# OpenTheo

## Good God? | N.T. Wright

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**The Veritas Forum**

How do we reconcile a good God and a world filled with suffering? N.T. Wright takes to the stage at Duke University to discuss this tension. Please like share, subscribe to, and review this podcast! [Note that we will not be publishing a podcast on December 26th but will resume on January 2nd]

## Transcript

Welcome to the Veritas Forum. This is the Veritas Forum Podcast. A place where ideas and beliefs converge.

What I'm really going to be watching is, which one has the resources in their worldview to be tolerant, respectful, and humble toward the people they disagree with? How do we know whether the lives that we're living are meaningful? If energy, light, gravity, and consciousness are a mystery, don't be surprised if you're going to get an element of this in God. Today we're here from a new testament. What's the difference between the world's knowledge and the world's knowledge? What's the difference between the world's knowledge and the world's knowledge? What's the difference between the world's knowledge and the world's knowledge? You straddle the number of worlds.

You're in the popular theology world. You're speaking to a larger audience. You've also been a serving bishop, so you've had a flock that you've cared for.

You are a scholarly theologian. Last night you were speaking on your 1500 page doorstop book on Paul. I decided I wouldn't go after that issue.

Do these roles conflict with each other? Do they complement each other? How do they work together? As far as I'm concerned, they complement each other. I'm one of those funny people that likes doing a bunch of different things, because it's kind of fun to bounce to and fro between different areas. I've had the good fortune to be in places and do jobs which have enabled me to do that.

Actually, being a Church of England bishop is perhaps quite unlike being an North

American bishop in that one does have the expectation in the society at large that you'll not only be in the house of lords, but you'll do stuff with the media, that you'll take part in local debates, whether it's about housing policy or whatever it is. I really relish doing that. I found that, to be honest, as a New Testament theologian, there were all sorts of things where the stuff that I would work on in terms of New Testament scholarship would raise issues about what it means to be faithful in a very complex world that were directly relevant to the stuff that I would be doing with the local council or with government in London or whatever it was.

Of course, then the converse is also true as you start to reflect on what it means to be wise within public life. You look back at the New Testament and you realize, actually, a lot of those questions are there, but because we in the West have read the New Testament as purely a book about how me and God get it together or whatever, we have sort of screened that stuff out, but actually some of the most important first century documents about faith and public life are in the New Testament. I think there's a lot waiting to be discovered there, so I've found a rich complementarity.

And our questions from the unwashed, like me, who can barely spell theology or from professional theologians like you met with last night, which are tend to be the more difficult questions. That's impossible to answer because it depends entirely what they're about. Obviously, within the profession, within the Guild of New Testament scholars or theologians, there's a certain discourse, as any academic discourse has, you have your own jargon and you kind of take things for granted and you're always trying to push to the next level, so part of the deal is that you're trying to probe and prod each other to try to see where the weak points are in one another's arguments.

That's part of academic life, we all do it. With the public life questions and people coming in who aren't professional theologians, then often the questions come as I think your metaphor in America is from left field. I'm not sure what that means.

We don't have left fields in England, but the... Sticky Wicked is... Oh, that's much better, yes, well done. Yeah, yeah. Well, you already used Stumped.

I think you're trying to tell me something. He actually knows more about cricket than he lets on. But there we are.

So, you are a New Testament scholar, a genuine historian of the New Testament, but you're also a believer. And that's sometimes in America considered to be an odd thing, right? That we have just down the road, we have Bart Erman, who is a prominent New Testament scholar who emphatically is not a believer. And so, is that unusual? Have you always been a believer? Can you tell us a little bit about your personal faith story and the connection between studying the subject and believing it? Yeah, in studying and believing, I mean, my family has been very involved in music.

And in the academic world, a lot of people who teach music academically are also either serious pianists or conductors or whatever. And I've often thought, would you rather be taught music, history or theory or something, by somebody who is actually tone deaf? Or would you rather be taught it by somebody who was on their way to conduct, even if it was a rather wacky performance of Bach Passion or Beethoven Symphony or other? I would much rather be taught music by somebody who was actually hands-on with the stuff. Now, that's not to say that somebody who was tone deaf couldn't give you a very good lecture on music history if that happened to be their thing.

And it's not an exact analogy, of course. By the way, I know Bartherman a bit, he and I've done debates and so on, and two or three times, actually. So, yeah, we have kind of crossed swords a bit.

But in terms of my own background, I'm one of those funny people that I was told about God and Jesus and all that when I was little, and I've never seen any reason to doubt it. So I've just carried on, at least I've seen reasons to doubt it, but each time I've seen reasons to doubt it, I've asked myself the question. And I've looked at things and it sort of makes sense.

And you go to the next level of making sense. And likewise, when I was about 11 or 12, I think somebody suggested to me that it was about time I started reading the Bible regularly, and I began then and again have never seen any reason to stop. So, I am not one of those people who kind of led a wildlife until the age of whatever and then suddenly gave it all up and saw the light, etc.

I'm one of the boring people who was always sort of there or thereabouts. I've had lots of other crises and difficulties and problems, but not at that level. So all your sin stories are after you became a believer in that.

Isn't that frustrating? Yeah, yeah. Yeah. We may get there.

We may get there in the conversation. Hopefully not. So, I'll tell you mine if you tell me yours.

Yes. Fair enough. This is going to be broadcast, I think, on the internet in the other end.

I was struck by what I will assume is providential planning that had this talk, and particularly the nature of the talk about, which is playing off of your book, which I believe can be bought upstairs, but evil in the justice of God. This is one 50th of your corpus, right? But we're talking about this book on November 11th, which in America's Veterans Day in England is a Remembrance Day. And so I just reflect on that, the irony of that, and how should we think about veterans and war and the survivors and the casualties of the war? Yeah.

It's one of the fascinating things that's become quite clear in my country over recent

years, that whereas when I was growing up in the 50s and 60s, we sort of astute the people who were living in the war. And so, in the 50s, we sort of assumed that, yeah, on November 11th, we remember those wars that happened to previous generations, but it wasn't to us. So we all sort of assumed that that remembrance thing would quietly die a death as the veterans died out.

And that, the exact opposite has happened. Right now in London, in the moat of the Tower of London, they have an enormous exhibition of ceramic poppies, where the poppies is in England, the symbol of Britain, the symbol of the war. And the symbol of really the First World War is the poppies of the fields of Flanders.

And people buy little poppies and stick them in their lapels, and the money goes to veterans' charities, if you like. And they have this amazing display of these deep red ceramic poppies, and millions of people literally have been to London looking at these. And it's very moving because each poppy represents one soldier who died in the First World War.

And when you see the number, you realize, this wasn't just, oh, yeah, we had a little war a few years ago. This was a major world-changing event. In a way that I think even the Second World War wasn't, and I'm not good on the statistics as to how many died in the two wars, but I had two great uncles, my father's, father's brother and brother-in-law, who died in the First War, one of them on the first day of the Somme.

And I was always brought up with the memory that I had this aunt who lost her husband and was left with two little children, and that, sorry, great aunt, and that great aunt who likewise was left with two little children. And we just knew that something had happened which caused half the families in the land to be, if you like, misshapen and to be living with the legacy of that. And then my father was a prisoner of war for most of the Second World War.

He was just 20 years old when he was in France. He got as far as France in late 1939, early 1940, and then just before Dunkirk, he was captured, wasn't one of those who got away at Dunkirk, and he spent the rest of the war in captivity. And knowing what I know about what it's like being a young male person between the age of 20 and 25, to think of a lot of them being in captivity, most of the time not knowing whether there was going to be a future or not.

So I was brought up with that memory, not that he talked about it very often, hardly at all actually, but there was a sense that this extraordinary, awful, almost unmentionable thing had happened, and that my generation really were jolly lucky, not to be a human. I'm really lucky not to have to go and do it as well, because my grandfather fought in the First War, my father in the Second. Happily there hasn't been a Third World War.

I've had cousins serving in the military in Britain. So I was always brought up not with

glorifying war at all, but with knowing that this is actually a very horrible thing, but with the sort of sense that sometimes it might need to happen. We didn't really discuss questions of just war or pacifism at home.

It was just assumed that, yeah, sometimes very bad things happen and sometimes you just have to go and do what you can, and it'll hurt and it'll be nasty, but. So it was only then as an adult that I started to realize that there were actually questions behind that which had to be addressed as well. My dad was a principal pacifist until he said Hitler.

So Hitler converted him from Christian pacifism to Christian just war. You're at Duke, which is the intellectual hotbed of Christian pacifist intellectual thinking. Where do you come down on that? Yeah, I've never actually been a pacifist because it seems to me that as in a society you have the need for a police force.

That is to say, if you don't have any policing, you may survive for a short while because people still behave, but pretty soon people with less morals, are going to start praying on the weak and the vulnerable. And then most of us would want there to be some kind of police force which will do justice in however basic a fashion. In Britain we transferred in the early 19th century from having local militias to having a national police force which was broadly credible across the nation.

So it wasn't just beholden to fractional interests. And obviously that's a fragile thing, but we all think that it's good to have some kind of police force rather than none. And over the years in my adult life and looking at some of the horrible things that have gone on in the world, for instance I became dean of Litchfield and was preaching regularly through the 1990s.

When the Rwanda disaster happened and we were all ringing our hands and saying that we all grew up saying to ourselves, never again will we stand by while genocide is happening. And yet we were standing by while genocide is happening because we didn't know what to do about it. And I started to reflect on the role of the United Nations and realizing that the United Nations is in all sorts of ways weak and not actually as capable as it might be and it's hamstrung in various ways.

But it seems to me then and it seems to me still that if we think that the world needs some kind of policing, it must be done in a credible way rather than an incredible way. And my own judgment is that the last 10 or a dozen years of joint action by my country and yours and a few others has taught us one thing in particular, which is that never again can the Western powers, the incredible supposed police force, particularly in the Middle East, because it's so easy for people in the Middle East to say in effect, that's the Christian West coming and beating us up in the Muslim East. And once they start thinking that, it goes from bad to worse.

And that's precisely what we've seen over the last 14 years. So I would say we need

some kind of a credible global police force. We are a long way away from achieving that, partly because the United Nations is de-skilled or destabilized by various factors, and partly because some people don't want the United Nations to be strong and they don't want the International Criminal Court to be strong.

But unless we are then to live in a world which oscillates between chaos and vigilantism, then I think we need to work over the next generation towards some sort of a credible. But I would see it as police action, which may be morally philosophically a little bit different from what traditionally has been thought of as war. I should say there are people in this auditorium who've studied this and written about it.

I have not studied it. I have not written about it. This is just my sense as a pastor talking to people over the last 20 or 30 years, listening to conversations in various forums, etc.

So that's where I come at. So as a professor of international relations, I really want, I'm tempted to go into the issues of the UN and how they work. But instead I'm going to poach and be an amateur theologian.

Because I want to get us to your book. How do we know the difference between good and evil? And how... How long have we got? Yes. How... I may have a follow up.

One of the fascinating things to me about humans in general is that humans in general have a deep instinct for something we can broadly call justice. You don't really have to teach a child very much about what's fair and not fair. As soon as they get the language, it's as though they already know that that's not fair.

He stole my apple or she did this to me or whatever. And as soon as you give them the language to say that, they have things they want to say with that language. And so it's deeply ingrained in us that some things are right and some things are wrong.

Now, of course, growing up is about fine-tuning that and actually learning that some things which you thought were wrong because they seem scary to you or your parents got cross if the topic was mentioned or whatever. In fact, you have to grow through that and likewise some things which we grew up believing were good. My grandfather who fought in the bow war reading his letters home, now we realize that that generation, 110 years ago, 115 years ago, believed all kinds of things which we would now say were deeply racist but which were just the sort of things that pretty well everybody in that world in the different European countries and perhaps I don't know in America as well, they just took this for granted.

And I think we have learned that some attitudes are actually very damaging. And so we all come with a basic kit and if somebody doesn't have the basic kit of moral discernment, then actually we have words for describing such a person in terms of the kind of things that we have. So, I think it's a very important thing to say about the

culture person in terms of either psychopath or certain types of autism that's too broad brush but there are pathologies where people really don't seem to have the same moral compass as the rest of us.

But then within that there is a matter of education which is about living in the community, about learning how the community is and learning who you are yourself and where boundaries are and so on. So, both very simple and basic and then very complex which is why we have people who teach ethics and so on because you get into some of the more complex issues and you need to do that. So, I'm glad you said the word intuition because that tees up my next question.

It seems to me that the Christian description of good and evil, at least the gospel description is totally counterintuitive and a lot of the discussion is grossly unfair. And let me just give you a for instance that it's intuitive that it's far worse to kill a man than to just hate a man and yet Jesus said that if you hate the man that is ten amount to kill him. So, explain to me that intuition that it seems what makes a lot of sense is that there's an escalation of evil and saying someone doesn't look fat in their dress is one level of not so bad lie but it goes up from there.

Can we just bracket that one out? You look great by the way. But my point is Jesus seems to eliminate some of the intuitive understandings of evil or have I just misunderstood. I don't know whether you've misunderstood or not but it seems to me Jesus isn't saying that hating is worse than murder.

He's saying that just as murder is wrong and basically most normal human beings know that's wrong that actually when you trace it back to the root causes then the hatred which can turn into murder is as bad as and so on and so on like covetousness being in a sense as bad as theft. I say in a sense because we're not in legal situations here where some magistrates are going to say, well actually today maybe they do say you're guilty of hate but probably not guilty of covetousness otherwise we'd all be in court all the time. I really like your time.

Well thank you yes yes, ask you to identify the characters on it very soon. But I mean just to follow that through for a minute I think it's potentially worrying that certainly in my society now we have people talking about hate crimes because it seems to me one of the great things of law generally is that we don't try to legislate for what goes on inside somebody's head and they actually legislate in public law for what they actually do for how they actually behave and try to penetrate and say that you have men's rare a guilty mind and we'll judge you on that even if you haven't done anything wrong. I think that's actually a very dangerous territory and I would say that whatever the issues were however then what's going on in the gospel is precisely not trying to legislate for public behavior.

It's Jesus saying God is doing a new thing and the way God is doing the new thing will

involve transformation of human character so that humans will be able to be God's agents in doing that new thing. I mean the passage you're referring to in the so-called Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel is actually all about a blueprint for the new world that Jesus believed God was launching. That too may be counterintuitive because people look back 2000 years and say what new world is this? Actually there are good answers for that but what Jesus is saying is that in this new world people will be renewed in order to serve God's new world purposes if you try to put what Jesus said within the framework of the present world grunging along the way it does it seems kind of odd but as with so much that Jesus was and did it makes sense granted this vision of a new world coming to birth.

So the way I've often thought about it and maybe I'm wrong about this is that he was the Phariseeical tradition that he was describing could almost be done. If you were really really careful you could almost be a good Pharisee and what he ended up doing was raising the bar so much higher that even a good Pharisee could recognize well I couldn't possibly live up to that standard. And that's part of what was happening.

Yeah there's about three or four different levels to that. We have to be very careful about the way we use the word Pharisee. If you look up the word Pharisee in a major dictionary of the English language it will come out as hypocrite, legalist, etc.

That's actually doing a grave disservice to the Pharisees. Some of my best friends are Pharisees. I was trying to be very positive about it.

And vice versa some of the best Pharisees were friends. There's a sense that actually this was a populist movement longing for God to become king, to take charge and reckoning that if that was to happen Israel would have to smarten its act up, keep God's law, and it was all to do with believing that God was going to do the new thing that he'd always promised. And yes, I mean you say they could just about get there as it were Saul of Tarsus who became Paul the Apostle.

When he self-described he says in effect, as touching the law I was blameless I managed basically to do it. I don't think that meant he never did anything wrong. I think he meant that within the Jewish system of the day if you did something wrong there was a system you repented you offered sacrifice and you stayed clean.

In other words you kept short odds with your conscience and before God and that that could be done. But this is why I say that it's not that Jesus is offering a more rigorous moral system within the same ongoing world. Jesus is saying God's new world is being launched and in this new world the thing that you've always wanted, namely a different way to be human, is actually starting to happen.

That raises a lot of questions we're going to get to that about how much that's been accomplished. You said there's good answers to that question so I'm going to ask you

that in a moment. But first I want to ask you about something that struck me in the book and that is your treatment of Satan who you always call the Satan and you don't use an anthropomorphic key for it.

But it raises the question in my mind, do you have to believe in the existence of Satan if you believe in the existence of God and Christ. There's a lot of people who say they believe in God but they don't believe in Satan, they believe in heaven but they don't believe in hell. Help us think through that and what was the purpose of that terminology "the Satan".

Now the word Satan, SATAN, is not primarily a proper name in the early parts of the Bible, in the Hebrew Scriptures. It's a word which means accuser and in the Old Testament in the book of Job for instance in other passages the picture is of God who has a heavenly court rather like a government with different departments and different angels operating these different departments. And the Satan is the accuser, in other words he's the director of public prosecutions.

He's the one who if people do wrong things has the job of accusing them. And then in the way and the Bible is full of this wonderful imagery, it's a very multi-layered book and in that wonderful imagery there is this idea that actually what then happens is that the director of prosecutions so enjoys accusing people of things that one of the things this angelic being, this non-human but very powerful being does, is lure them into doing things of which they can then be accused. Now that is a way of talking about stuff that people throughout human history, both Jewish and non-Israel, Israelites and Jewish non-Jewish, have been aware of, namely that evil is somehow in a way it's difficult to describe, but evil is more than the sum total of human folly and wrongdoing.

And I think, I mean you mentioned Hitler before, but looking back at the 20th century it seems to me we've got lots of examples where evil is more than the sum total of this person doing something wrong, that person doing something wrong. It seems sometimes as it were to roll itself into a ball and become bigger and more powerful, taking over crowds, taking over nations, taking over cities, taking over movements, and then really, really bad things can happen as a result. And when people look back at them, either they just screen them out and say I can't really believe that happened, or they have to say something more was going on there than just that person making a wrong decision and that one and that one.

And then you can understand how in the ancient world or in the modern world, people would want to use language about a super personal non-human force. And so the biblical language of the accuser becomes one way of doing that, and the Bible itself uses that language. However, in the last, I don't know, six, seven, eight hundred years in the Western world and church, the polarization between heaven and hell has been part of our mental furniture in a way it never was in the Bible itself.

The Bible doesn't do big pictures of heaven and hell, such as you get in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel or in Dante's Inferno and Paradiso with Purgatory in between, of course. This is a medieval way of looking at things which actually the Bible does not sustain. The Bible is quite clear, I think, about several things to do both with the ultimate purpose of God for human beings and the real possibility of people missing out on that, and about real forces of evil.

But it doesn't do the dualistic thing which we in Western culture have done, so that it certainly doesn't have God and Satan as equal and opposite. And that's why I've tried in my writing to be obedient to what I see as the ambiguity of the biblical language by keeping the phrase "the Satan" to remind ourselves that this is the accuser, this is a kind of a non-human evil force, which is at large and on the loose, and is in danger of doing damaging things and luring people to doing more evil in groups than they could by themselves, etc. But because of popular culture's usage about Satan as though Satan is like a person equal and opposite to God, I think that's actually dangerous.

I'm perfectly content, I was going to say happy, but we're not happy when we think about this particular force. I'm perfectly content that for the sake of description, we use that quasi-personal language, but I'm just trying to distance myself from the kind of simplistic, "Yeah, there's God and there's Satan and that's it." Because that way lies all sorts of dualism and I would rather avoid that. So you say in the opening of this book that you set out to write a book about the crucifixion, but then you ended up writing a book about evil and the justice of God.

So help us think, how did that happen? If Jesus is the embodiment of God, what should we make of the crucifixion of Jesus? Was that an evil act? Yeah, I mean that's one of the great paradoxes that in the New Testament itself it says both that the crucifixion was one of the most wicked things ever done and that it was simultaneously the loving, rescuing act of the Creator God. But somehow, the further you go with moral thought and theological thought, the more you realize there are some huge paradoxes there and that we have to live with and inside those paradoxes. And only by doing that, which always feels risky, can we actually find a way of wisdom and a way of hope.

So how the book happened was that I had a couple of years before done a series of lectures about hope, about the resurrection, which were on their way to becoming the book surprise by hope, which was the one Stephen Colbert interviewed me about. So this is sent to Deja View about this. But I thought, okay, after that I should follow that with a series of lectures about the meaning of the cross because that sort of goes with the resurrection naturally.

As I was thinking about that, I realized that whatever we say about the cross, and Christians talk a lot about the cross, about Jesus being crucified, and that somehow that was the way in which God addressed at least the problem of evil inside us, and perhaps

the problem of evil larger than that. And I realized that whatever you're going to say about the meaning of Jesus crucifixion has to correlate with whatever you're going to say about evil, whatever that is and however that works. That happened to coincide with some language that my then Prime Minister Tony Blair was using about the axis of evil in the Middle East, etc.

And he made some extraordinarily naive speeches at the Labour Party Conference and elsewhere about as though we had just suddenly discovered that there was this thing called evil in the world. So we were going to go and deal with it. And then he said, and we sensed that actually there's more evil out there.

And once we've dealt with this first bit, we'll go and deal with. And remember, listening to those speeches and thinking, if you're saying that because you're the Prime Minister, you get the right to solve the problem of evil. This is actually something which, you know, God in Christ addressed, and even now we're wrestling with it, and how come any mortal can do that.

And so there was a sense both of this is a theological and ethical problem which I wanted to wrestle with intellectually, but also a very immediate problem about the fact that the problem of evil isn't just that some children are born with very serious illnesses, or that volcanoes spew ash over villages and communities. People talk about the problem of evil vaguely in those terms, and fair enough those are things to talk about, but that it's also that some human beings and some human societies do things which the rest of us find utterly appalling, and we seriously wonder what we should do about them. But to try to address those as though by being a newly elected politician, we could now see what to do, and the answer usually being to go and drop bombs on people and then it'll be alright, won't it? You know, it's just incredibly dangerously naive.

And so the book had those two origins, one that I wanted to talk about the background to the story of the cross, and the other that I really did think something needed to be said about the fact that, as I say in the first chapter of that book, evil is still a fall at a word. So you mentioned paradox, let me press you on what is probably the ultimate paradox, and it's at the center of your scholarly work. If I understand your central argument, it's that Jesus represents the climax, the culmination of the story of Israel and the kingdom of God that he's ushered in the new kingdom that had long been promised.

And yet for 2000 years since we've been praying thy kingdom come, thy will be done as imperative, as a request, as a petition, and we look around the world and we see as the headline of our talks as Ebola, ISIL, and so on, help us understand that paradox. How could he have accomplished it and it still doesn't look like it's done? Two things I think, well, there's lots of ways into this, but let me suggest too. First, about a century after the time of Jesus, there was another Jewish messianic movement.

The Roman Emperor Hadrian was taking over Jerusalem, turning it into a pagan city,

forbidding the Jews to do their usual things like circumcising children, etc. And there was this Jewish revolution with a new messiah, who was called Simeon Ben-Koziba, alias Bar-Kokvah, son of the star. He was going to be the messiah.

And lots and lots and lots of Jews really believed he was the messiah. They minted coins to celebrate his new reign. It was a very small area that he was ruling, but they really believed this was the beginning of God's new world.

They minted coins with the year one, and then the next year they minted coins with the year two. You know who else restarted the calendar? French revolutionaries. You at least in America didn't think of doing that when you kicked us out 250 years ago.

We still might. Yes, yes, I can believe anything. But at the same time, those coins had images on representing the temple in Jerusalem, which was not standing, but which was their goal that they would eventually defeat the Romans and rebuild the temple.

In other words, they were saying simultaneously the new age has begun. This is year one. But we now have a task to do.

We want to rebuild the temple. And they were living in what we in the trade call, and now and not yet situation, that something was already true, something had been truly launched. It wasn't a false, as far as they would say, it wasn't a false dawn, but that gave you an agenda for where you then had to go to complete the job.

Now, that's a hundred years after Jesus. Jesus himself has a similar two or three time in his public career, if you like. And it's clear that Jesus believed and his followers believed that something really was happening during that period.

And then the gospel writers writing it up that something really did happen in his crucifixion and resurrection through which the world really did become a different place. But that doesn't mean that everything is done overnight and that suddenly utopia arrives. You move into a now and not yet situation.

So the second thing is that the New Testament is written by people who are being persecuted, who are being hunted down, who are in prison, who are being isolated, all sorts of things. And yet it is they who are saying, and some of the letters from prison say this more strongly than anywhere else, that actually we are already part of God's new movement through which the world has been changed and will be changed. And so one could say they were whistling in the dark.

Lots of people have said that, and as you've hinted we sort of look back and we think, well, nothing much has really changed has it. And actually I want to say, actually yes, a whole lot has been changed. I was an ancient historian before I was a theologian and I know a bit about what the world of ancient Greece and Rome and so on was like.

It was pretty brutal. Unless you are well off, you probably didn't have access to medicine. You and your children wouldn't have access to education except in the very basic, very basic sense.

If you were poor, you would likely stay poor because nobody was looking out for you. There's no social security. All sorts of things that we today in the Western world take for granted as values, even if we find it difficult to achieve them, like forgiveness, like humility and so on, were not considered values at all.

And forgiveness and humility was just weakness. That was for wimps, the kind of ancient version of Nietzsche and morality that shouldn't be like that. And the fact that we today have such a strong sense of public education.

I was going to say a public health. I would say it in any other country, but I'm not sure whether it pains you or not. The rest of us really just can't understand them.

But also a sense of obligation to the poor and obligation to people who unlike ourselves. These things come deeply from the Jewish tradition as mediated and spread through the Christian tradition. And they just weren't there before.

And they have colored all sorts of things in our cultural life, in our ethical life, in our public discourse. And we kind of grow up with this with sort of post enlightenment values and it's common to sneer at Christianity. It's a Christianity part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

And of course Christianity is part of the problem because it consists of frail, fallible human beings like you and me. And those of us who worked in the church know perfectly well that we are not perfect either individually or as a society. But we are called to bear witness to and to work for the fact of God's kingdom, which is the transformation of human life here and now.

We won't build it by ourselves. We can build for the kingdom. We are doing things which will count into God's new kingdom, new day when it eventually comes.

But because we can't do it all, that doesn't mean we can't try because the church has transformed, actually the church has transformed the world down the years. So you mentioned the virtue of forgiveness and that's when in chapter five when the book gets to the sort of personal application part you emphasize forgiveness. But I want to tie that back to the Rwandan story or today, ISIL.

And you know, is it the canon white, Reverend Ken White, the speaker of Baghdad. But so is the message to Christians in the Middle East who might be victims of ISIL and it's not just Christians. Any is the message of the book to the people who would be victims of ISIL.

The only thing you should do is forget. You just have to forgive. What is there more we can do in response to that? That's hard enough.

And just help us think through that piece of it. Forgiveness is tough and we all basically know that. And it was tough for God if I can put it like that because the cross is the sign that it's tough for God.

But forgiveness is part of a larger package. One of the great theologians of our day, who some of us here in this room are privileged to know, Marislav Volf, who teaches in Yale, the Vinci School, wrote a book 15 or more years ago, 20 years ago, called Exclusion and Embrace. Now, Volf comes from the Balkans and grew up in a family, a Christian family, under communist rule, and then saw extraordinary violence and the whole thing about Croatia and Serbia and Bosnia and so on.

That's his native ground, which leaves you with this terrible question. How do you, for him as a Croatian, love your Serbian neighbor after all that's happened? Granted, you're both supposed to be part of Christian cultures now. And he wrestled with that.

And his answer was this phrase, exclusion and embrace, that it's not enough just to say, "Oh, you must forgive everybody. You must embrace everybody. You must welcome everybody." Because real evil has happened and needs to be named and, in a sense, shamed and dealt with.

And the other example, obviously, is Desmond Tutu in South Africa, the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation. It's no good just to say, "Let's buy guns. We've got to move on now." No, you can't do that.

That is to leave undelth with serious issues, where real evil has happened, it needs to be addressed. And in some justice systems today, actually, that's being done in the New Zealand justice system based on some of the Maori court systems. They actually bring victim and offender together with family members, with society members, and with facilitation.

I mean, this is a dangerous and potentially toxic situation. And they actually address what's happened and how best now to deal with it. And for my money, that's a lot better than doing what we do most of the time in Britain, which is just to say, "You're a criminal.

We'll lock you up or find you," or whatever, which doesn't actually address the real problems going on. So forgiveness, ideally, happens within a larger context where that, which is evil, can be named and dealt with. Now, of course, there are many, many other situations, and there have been noble examples in your country with that horrible shooting in an Amish community not that long ago, where the instant reaction of the community was to forgive, because that's absolutely what they do, and they're based on that.

And we had the same in Northern Ireland a couple of decades ago when a bomb went off, and somebody's daughter was killed, and he was a minister, and he said straight away, he said, "I forgive these people." And that sent a sort of a shockwave, an incredulous wave, through British society when that appeared on television, because most people just thought, "I couldn't do that. I couldn't forgive them. I would want to go and kill them back." And so there's a sort of sense that maybe there is a different way to be human, and who is the better for that at the end of the day? Is forgiveness actually just weakness? Well, it could be, but actually forgiveness like that is amazingly powerful, because forgiveness doesn't just say, "Okay, I'm not going to hate you." Forgiveness actually creates a new world, and that's part of the message of the cross that what God does on the cross creates a new world, and if you did something horrible to me and I forgive you, it actually doesn't just bring us back to square one, it opens up a new possibility.

I know a man in your country who lost two daughters in a shootout outside a church. Somebody was in the church parking lot spraying bullets around, and they dived for cover, and two of his daughters didn't make it, and two did. He and then the young man finally turned his gun on himself.

The friend of mine, who is the father of those two daughters and the two who died, has made friends over the years with the parents of the young man, and they are very close friends now, and have this extraordinary bond, and it seems to me there you see the potential for healing communities, for new things to happen. So it isn't just, it's a wimpish thing which brings us back to square one, and that's it. It actually carries a strange part.

That's what Desmond Tutor has been doing in South Africa, and I thank God for that. Sorry, long answer, but that's a very interesting thing. So I think we're going to be opening it up to questions from the audience, and there are microphones down here at the front.

So if you have a question, come down, but while they're collecting, let me ask the last question, because it plays right off of what you just said. In the book you make a point of drawing the tight link between our forgiveness of others and God's forgiveness of us. You tell that that parable, but then you also said that Jesus has already, God has already forgiven us, and that's the work of Christ on the cross.

So how can it be that we're already forgiven, but then our capacity to be forgiven is a function of our forgiveness? That seems paradoxical. It is paradoxical, and it actually needs to be laid out perhaps a bit more thoroughly again than it's possible within these confines, but in terms of forgiving and being forgiven, as a pastor I have sometimes been aware when trying to help somebody through a particular crisis. That it is as though, and I use this language metaphorically, as though there is a door in your heart, which is the

same door which you open to give forgiveness to somebody else, but it's the same door through which forgiveness can come to you, and if you shut that door, then you shut that door.

And I know people who will not accept God's forgiveness for something they've done, perhaps because they're ashamed of it or they don't want to think it was wrong or whatever, so the idea that God would forgive them would be humiliating because it had to admit it was wrong, but who then find it impossible to forgive other people. And I know other people who readily accept God's forgiveness, which is accepting it is always an act of humility, as I said, and who are then gloriously able to forgive other people and who are life-giving people as a result. And that's the kind of the paradox then of humility that you become actually in a Christian sense, a much more powerful person, not in a sense of domineering power, but in the sense of the power of love.

Of somebody through whose life and work other people can be sustained and built up. And so that image of the door really helps me as a pastor understand what may be going on in some people's hearts. In terms of Jesus, can I shut the door so tight that God can't open it? God can do whatever God can do.

I would never put limits on what God can do. However, one of the things that God did very early on in creating us as human beings, and this is deep in the Jewish and Christian tradition, is to give human beings responsibility. And that's part of the dignity of being human, and I think that actually goes back to something deep in the character of God himself, to do with what Christians call the tri-personality of God, and it's to do with God and Jesus and so on.

That God wants human beings to be genuine, authentic agents who can take responsibility. And so God isn't suddenly like a parent who thought that the child was able to handle this, but now snatches it back and says, "No, you're obviously not up to it." God doesn't actually do, well, God may do that if God wants, and maybe thankfully God sometimes does, rescues from our own folly, but God actually wants us to be grown up to be full humans. And if in our grown-upness we say to God, "You're not wanted on side here," then God is not simply going to overrule that as though we were immature children.

And so that's the danger of being human, of being given this responsibility for God. But in terms of Jesus' death accomplishing something, I really do believe that there is a sense in which. In any serious exploration of any subject, you sooner or later get to the borders of language and you find yourself saying, "There is a sense in which, if my students write the phrase in a very real sense, I cross it out and say, 'That's a way of saying, 'I really want to affirm this, but I haven't yet thought out how.'" So if any of you find yourself using the phrase in a very real sense, just remember that.

But at the same time, there are some things which we can only point to and can't

necessarily say accurately. And one of those is that when Jesus died on the cross, the accumulation of the basic force of evil was dealt a death blow from which it will not recover. And now, in the Bible, there is a wrestling then with the fact that it's obviously continuing.

You know, evil did not suddenly cease to exist on Good Friday. And so several passages in the Bible talk about the power of evil or the quasi-personal force of evil as a defeated, wounded, bruised, but still angry enemy. Like if you try to swat a wasp in the room and you don't actually kill it but only stun it, it's probably more likely to come and try and sting you than it was before.

And we're kind of in that mode. And I think the New Testament writers know perfectly well that we're in that mode. But they cling on to the belief that on the cross, something actually happened which will result in the final elimination of evil.

And the sign of that is that Jesus rose from the dead because death is the result of... evil is basically anti-creation. It's basically the antithesis of the goodness and vibrancy of creation. It's shutting down creation.

And if Jesus rose from the dead, that means that something happened three days earlier through which the power of evil that would have otherwise held in there was dealt a decisive blow. And that's what Christianity is based on. And the funny thing is saying this now, probably half of you in this room are saying, "Okay, this guy really has lost it.

Sensible people don't think like this." But actually in the first century as well, people knew this was crazy. Paul says this message is foolishness. It's a scandal.

It's nonsense. And yet, when you hear it and think about it and let it go down inside you, it will transform you like nothing else will. So in a very real sense, I think I'm doing a good job here.

But I know it could be better if folks ask their questions. And when are you going to get a chance to ask someone with that accent and that deep voice and have them respond? This is your chance. Take advantage of it.

But some questions were texted in to us already. So I'll ask one of them while we're waiting for a brave soul to come down front. And that is, can we believe in a good God, given all the bad stuff that's in the world? Yeah, absolutely.

Because though the bad stuff is in some sense or other, there we go again, incomprehensible, we can understand why it's incomprehensible, at least to some extent. Let me just explain what I mean by that. If we were able to look out at the world and say, "Yeah, I can see why there's evil there," then we haven't actually understood what evil really is.

Evil is the disruption of the good, ordered creation. It is absurd in the sense that it doesn't make sense. Here is this creation which is flourishing and all the rest of it.

Why would there be such a thing as evil? And if you think you can say, "Okay, here is creation and there's evil there, so that's all right." Then you've not only belittled it, you've actually stood back from any responsibility in relation to it, which is a very dangerous thing. So we should expect it to be difficult for us to understand evil, let alone to understand what God has done about it, but we can make some wise gestures towards some answers there. In terms of whether, when people ask that question, as they often do, I think particularly it comes from the 17th and 18th century, very formative in my culture and yours, with d'ism where you basically have God as an absentee landlord who created the world and then went off upstairs somewhere, but he's still supposed to be in charge somehow vaguely, so that if things go wrong, we sort of blame him.

And that's still how a lot of people think that when something goes wrong, it's all the CEO's fault, and he may be sitting in an office upstairs, but he should have done something about it. And that is actually easy, but very naive and doesn't actually get us very far in anyone's universe. I would turn the question around the other way and say, if there is no God, why is there love and beauty and wisdom and truth and joy and hope? Are these all just as Jean-Paul Satra said, just a sick joke? Are we sort of hardwired to do those things, to love beauty, to cherish one another, to enjoy things, just as part of our random genetic package? In other words, whichever way you go, you either have God and a problem of evil or no God and a problem of good.

And those aren't equal and opposite problems, but I think it's worth thinking about. If somebody is tempted to say, because there is evil, there can't be a God, then actually we want to push back and go to a different level. Well, we do have some questions.

We'll take this one here first. Thank you. One of my first questions is, I think as a Christian, one of the hardest things to reconcile with a good God too would be the problem of natural evil itself.

Part of this whole, and I know you've wrote about this whole, the creation, evolution debate. One of the hardest things is this thought that death is not only a fact in nature, but a necessary thing for which it is to thrive. And the thought that this is actually necessary kind of does not fit to a person's mind as a good creation.

And as someone who's personally working towards ecology, I'm going to be preserving this. I'm not brave enough to slap a lion and say bad boy. But how would that work towards, how would a best explanation be for that kind of thing if this creation was, as he said, very good? Yeah.

Thank you. Didn't death precede the one that death recedes the Adam? Death is a funny

thing. Clearly, there has been animal death, decay, etc.

And plant death, decay, etc. For millennia, that's a given. When the human project, as we know it, started, there was a, in the book of Genesis, there's a warning about what I think is a different sort of death, that it's not just in the natural life cycle.

I mean, animals, life cycle, animals, when they're going to die, they more or less know animal communities, whether it's elephants or squirrels or whatever. They have ways of coping with this. And though they may grieve, some animals do seem to grieve, there is a sense that this is natural, that we know about it, that we cope with it.

With humans, death always has as well the sense of shame, the sense of a loss which really shouldn't be like that. And the biblical explanation for that is that we humans actually colluded with death rather than working for life. And in the Bible, one of the images for that is the tree of life, which signified that the good creation which God made in the first place was not a tableau, it was a project, it was designed to be going somewhere, and that the place that it was going would be a new place.

In which life would be a whole new dimension, so that the world as we observe it is as you've described it, and has been as you've described it, but that death became a worse sort of thing for humans. In ways again, we don't have good language for this because we've just never developed it, but one can sort of see that there are different dimensions there, but at the same time that there was the promise of new life, a new sort of world, a world which would be where the first one was supposed to go to. And that's precisely what Jesus claimed to be launching, and that's why with the resurrection, there is a new possibility, a new hope.

Even though what we have to go on, namely the resurrection of Jesus, we then have to extrapolate out from in order to see what maybe God's ultimate new world would be like. And that's mysterious, but it's the kind of mystery which we can sort of locate and start to come to terms with. Great question, how about over here now? Good evening, sir.

I am myself an American soldier, a veteran of the recent wars. I'm a Christian, I married a woman who's committed to Christian nonviolence, and has taught me a great deal about the power of redemptive love. So I asked someone who is not yourself a pacifist, but seems committed to the idea of this forgiveness as the Christian way to change the world.

How do we hold it in tension? And as a veteran of the recent wars, there's been a great deal of foolishness, so they're probably bad examples, but instead, Rwanda, Cambodia, Bosnia, Kosovo, where we just see unbridled evil, and we see maybe the only way we think that we can do something to protect innocent people is to use violence. But at the same time, hold that intention with this belief that the cross is a new and different way of doing things. Yeah, thanks.

It takes us back to one of the questions we were addressing earlier, and I'm grateful to have it from a source such as yourself. It seems to me that there are situations in the world. There are situations in every city, probably most nights of most weeks, where the only way to prevent something really bad happening is for somebody in the police.

One hopes to do something which is at least restraining, and maybe something that could be called violence, because not to do that would be to fail in a duty to protect the weak, the vulnerable, the innocent from what people are doing. The problem would come if, as sometimes happens in my country and perhaps sometimes in yours, if the police are perceived to be acting in the interests of one segment of society rather than another, whether that be a rich poor thing, a class thing, a race thing, whatever, and then the police lose credibility, and then the people who feel victimized by that, instead of feeling that ultimately their society is protected by the police, they feel they're being preyed on by the police. Now, extrapolate up from that into the military, the global context, and as I said before, the only way it seems to me that we can do the restraint that might be necessary in another Rwandan situation or whatever would be for a credible police force, which would have to be a multinational police force, which could not be seen as protecting one part of the world's economic, political, social, cultural interests, and certainly couldn't be seen as a new crusade by Christians against Muslims, couldn't be portrayed as that.

That's just been one of the major global disasters of this last 12, 15 years, which I think will take at least two generations to work out if then, and only if we're very wise from now on, which I see no sign of happening any day soon. I'm talking about my country and leaders and nobody else's, but the question then of forgiveness, there have been wonderful stories that have come out long years later about, for instance, people who are imprisoned by the Japanese in the Second World War, and who have gone back and have found the people who had held them captive and have worked at reconciliation and have made friends and have done the daring thing of crossing divides and building bridges. That takes real courage, real guts, real humility to abandon a sense of anger and retaliation or just smoldering resentment and embrace a different way.

Whether that sort of thing will be possible after the wars that have been happening recently, I couldn't possibly say. There are people like Andrew White who mentioned before who would be working for that. There are some noble, brave souls who do that sort of work, but I think we've made it much, much harder for ourselves, not easier.

I think I hear Andrew White saying something slightly different, which is that before he can get there to that work, there has to be another work that is involved in defeating ISIL. It just won't do to say, "Well, let the UN handle it, because the UN is us." And if the UN doesn't vote for it, should we tell Ken and White, "Sorry, but we can't come get you." I understand, but this has to be a long-range project, and after all, it took us thousands of years to get to even the idea of a UN, and part of that is because we've, over the last

hundred years, lived in an age of easy global communications, which simply was not possible before. That's why I've said that just as in my country in the early 19th century, we made a shift from local militias to a national supposedly credible, and sometimes it is, police force.

So we really urgently need to make the equivalent shift in global defence policing, because if we don't, the alternatives are either doing nothing or some form of vigilantism. Namely, if one nation decides something bad happening over there, I may not have authority from anybody, but I'm just going to go and do it anyway. That is bound to produce an equal and opposite reaction.

And I said this in 2002 when Tony Blair was wanting to say, "It's time we went and bombed Iraq," etc. I said it in public, I said it in Westminster Abbey, I've said it in various places. I see nothing to think that I and the others who are saying that then were wrong, and everything to back that up.

The reason we have, you call it ISIL or ISIS or whatever it is? The reason we have that now, the funny thing is, we thought al-Qaeda was the worst thing on the planet, and these guys are making al-Qaeda look like a rather gentle, moderate group. But one of the reasons that they have thrived is because of al-Qaeda being able to portray the west as the Great Satan, and every bomb we dropped has been another recruiting agent for that whole movement. Can we go on doing this? I am not a geopolitician, you are.

So, as you say about theology, I'm merely somebody observing this world, but as a pastor, when people ask me these questions, these are the kinds of reflections that I've been driven to over many years. Good, over here. Thank you for talking to us.

I'd like to know as someone who's trying to decide what I'm going to do with my future, and I'm considering theology or some type of ministerial care. Where do you think the future of theology is going and what needs can the future generation of theologians meet? Where are the jobs is what he's asking me? That's a huge and good question. People ask me this quite frequently, "At home, people email me, people come and see me, and ask, you know, "I want to do something in this sort of area where should I be?" An awful lot of the answer is to do with your particular skill sets, the gifts that God has given you, your particular inclinations, where you feel a burning desire to do stuff.

But at the same time, obviously that has to mesh with public realities. It seems to me that actually during my lifetime, Western theology has been through quite a change. When I was growing up, there was a very sort of ho-hum liberalism trying to scale everything down, make the Christian faith more credible by not talking so much about incarnation, certainly not about resurrection, the crucifixion just being a moral example, etc.

We seem to have come right through that, and some of the leading theologians of our

day, I mentioned Mirer Slavvolf, but also people like my friend and former colleague Rowan Williams in the UK and Oliver O'Donovan and people like that, have articulated a robust Christian theology for the 21st century, which actually has had the courage to say some of the big things in new ways in Carnation and Atonement, these big crunchy words that Christians use to talk about a God who is real. To talk about a God who loves, to talk about a God who does new creation and who launched that project in Jesus. Now, as I say those things, if there are things where you think, "Wow, here's a particular issue I'd love to give myself to." And it might be a question of Christian social ethics.

It might be fresh readings of the Hebrew Scriptures, it might be all sorts of things, then explore them, go and talk to people who teach them, find out where you can make a contribution, and be prepared for surprises. When you sign on, Bonhoeffer said, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die," so watch out. When you sign on, there will be surprises, there will be pain, there will be shocks, but it will be just an amazing thing when you put your future, and I would say to anyone, the Christian or non-Christian, you put your future into God's hands, tremblingly, and God will do things that you would never have imagined, and some of them will be very painful, some of them will make you just be grateful to be alive.

So go for it. So last three questions, we have two here and one last one here. Thanks.

I once read the story of a newspaper article that said, "In looking out on the brokenness of life, what's wrong with the world," and it was repeated that GK Chesterton wrote in and said, "To whom it may concern, I am." Signed GK Chesterton. And you've talked some about evil on a cosmic or corporate level, and I was wondering if you could talk some about the biblical understanding of evil on the micro level for the individual, and I guess more pastorally, how does the message of God's new creation through Jesus speak to the guilt and shame that we might experience in the trenches of day-to-day life? Right. Yeah, I mean, different cultures experience this differently.

We in the West tend to overdose on guilt, other cultures overdose on shame, and there are different ways in which people cope with the fact that we all know that individually and corporately and family and so on, that we are not what we would like to be, and that we have a sense of missing the mark and getting it wrong and so on. Obviously, the Bible has words for that. Lots of different cultures have different words for that.

It's better to be happy to use different images and different ways in lest we get stuck in one mode only. However, in the New Testament and the Christian tradition, this blessed word "sin," which is a difficult word because it gets abused and again belittled as though there are certain kind of trivial offenses and some not so trivial, but that's sin. But actually, we can go and drop bombs on innocent civilians or we can go and do massive corporate fraud and we somehow don't think that that's sin.

And the answer is that actually sin exists at all sorts of levels, and sin is what happens

when humans cease to worship the God who is love and life and give their allegiance to anything else, any element of creation, whatever, because when you do that, your humanness deconstructs, at least a little bit, and then the things that you do reflect that subhumanness with which you have colluded. And that's a long way round to say, yes, there are such things as personal sins, of course there are, but the danger in our society is that we polarize between people who have the idea that there's a sort of a moral law, of absolute hanging in midair somewhere, and that we're all sort of cowering under it and we may break a few of these laws and then should we feel guilty or should we say silly old laws. We oscillate between that and the existentialism or romanticism sometimes, it says that what matters is that I be true to myself, that I shall live authentically, that I just do what comes utterly naturally, and that if I don't do that, then that's the real problem.

And neither of those are wise ways of ordering a human life. There is this thing of vocation, there is this thing of character development, and in the Christian tradition, this happens through worshiping the God in whose image were made, and so discovering how to be genuinely human. And it's when we're not doing that, that actually something about our being human is starting to diminish, and then things we do, though you might label them as sins, they might actually be infringements of some divine law or whatever.

That's not the point. The biblical word for sin is hamartia, which means missing the mark, which means failing to be a genuine human being. If we think of it like that, then I think we're actually getting somewhere.

Here? My question is about systemic evil, and it seems that I live and move and have my being in a world that is deeply entrenched in systemic evil. I can't go to the supermarket without seemingly participating in that, and I need help thinking about how to be both a Christian and a consumer in that kind of environment. Yeah, thanks.

That's a great question, and one which I think people have only really started asking seriously in our culture comparatively recently, and I think it relates to something you said at the beginning, which you haven't actually followed up, I think, about how we live wisely in an ambiguous world. This is one of the reasons why Christians pray a prayer every day, which includes the phrase "Forgive us our trespasses." It's one of the reasons why I love this old story in the Hebrew Scriptures about a man who comes to see an Israelite prophet to get healed from a disease, and the Israelite prophet heals him, and the man realizes this is where the true God is. But he's got a job back home, which involves him working with the king where he lives, and when the king goes into his temple where there's an idol, and he's an old man, he leans on him, and when the king bows, he has to bow as well, and he says, "Look, I don't want to do this, but I don't see any way out of it." Fascinatingly, the prophet Elisha says, "Go in peace, that's understood.

The glass is half full, it's not half empty." Simultaneously, the prophet has a servant who, seeing this rich man from another country, come and get healed, thinks, "Ah, I on the main chance." He dashes after him, and he tells him some cock and bull story about needing some help for some friends who've come to see him, and the guy gives him all these good things, clothes and money and so on. And he comes back home, and the prophet knows exactly what's happened, and life is the worst for him, his glass is half empty. And the question in the ambiguous situations is, is the glass half full or half empty.

And as long as the glass is half full, and you are really doing your best to be sensitive and wise about worshipping the true God and being as aware as you can about the systemic evil, in which we all do take part, and I too have to fill a car with gasoline, I too have to take part in systems which are broken, because we can't avoid that. And then we look back and we say, "Actually, it's always been like this." The first century was a deeply ambiguous time. There has never been a time when these issues have been cleaned cut.

But if we are sensitive, even when things are grey and murky, then if, please God, it won't happen, but it might, if things get worse to the point where our society, the Western world, your country, my country, whatever, actually find itself being pulled by other countries. And by the way, if things are not like other countries, like other countries have in a direction which is more radically evil, it's the people who are sensitive at the moment about the little things who may be in a position to stand up and say, "Not in our name. We're not going to do this.

Thank you very much." And it's why in the New Testament we are told that when we pray for discernment, the Holy Spirit will guide us. And some of the things we have to do may seem ambiguous choices. We can't avoid that, but it's the wisdom and the glass half fullness that we should be aiming for all the time.

And last question from the audience. I'm headed right. Thanks for coming.

I think you're great. But you've heard a lot on the Christian, on reworking the Christian understanding of heaven. What, if anything, do you have to say on Down Under or Hell? I try not to talk about Hell.

In fact, when I wrote "Surprise by Hope," there wasn't a section on Hell, and then whenever I lectured on "Surprise by Hope," can I, don't misunderstand this, but in the UK I would lecture often on the Christian's ultimate hope and so on. And again and again and again, the first question would be, "What about Hell?" Happily it's the last question tonight. It's a happier place.

We're in the Garden of Eden over here. Yeah, okay, I accept that. But if you insist on worshipping that which is not God and determinately doing that, your humanness will

deconstruct because your humanness consists in reflecting the goodness and love of the God in whose image you are made.

I hate saying this because I'm talking about people I know who actually have turned their back on God. People I love who really don't want to know. But I really believe that this has to be said that it is a matter of people dehumanizing themselves.

It isn't a matter of the Sistine Chapel. Some people going up, some people going down and kind of an equal and opposite thing. C.S. Lewis in his book The Great Divorce has this extraordinary image of this wonderful new world which is like our world only much much more so full of beauty and power and so on.

And then the place which is called Hell is down a tiny little crack in the earth. It's so thin and slight. The people there feel it's quite big, but actually in comparison with the real new world it's almost negligible because it's literally next to nothing.

And somehow that's one imaginative way of getting at the fact that the two are not equal and opposite. But then that's all the more serious when we talk about human beings making the choices which dehumanize themselves and which are inviting that kind of nothingness as their final destiny. So it remains for me to do three things.

First to let you all know that I think I heard the bishops say we would not be sinning if we participated in the capitalist culture of buying his books which are available out at the thing. And I encourage you all to do that. Second.

An act of loving kindness to my children and grandchildren. There we go. Secondly to let you all know that the glasses will be half full in the divinity school.

There's a reception in the alumni hall in the divinity school to continue the conversation if you want. But finally it remains for me to ask you the last question which is and I want to borrow from an old preacher's gimmick that says if you were to go to bed tonight and you didn't wake up in the morning where would you go. I don't want to I don't based on what I've read you don't like that gimmick.

But let me let me tweak it slightly. There might be folks in this room who heard all of this they've heard the Oxford Jackson and they still say I don't buy it. What's the question you would like them to ask themselves tonight before they go to bed.

What's the question you would like them to be thinking about. I'd like them to be thinking about Jesus. Jesus was and is a real human being who was a human like us who lived and died like we do but who also rose again and such people probably don't believe he rose again.

But I think if you look if you're honest enough to look hard at Jesus get hold of one of the gospels and just say who is this man who was this man who is this man. And I think to go

to sleep with the question who is Jesus in your mind is a pretty good way to go you might actually wake up a different person. If you like this and you want to hear more like share review and subscribe to this podcast.

And from all of us here at the Bear Toss Forum thank you.

(gentle music)