we haven’t touched on everything but ...

NTW: It’s enough to get you going.

GD: Some very important themes. Thank you again.

NTW: Very good to be talking with you. Thank you.

TRINITARIAN GRACE AND PARTICIPATION

Gary Deddo: It's great to have you here. Tell us a little about yourself. You went to Scotland and studied theology, and you've been involved in pastoral ministry since then. What led you to study theology?

Geordie Ziegler: I fell in love with the Bible. I got exposed to it in college. I didn't go to a Christian college but I attended a Bible school for one semester and fell in love with it. That sent me to seminary and so I was at Regent College for a seminary, and that ended up sparking some things that I couldn't let go of, and eventually led to Scotland.

GD: That led to a big project that lasted quite a few years. Eventually a book came out of it, which I was happy to read. I love the title you came up with — it indicates the core of your interest: *Trinitarian Grace and Participation*. There's a million theological topics



that you could have chosen and pursued. For what? Three, four years or longer [GZ: Six years.] That's a lot of time and a lot of effort. So tell us about this Trinitarian grace – it seems that it captured a lot of what you were interested in and wanted to explore.

GZ: Maybe I need to go back to your first question to prepare for that, because when I was in seminary, I went to Regent College, which was fantastic. Some wonderful teachers there. My theology classes were from people like J.I. Packer and Stanley Grenz, but at the end of my second year, Alan Torrance came to Regent College and taught a class on Christology, on Jesus, and I ended up being his teaching assistant for it. Not because I was helping teach, but because somebody had to make copies and pick him up from the airport.

I sat in on his class and I read the book that he recommended, which was *The Mediation of Christ*, by Thomas Torrance. I felt like I was hearing the gospel for the first time. Not that I was not a Christian before or anything like that. I got excited about what I was hearing in a way that I have never felt before. If I had to identify what was new, I think the big things were [first] that the incarnation – when God becomes human – is not just an experiment that God did to get a job done for 33 years, but it was an eternal decision.

[And second,] That the Incarnation continues in the Ascension. God retains his humanity. He doesn't leave it behind. That stunned me. I know it's in our Creed and we say that, but the penny never dropped for me, that that was the way it is. For me, that showed that God's love was on a scale that I never understood before, which then forced me to think about what was the basis for God and his relationship to me?

My understanding, my assumption (even though I was Trinitarian and would never doubt that) for God for me, primarily was ruler. He was Lord, he's sovereign, he's Almighty. He's God. That's the way that we tend to talk in church. God was Trinity – Father, Son and Spirit – but we don't do a lot with that in church. If the primary thing that defines God is that he is ruler, then first of all, it means that he needed a creation to rule. He needed people to be the rule followers. Then my job is to follow his rules, to be a dutiful servant, to live in gratitude, and that's the set-up, the framework.

But if the core of who God is, is that he is Father, Son, and Spirit, then that changes the relationship, that changes the basis. Athanasius said that before God is creator, he was Father. That means that before there was a creation, Father, Son, and Spirit were together in love and they chose to

make this creation out of the freedom of their love, and that [understanding] changed the playing field. It was a game changer for me in terms of my understanding of how God related to us as human beings.

That got me excited and I couldn't let it go. That kind of buzzed in me for nine years as I was a pastor in California and eventually led to us selling everything and moving our family to Scotland, which was a great experience for all of us, mostly. That was what drove us and the theme, the topic that I was passionate about, was understanding what is God's grace. *Trinitarian Grace and Participation* is the title of the book. Its subtitle is "an entry into the theology of Thomas Torrance." That's how it got there. I think you're asking about why the title.

GD: Yeah. A lot of people would just say it was grace. We all know what grace is. It's simple. It's easy. But is it really that simple and easy, especially just common ordinary answers to what grace is? I'm sure your exploration revealed some things about it.

GZ: Most people, when they think of grace (and this is also within church history; there are ways that grace has been understood over time), probably one of the most common is that it's kind of a thing. It's a commodity. It's something you can bank and possess. And if you have more grace then you are more able to be a spiritual person or do good things. One version of it is to kind of commodify grace. I call it the pharmaceuticalization of grace. It's like this pill, and if we get it or we can store them, then we have more of it.

Other people talk about grace like it's more of an impersonal legal transaction. That's more of the Allah court [?] image for grace. At this single moment that's all that it's about. It's not personal, it's just something that happens, has to happen. It's focused on the cross. And then another way people think of grace is, it's like a tool and it helps you. It's a little divine boost – powerbar you can take. But all those versions of grace are impersonal. They miss the essence of grace – which is God giving himself to us, in Christ through the Spirit.

The title of the book is a bit redundant. People don't know it's redundant but it is, because grace is not uni-directional. It's like a boomerang. God gives himself in Christ through the Spirit so that we would participate in his life. The purpose is relationship. We like to tell people that grace is a free gift with no strings attached. It's not. The purpose of the gift is for relationship. A gift with no strings attached is like you don't care. You leave it on the doorstep and walk away and nobody knows; it doesn't make

a closer relationship. It blesses a person who got it – a very individualistic version of maybe what grace would be. But God's purpose in grace is to give himself to us so that we would share in his life.

GD: That's a good illustration. Another version I've been aware of is that it's an exception to a rule. So, back to that you're talking about God being the ruler. In that framework (and I think it's the one that affected me for a lot of my life), God is gracious and what that means is he makes exceptions to rules. I knew there was something else to it. But I didn't know how it connected.

GZ: Yeah. Or we say what grace is getting what you don't deserve, which we agree with, but if that's the core definition, it's the same thing. You don't deserve this. It's not something you're supposed to have. It never was God's intent but he's going to break the rule and give it to you anyway.

GD: That's impersonal too, in a way. It's not what you are talking about in terms of the gift of a relationship by him giving himself to us. That's a different thing.

In your book, you were talking about the connection between God's love and God's grace and I thought that was an important differentiation you were making. Tell us about that – the love of God and the grace of God. How are they distinct? How are they connected? They're both from God.

GZ: God's love is who he is in himself. He is love — Father, Son and Spirit share this love in their life. They always have; they don't need us; they're not lonely. But God, in the freedom of his love, chooses to share that. So he makes a world, makes a universe. He didn't have to. There didn't have to be anything, but there is. I remember the first time one of my supervisors in Aberdeen said that. None of this had to be. I was like, oh, I guess that's true. God didn't have to have kids. He didn't have to have a universe, but he did. So, grace is his love extended beyond himself. When he gives us himself, his love is poured out. As Paul says: his love is being poured out into our hearts [Roman 5:5]. That is his grace, and the purpose of that is that we would share in his life and become like him because of that.

GD: Yeah. I find that helpful. Would grace be grace if God *had* to be gracious? No, it wouldn't. It's important. I'm sure you run into this in your ministry: we say that God is love. That's true. We can find that in 1 John; there's not a problem with that. But often people don't know to fill that out, or they fill in the notion of love in any old way. It seems to me, they've not

recognized that the form of love is what we call grace.

GZ: Grace has a shape, a form. Love has a shape and a form. And the form that it takes that's revealed to us is: God comes and it's self-giving love. Sacrificial love. We see that lived out in Jesus. People often say, "I like Jesus, but I'm not so sure about the Father. Should we even call him Father? It's kind of scary. 'Spirit' is confusing. But I like Jesus." I don't think those people have read everything Jesus said. Because he is challenging — he calls us to a way of life that's like his, which is love poured out.

GD: So it's a self-giving nature and it has a form. A lot of the notion of love today, generally in the culture, is just being kind or nice. A person may be helpful or something like that. You used the word "sacrificial." Say more about that. What's the sacrificial side of grace?

GZ: It's because this world that God made has resisted him and turned away because of our sin. The way Scripture describes sin, it's reliance on ourselves, rather than dependence upon God, faith and trust. Those words become blurry to people. Trust is reliance on God, dependence on God, rather than reliance on ourselves.

Because of our sin, the world that God comes into is a world that needs redemption. It's a world that is broken and needs healing, so he deals with it. He enters it fully. He doesn't just wave a magic wand to fix things from a distance. Could God have done that? If he could have, it would have been a very impersonal way to deal with the issue. I think you could say, given the nature of who God is, he wouldn't. He deals with everything personally. There's nothing that God does that is not personal.

Within our culture, within our ways of understanding God, and ourselves, and the church, we do a lot of things that are impersonal. We functionalize people. We functionalize systems. We treat people as problems rather than as human beings — and that's not the way that Jesus relates to us. That's not the way God relates to us. Love calls for that kind of personalness, of entering into the difficulties of life with people. Not from a distance, not making just big policies, but life on life, which is hard and slow and takes a lot of patience, but God is patient.

GD: Yes. We just don't throw in our own definitions of what love is. But actually it's demonstrated in a particular way in Jesus himself.

GZ: The ultimate is, of course, on the cross. That's his love, it's the obedience of his love to the cross that he shows it to the fullest extent. It's not only a love for humanity that God shows in the cross — it's Jesus' love of the Father that he shows, in his trust in the Father. To have his will

aligned with the Father's will in the Garden [Luke 22:42], to be committed to trust the Father to that extent. And that's how reconciliation took place.

GD: So, Jesus' love for us has its root in his love for the Father, and it has the same shape expressed toward us. That goes back to the Trinitarian nature. Jesus' relationship with the Father is one of love, and that same love is extended towards us. That's grace, because it needs to address the problem – our alienation, our distrust and the brokenness of it.

A lot of people pit love or even grace against God's wrath or God's judgment. I know it's a huge topic, but can you say just a word about that? Because a lot of people think they're opposite, but we see both in the New Testament and in Jesus' ministry.

GZ: It is a terrible idea to put God's love on one side and his justice or his wrath on the other, as if he loves us but he's got to satisfy this, so there's some sort of negotiation deal, and here's the deal that's been worked out among the lawyers. That's a terrible way of talking about who God is and his attributes.

Somebody recently sent me something from a Bible study that they were a part of. It's just a list of God's attributes, about 30 or 40 of them. And when you make a list, none is more important than the other. Or maybe here's the most important, then here's number two and number three, but it becomes just this list.

The reality is that everything God does flows from his love. So, his wrath is an expression of his love – his commitment to justice and righteousness is the expression of his love. His wrath is him saying no when we resist him. We say no, and he says no to our no, and that's because of love. If my kid is going to run out on the street, I'm going to grab him and pull him back. That may hurt their arm when I do that. They may cry and be upset at me. But it's because of love that I'm seeking to protect them and care for them. It's not because I'm angry. They may experience it as anger. But it's not necessarily anger. It's actually because of love.

GD: They might think you're against them, rather than know you're actually expressing love, you are being for them, to watch out for them or to prevent harm and damage. That's a very important point. Thanks for sharing all that. These are interesting, important things. I'm sure it's key to your ministry to try to help people grasp this more deeply.

GZ: It is. What I want people to recognize is that God's grace isn't just some generic commodity. It's the invitation to participate in the Son's relationship with the Father. And that to me is what the Christian life is all about.

A TRINITARIAN APPROACH TO SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Gary Deddo: You've been involved in pastoral ministry quite a few years, and for a good number of years, there's been a rising interest in what's often being called spiritual formation. I know you've run into this, because you wrote an article on it, that I found very helpful. The title was: "Is It Time for a Reformation of Spiritual Formation?" You've done a lot of thinking on that and I know it's tied in with the rest of your study and theological reflection. What led you to that topic and why did you want to address it?

Geordie Ziegler: It's kind of the pinnacle of what my research has been about. I was a pastor in a church for nine years and was passionate about spiritual formation. I went to conference after conference and read all the kind of books you would expect somebody to be reading and found them helpful, but there were some theological gaps that I think were significant. I found in my experience with the congregation that many forms of spiritual formation throw people back on themselves and get them to pay more attention to themselves rather than to the God that we are seeking to become like, and that becomes problematic. Spiritual formation can begin to feel like a workout program and then it's just "train yourself and try harder and you'll be able to become the kind of person that can do these things. I couldn't run a marathon tomorrow, but if I trained for it I

could.” That’s all true, but is that how we want to base and understand the framework that we live in in spiritual formation?

In my research, I came to believe that the goal of the Christian life is that the Father-Son relation would become embedded in us, that we would share in that and live in that. That forced a re-thinking of spiritual formation as a whole. In the article, I describe what I call a normal version of spiritual formation as subjective moral formation. “Subjective” because it begins with us. It’s “moral” because the focus is on becoming a certain kind of person having certain virtues that are socially recognized within our culture to be the right things, and it’s “formation” because if you do certain things you will become like that. I think that fairly accurately describes a lot of the books that are out there.

But I think a better way, a more Christian orthodox Trinitarian way, would be called objective Trinitarian participation. “Objective” meaning that it’s rooted in who God is and it begins with God and then what God has done. It’s “Trinitarian” because it’s about participating in the Son’s relationship with the Father through the Spirit. That’s the center of it. And it’s “participation” because it’s sharing in that, and as we share in his life and share in that relationship and we begin to take on the mind of Christ in that way, then we do become a new kind of person. But it’s not through our own training and trying on our own but it’s in relationship and in *koinonia* with Christ.

GD: It sounds like this would be (back from the ’60s) a kind of self-realization, self-actualization and things like that, and the techniques and methods for doing that. What you’re talking about sounds like it’s going down a different route than that. Say more about that difference.

GZ: Foundationally, it’s where we start. Are we starting with a center in ourselves, or are we starting with a center in God and who he is and what he’s doing? I think much of formation begins with ourselves and trying to make ourselves into certain kinds of people – we work really hard, we do our Bible studies and we do our works and our activities and it becomes just work.

GD: And often people say, I’m trying to be like Christ.

GZ: Yeah, that sounds difficult. Christ-likeness is a great goal, but the real goal of spiritual formation (if we want to use the phrase spiritual formation) is not Christ-likeness – it’s Christ. It’s not to become a person who lives for Christ, but to be a person who lives in Christ and with Christ.

I don’t think Christ-likeness is a bad goal, but what do we mean by

Christ-likeness? Do we describe that or define that by moral-likeness like Christ? Or are we talking about relational-likeness? Of course, Jesus was moral – although socially he wasn’t always moral – he often did things that the morality of that culture thought was immoral, but what made Jesus who he was, was his relationship with his Father. It’s this orientation that he has toward the Father and everything through the Spirit and that made him a person who lived the kind of life he lived.

So if we are to be Christ-like, then it is to share the mindset that he had, of orientation to the Father. What does it look like for us to be doing that constantly? So we might do the same things – we might open our Bible, we should open our Bibles and read it and spend time in it. But when we do that, where do we begin? Are we beginning with ourselves, and thinking, “I got to figure this out and I got to read three chapters and keep up with my project that I decided that I should do – or somebody told me I should do – we make that a self-making project?”

Or do we open the Scriptures and say, “Lord, how do you want to spend time with me today? How do you want to speak to me through this word? I’m here, I’m open and listening.” That is not our project, but we begin with him and we keep orienting it back to him. Because that’s Christ-like, because that’s what Jesus did. Everything he did, he says, he did because the Father told him to. He only did the works that the Father was doing [John 5:19]. His whole life was oriented around the Father. I think we miss that so much in our teaching, in the church, we lose sight (as Torrance says so well) that the center of the New Testament is the Father-Son relationship. And if that’s true, we should pay attention to that more.

GD: Yeah, my own study is looking into that, for the New Testament has a lot more about that than I had realized. When I started looking for it, I found it was right there in front of my nose. It was there, there’s a lot more to discover. I particularly like John 17, which talks a lot about it. As the Son is praying to the Father, you realize the nature of their relationship. There have been conversations down through the ages about the imitation of Christ, and in that framework a lot of people come away with the idea – I’m trying to follow Jesus’ example, do what Jesus would do – that what-would-Jesus-do type of thing. But it sounds to me like you’re talking about something maybe related but still different from that.

GZ: Yeah, one of the tests I ask myself (and we talk about this in our church staff quite often every Sunday): “Did we throw people back on themselves? Whether it’s in the sermon or any part of worship, in a prayer

and the offering and our confession and assurance, did we throw people back on themselves?" Because there are many ways that people can be involved in Christian things and it's just a weight on themselves.

It reminds me of what Jesus says in Matthew 11: "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me." Just before he says that, he's praying to the Father, talking about this special relation between him and the Father that they only share, but also that he can pass on and share with his followers. That invitation to relationship that he has for us is different than just watching him from a distance and thinking, "I'm going to try and I'll become like that and I'll try harder."

That's probably one of the biggest problems in Christianity: that people see what they should be – here's what I ought to be, but here's where I'm at. Here's reality, and I've got to get from here to over there and I've got to somehow cross that chasm. So we try to follow his example, we work hard at applying Scripture to our lives, but all the time we are doing it in a way that is focused on self or is self-reliant. The invitation of Matthew 11 is that we would come to him and do it with him. That's what participation is really about, that's the invitation. It's to share in Jesus' relationship with the Father.

You mentioned John 17 earlier. At the end of John, there's a scene where Mary is in the garden looking for the body and suddenly Jesus appears to her. She's so excited, she wants to hug him and he's like, wait. Then he says: "Go and tell the disciples this message: I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." So she goes and tells them. But I think it's significant that this is the first message that the risen Christ gives to the first person who finds him – to tell the brothers and sisters this truth. I think that's what they were so excited about – that Jesus now is with the Father and we're included in that. What's happening to him somehow includes us, and we can be excited about that, and we can live in that reality of his presence with the Father, but also his presence with us, because he is with us through his Spirit.

One of the challenges related to this is a question of ontology, of how we talk about the Christian life and what grounds spiritual formation, what grounds the church.... I worry about a lot of forms of spiritual formation that are not grounded ontologically. I get that phrase "ontology of the church" from Eugene Peterson – he uses it in his book *Practice Resurrection*, and it talks about the ontology of the church, which Torrance also does. That ontology is Jesus Christ and the risen Christ at the right

hand of the Father – the one who lived among us – on our turf, lived that human life, that incarnate life, and also he’s the one who’s with us through the Spirit. That ontology includes the past, the present now, and the one who’s taking us into the future. That needs to root us and ground us our entire life.

Torrance had this phrase “we live within an all-embracing framework of grace.” If that’s true, then everything in our existence is meant to be a life of participation in that relationship. There’s no realm of our existence where we are meant to just go off and... “you can take care of this on your own. You’ve worked, you’ve trained hard enough, you’re good enough now...” We never get better at the Christian life. We never get holier, or godlier, in the sense that godliness doesn’t mean that we need God less. “You’re so godly, you can take a week off.” The more godly we become, we actually realize our deeper need for God. Godliness and holiness should be defined by an awareness of our greater need. Because all of us are saints and sinners. All of us are one step away from falling into an abyss if we are not careful. We all are dependent people – creatures.

GD: So that relationship is very important. How does obedience fit in here? Because there’s a lot of trouble with that. There’s either, we just do it by an act will, or “well, we live by grace, so we don’t need to obey.” So how does obedience fit into spiritual formation?

GZ: If spiritual formation has an ontology, as our life in Christ does, and the ontology is Jesus, we look to Jesus for that answer. And when I look at Jesus and his obedience, probably we can see that his entire life was a life of obedience, but it begins at his baptism. In his baptism we hear that the Father speaks to him and says, “You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” The way that Scripture tells that story, it doesn’t seem like it’s just for everybody else’s benefit to hear, “this is Jesus, the Son of God.” It’s spoken to Jesus from the Father. I think that’s a very personal experience for him and an important one.

From that moment, in the next scene he goes out into the wilderness. He’s driven by the Spirit into the wilderness, faces temptations and in each temptation, in each trial, he’s obedient. In two of the temptations, two of the three trials, the specific wording of the devil, of the accuser, to him is: “If you are the Son of God...” He is attacking him at the place that the Father had just affirmed. Satan attacks that identity – that sonship – because he knows if he can challenge that and create some doubt there, then it’s game over.

Jesus is faithful in each of those places and that demonstrates what

happens throughout his entire ministry: He is the one who knows that he is the Son of the Father. He knows who he is and is always looking to the Father. His obedience flows out of that identity, and it's the same with us. We are those who are in Christ; we are sharing his relationship with the Father, so by adoption, we get to have the voice of the Father say that to us, too: "You are my beloved daughter, you are my beloved Son, in whom I'm well pleased." And then our invitation is to live in obedience and faithfulness out of that identity.

Where we go wrong is when we begin with obedience without having come from identity. When we start there, we start with a sense of performance – "I've got to perform, I've got to do good, I've got to impress people, I've got to make God happy, make me happy." When we begin with a center in ourselves, that can either be a way of trying to get God's approval or a way of making a name for ourselves and creating our own identity.

Obedience might look the same on the surface but be coming from very different places. Is it an obedience that begins in needing to prove itself to be enough? Or is it an obedience that comes out of a secure identity – a platform, a base, a spacious salvation place that God has given us to live in? Obedience, if we begin with the kind of the direction that we see in Jesus, if we begin from that place, then obedience is really being who we are. It is being who the Father has said we are in Christ. That is our truest identity, to be brothers and sisters of Christ; that's who he's made us to be. It's living with the grain of that calling. Disobedience is when we try to make a name for ourselves and do it on our own.

GD: And when we forget who we are and act as if we're someone else.

GZ: The challenge is, as Martin Luther says, that our default is religion. If we think of religion in the sense of working your way up, our default is to start with ourselves as performers. It helps me to think about that: If that's my natural starting point, then everyday, I have to say something like (this is a prayer that a friend shared with me) "You are God and I am NOT. What shall we do today?" Everyday we have to remember that my starting point can't be with me. It has to be with my God and who he calls me and makes me to be. So, am I going to be overwhelmed by all the tasks, or am I going to say "Lord, where do we start? It's your day. It's not all up to me."

GD: The doing will be doing together, instead of on our own. When we say "You're God and I'm not," that's a kind of repentance, isn't it? Dying to self, and remembering who we really are.

GZ: I think we have problems with the language of repentance because we make it about such big things. If somebody has to repent, we think, they must have done something terribly wrong. Well, we have to repent many times a day. Because it's really about changing your thinking, your mindset – from beginning with yourself to beginning with the reality of who you are in Christ and who the Father says you are and starting with him. It's really about that with-ness: am I going to do my day with him? Or am I going to do maybe 15 minutes with God and then we'll check back in at the end of the day? Rather than just living that as I'm driving, as I'm interacting with different people, as I'm reading Scripture, as I'm dealing with challenges – letting that be something that's with God. And you can't always have your mind in two places, but knowing that we are accompanied and making that a practice to bring that together.

GD: That reminds me when Jesus says, No longer I call you servants or slaves but friends [John 15:15]. I think he's trying to help them see a new kind of relationship so that they live out that relationship. Not as a servant, as a slave, but as a son and a daughter.

GZ: People can do, on the surface, many of the same things. But we can either do it as a son, as a daughter, or we can do it as a slave. As a son or daughter, there's a sense that, I am loved (even though it doesn't mean I'm perfect). It's just "I'm loved," and that's the beginning point. I am, because God is. As a slave, the message is: I'm not. I'm not enough and I'll never be enough unless I figure it out, work hard, and that's just an endless cycle.

Everyday we have that choice. But it's not a choice that we make in our own power and struggle. We say, "Lord, I'm weak, and I want to do this day with you. Help me. And Spirit, remind me throughout the day." It's not even my job to remind myself all the time. I can do things to try to help to make that easier or better, more consistent, but it's the Spirit who ultimately is responsible for it. Just letting that be part of the prayer – that the prayer should not be that I would be strong so I can do this on my own.

If I could start a revolution or a reformation of spiritual formation, it would be that we would really believe that the heart of the Christian life is sharing with the Son's relationship with the Father through the Spirit. As Torrance says: Christian discipleship is thinking and acting in Christ – the disciplined habit of thinking and acting in Christ – and living in that place.

GD: Thanks. I appreciate you sharing with us.

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- *Old Testament Story and Christian Ethics: The Rape of Dinah as a Case Study*
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- *Scripture's Doctrine and Theology's Bible: How the New Testament Shapes Christian Dogmatics* (with Markus Bockmuehl)

David Torrance studied in Basel, Switzerland, under Karl Barth and Oscar Cullmann. He served in the Church of Scotland from 1955 until his retirement. His books include:

- *A Passion for Christ: The Vision that Ignites Ministry* (with James and Thomas Torrance)
- *Anti-Semitism and Christian Responsibility*
- *Calvin's Commentaries* (12 volumes, edited with Thomas Torrance)

- *Embracing Truth: Homosexuality and the Word of God*
- *God, Family and Sexuality*
- *Israel God's Servant: God's Key to the Redemption of the World*
- *The Mission of Christians and Jews*
- *The Witness of the Jews to God (editor)*

Robert T. Walker is a nephew of the late Thomas F. Torrance. He edited Torrance's lecture notes into two books describing Torrance's teachings about the person and work of Jesus Christ:

- *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*
- *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*

N.T. Wright is Chair of New Testament and Early Christianity at the School of Divinity at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland. He received a PhD from Oxford in 1980. He is a prolific author; for a regularly updated list, see <http://www.amazon.com/N.-T.-Wright/e/B001H6NEG8>. For sermons, articles and other publications, see www.ntwrightpage.com/.

- "Romans." *In The New Interpreter's Bible, volume 10*
- *Acts for Everyone*
- *Advent for Everyone, Matthew: A Daily Devotional*
- *Advent for Everyone: A Journey with the Apostles*
- *Advent for Everyone: Luke: A Daily Devotional*
- *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters*
- *Bringing the Church to the World*
- *Christians at the Cross: Finding Hope in the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus*
- *Early Christian Letters for Everyone: James, Peter, John, and Judah*
- *Evil and the Justice of God*
- *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*
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- *For All the Saints?: Remembering the Christian Departed*
- *Hebrews for Everyone*
- *History and Eschatology: Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology*
- *How God Became King: the Forgotten Story of the Gospels*
- *Jesus and the Victory of God*

- *John for Everyone*
- *Judas and the Gospel of Jesus: Have We Missed the Truth About Christianity?*
- *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision*
- *Lent for Everyone: Luke: Year C*
- *Lent for Everyone: Mark, Year B: A Daily Devotional*
- *Lent for Everyone: Matthew, Year A*
- *Living Faith: Exploring the Essentials of Christianity*
- *Luke for Everyone*
- *Mark for Everyone*
- *Matthew for Everyone*
- *New Testament Prayer for Everyone*
- *Paul: A Biography*
- *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*
- *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*
- *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians*
- *Paul for Everyone: 2 Corinthians*
- *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians*
- *Paul for Everyone: Romans*
- *Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*
- *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*
- *Paul: In Fresh Perspective*
- *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul 1978-2013*
- *Quiet Moments*
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- *Revelation for Everyone*
- *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today*
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- *Simply Good News: Why the Gospel Is News and What Makes It Good*
- *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters*
- *Small Faith, Great God: Biblical Faith for Today's Christians*
- *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*

- *Surprised by Scripture: Engaging Contemporary Issues*
- *The Case for the Psalms*
- *The Challenge of Easter*
- *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is*
- *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*
- *The Crown and the Fire: Meditations on the Cross and the Life of the Spirit*
- *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion*
- *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*
- *The Kingdom New Testament: A Contemporary Translation*
- *The Lord and His Prayer*
- *The Meal Jesus Gave Us: Understanding Holy Communion*
- *The Messiah and the People of God: A Study in Pauline Theology With Particular Reference to The Argument of the Epistle to the Romans (doctoral thesis)*
- *The Millennium Myth*
- *The New Testament and the People of God*
- *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians (co-author)*
- *The New Testament in Its World Workbook: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians (co-author)*
- *The New Testament You Never Knew Study Guide with DVD: Exploring the Context, Purpose, and Meaning of the Story of God (co-author)*
- *The Original Jesus: The Life and Vision of a Revolutionary (co-author)*
- *The Paul Debate: Critical Questions for Understanding the Apostle*
- *The Resurrection of the Son of God*
- *The Scriptures, the Cross and the Power of God: Reflections for Holy Week*
- *The Way of the Lord: Christian Pilgrimage Today*
- *Twelve Months of Sundays: Reflections on Bible Readings, Year A*

- *Twelve Months of Sundays: Reflections on Bible Readings, Year B*
- *Twelve Months of Sundays: Reflections on Bible Readings, Year C*
- *Virtue Reborn*
- *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?*
- *Who Was Jesus?*
- *Why Read the Bible?: A Little Book of Guidance*

Geordie Ziegler is a pastor at the Columbia Presbyterian Church in Vancouver, Washington. He received a PhD in theology from the University of Aberdeen. He has written:

- *Trinitarian Grace and Participation: An Entry into the Theology of T.F. Torrance*

In most cases, the interviewer was **J. Michael Feazell** (D.Min., Azusa Pacific University, 2000), who was then vice president of Grace Communion International. Some interviews were conducted by **Gary W. Deddo** (PhD, University of Aberdeen, 1991), who is now the president of Grace Communion Seminary. Some interviews were conducted by **Michael D. Morrison** (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2006), Dean of Faculty at Grace Communion Seminary and editor of this volume.

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWS

Most of the interviews were done in the GCI studio in Glendora, California. Some were done in the home city of the interviewee, or at a meeting we attended. When there are three to five interviews, they were usually conducted on the same day. In a few cases the interviewee returned on a later occasion.

Here are the years in which the interviews in volumes 1 and 2 were done:

Anderson: 2007	McSwain: 2008, 2009
Begbie: 2017	McVey: 2010, 2011
Campbell: 2010	Metzger: 2009
Colyer: 2009, 2011	Molnar: 2010
Dawson: 2009	Newell: 2008
Deddo, C.: 2011	Nordling: 2009
Deddo, G.: 2008, 2009	Parry: 2010
Fee: 2009	Purves: 2010
Fergusson: 2012	Root: 2009
Habets: 2012	Sanders: 2016
Hart: 2010	Seamands: 2012
Hunsinger: 2010	Thimell: 2009
Jinkins: 2015	Torrance, A.: 2010
Kettler: 2009	Torrance, D.: 2010
Kruger: 2006, 2009, 2011	Walker: 2010
McGrath: 2017	Wright: 2012
McKenna: 2007	Young: 2008, 2011

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER...

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We also offer personal counsel. If you have questions about the Bible, salvation or Christian living, we are happy to talk. If you want to discuss faith, baptism or other matters, a pastor near you can discuss these on the phone or set up an appointment for a longer discussion. We are convinced that Jesus offers what people need most, and we are happy to share the good news of what he has done for all humanity. We like to help people

find new life in Christ, and to grow in that life. Come and see why we believe it's the best news there could be!

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