

# OpenTheo

## #151 NT Wright Q&A with Bishop Joseph D'Souza on global mission - Oxford Conference Session 3

January 5, 2023



### Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

Tom Wright and Joseph D'Souza host a Q&A at the Reimagining Global Mission conference in Oxford covering questions on the theology of mission and discipleship.

NT Wright was keynote speaker at an Oxford conference on Reimagining Mission in the Global South, hosted by Bishop Joseph D'Souza of the Good Shepherd Church network in India, in partnership with Premier.

Watch the video: <https://youtu.be/HTFvFT0I7VA> For Bishop Joseph D'Souza:  
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## Transcript

[Music] Hi there! Before we begin today's podcast, I want to share an incredibly special resource with you today. If you're like me, life can get pretty hectic pretty quickly, but one thing that helps me slow down is connecting with God in new ways. And I'd like to share a resource that has really helped me do that.

It's called "Five Ways to Connect with God" and you can download it for free right now at [premierinsight.org/resources](http://premierinsight.org/resources). I think you'll find refreshment for your soul. So go right now to [premierinsight.org/resources](http://premierinsight.org/resources) and download your copy. That's [premierinsight.org/resources](http://premierinsight.org/resources).

[Music] The Ask NT Wright Anything podcast.

[Music] Hello and welcome back to the first show of 2023. I'm Justin Briley, head of theology and apologetics for Premier Unbelievable. We bring you the weekly Ask NT Wright Anything show as part of our whole suite of podcasts and videos.

You can find out more at [premierunbelievable.com](http://premierunbelievable.com) where we've loads of great articles as well from the past year. You can register there for our newsletter, get bonus content and of course the link to ask Tom a question yourself on this show. It's all done in partnership of course, this program with NT Wright online and S.T.A.S. and SBCK.

Tom's UK publishers. But again, [premierunbelievable.com](http://premierunbelievable.com), the place to go for all of your premier unbelievable needs. Now, Tom is of course a renowned Bible scholar, author and speaker and in today's episode we've the final session from a conference in Oxford where he was the keynote speaker.

Reimagining Global Mission was hosted by the Good Shepherd Church Network from India in partnership with Premier. If you want to watch the video of the conference, there's a link to that too with today's show. On today's podcast, Tom Wright and Bishop Joseph DeSouza of the Good Shepherd Church in India host a Q&A covering questions on the theology of mission and discipleship.

[Music] Good questions, interesting questions. There is this one which comes up right. What is the significance of pre-fall genesis to the work, to the outworking of image bearing for us today? What have we missed here that's foundational? I think as I hinted earlier, the church got off on the wrong foot when the fathers of the 4th and 5th century were talking about the image and saying, "What is the image of God in humans? Is it our imagination or is it our reason or what is it?" That misses the point that I think the crucial thing is, Genesis is a temple, a heaven and earth structure with an image in the middle of it.

And the reason you have an image in the middle of a temple is that it brings the, in pagan temples this is, it brings the presence and power of the deity into that space and it provides a focus for the worship of the people around. That's how a pagan temple works, but in God's temple, the genuine article, it's creation with humans as having a vocation to reflect God into the world. And this is, you know, because since the middle ages at least, the Genesis story has been told in terms of God setting the humans a moral examination which they fail and then the question is how are we going to get out of that bind.

And people have missed that sense of vocation that as humans, the way God wants to work in the world is through human beings. Of course, he does a million other things as well. No human being made the sunrise this morning, as far as I'm aware, and lots of all kinds of things, but God's crucial vital work he intends to do through human beings.

And I think, I think, you know, I've never heard that in preaching and in teaching in

churches that I belong to. And yet it seems to me absolutely central. And when you take it forward into the New Testament, this helps me to understand what it means when Paul says in Colossians 1 that the Messiah is the image of the invisible God, that that simultaneously means he is the genuine human being, and he is the ultimate one in whom God is present, and Paul uses temple language in that poem, Colossians 1, 15 through 20.

So I think all of those temple resonances have been regularly missed, and with it the sense of the human vocation rather than simply the human moral plight with then a little bit of our humanness, maybe reflecting God or something. There may be some supplementary on that, but that's where I would go with it. That's very interesting, that's very important, not interesting, important distinction, reflecting glory to God and God's glory to the people.

And God's sovereign healing will, you know, that when the church is being the church, bringing healing and hope into the world, this is God doing what he wants to do, the way he likes to do it. And as I've said in various places, and this isn't original to me, many people have said it, creation itself has Christology at its heart. The reason God makes a world in which the central character is to be the agent of his purposes is because the triune God from the beginning always intended to come and be the image bearer, that people have sometimes, particularly in the Middle Ages, thought that incarnation only happened because human sinned and God needed to come and rescue them.

And I am firmly with those who in company with the medieval Oxford theologian, Don Skotus, I'm happy to say, believe that no, incarnation was in God's mind right from the beginning, that God intended, how come one talk about the mind of the Trinity, but that the triune God in making the world makes a world in which it will be utterly appropriate for him to come and be the genuine human at the heart of the garden, if you like. When human sin, this means that that already conceived intention to become incarnate, has a whole new dimension to it, namely that in becoming incarnate, God will have to take upon himself, the pain and sorrow and shame and destruction and death of the world, but that that will call forth from God simply more of the same, namely self-giving love. I think that's hugely important, that God in making a world that is other than himself is pouring himself out in self-giving love.

When humans rebel, self-giving love is what? Through the appropriate vehicle of the incarnate human. Does that make sense? Yeah, yeah, there's a question here asking whether we risk showing people a partial Jesus by focusing mostly on this world since the kingdom is only partially complete in present lives. Where you focus is a matter of vocation.

We can't all do everything. We all ought to have the big picture in front of us in order then to say, "It seems that I'm called to work at this bit here." The trouble is when you're

working at one little bit of it, you can easily forget other bits, and then if you try to absolutise the little bit you're working on, then that danger would become very real. I would go back to 1 Corinthians 15, 20 to 28 again, which is a very dense passage, but it's quite clear there that Jesus is already reigning, that he must go on reigning until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

So there is now and not yet, always in New Testament theology you have a now and not yet, and it's always possible to move a bit too far one direction or another. Some of my colleagues accuse me of having an over-realised eschatology and some of having an under-realised eschatology. The fact that I get accused both ways is probably a good sign, not necessarily, but probably.

So often the church has imagined that the kingdom is something which only happens right at the end. In the creed, he will come again in glory to judge both the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end, as though the kingdom is something which will only happen when Jesus returns. The four gospels are adamant that Jesus is launching the kingdom of God in his own work.

That's the real problem with dispensationalism, the idea that, "Oh no, no, it got postponed." It really, really didn't. And the trouble is then that we aren't used to seeing the signs of the genuine kingdom in terms of what Jesus was doing in his public career and the way in which the church in the power of the Spirit goes on doing *Mutatis Mutatis* the same things. So there is a fulfilment, but of course, if somebody had misheard that and thought that I was saying that simply doing the things that we're doing now, that that's all there is to it, and there's no ultimate future.

I say, "Yeah, bacilli, read the larger text. God will do for the whole creation at the end," Romans 8, "what he did for Jesus at Easter." That's the ultimate horizon, and we anticipate that in the Spirit in the present. Excellent.

There's a question which you have referred to. What was the role of enlightenment and secular humanism in weakening the Christian faith in the world? Wow, wow. Okay.

The short answer to that is please read that book, *History and Eschatology*, which is on the reading list. Because I became fascinated by that when I was asked to do the Gifford lectures in Aberdeen, it was a great honour to do that. Because as a New Testament scholar, I hadn't really worked my way through the 17th and 18th century stuff in the way that one should, because as a New Testament scholar you're living in the first century, as I said.

However, so much of what has been written about the Bible, what has been written about theology, has been under the shadow of European Enlightenment thought. And it's a complicated story because the Enlightenment in some ways is reacting against the medieval European construct, which was very much about the great Thomas Aquinas

thing of all the different hierarchies and the point being that the soul will eventually go up and end up with the beatific vision and so on. The Reformers changed how that worked, but they didn't adjust the ultimate goal.

I'm not saying that very well. Let me try and say it again. In the Middle Ages you have the great Western Catholic scheme where the aim is for your soul to get to heaven and it's going to take a long journey there of our purgatory, etc.

The Reformers come along and they say, "No, no, we're saved by grace through faith." And that means there's no purgatory. Because purgatory was big business in the 14th, 15th century. And the Reformers said, "No, that's all a mistake.

It's a category mistake." But the Reformers never altered the ultimate goal. So then they say, "When you die, you go straight to heaven, end of conversation." And there's then a slippage because as with Aquinas himself, they still talk about resurrection. And they sometimes will talk about new creation, but they never integrate them.

Now the result then in European thought was a kind of gap as to how this was all going to work and where it was all going. And what you have in the 18th century is the Epicurean movement, which is secularism but rooted in ancient Greek thought. It's not a modern movement.

It's an ancient Greek movement with some modern footnotes. And the secularism says, "Ah, we will make the world a better place. You Christians have messed up and in teaching us a lot of mumbo jumbo.

We don't like that anymore. But your vision of a world put right is a good vision and we will go for it. We will do education.

We will do medicine. We will do social care of the poor, etc, etc. And that's where we still are.

Still in that place in Britain right now. With the secular government saying, "We will tell you how to do education. We will tell you how to do medicine." And if you have a Christian hospital or a Christian school, they say, "No, you can't teach that or you shouldn't teach this.

We're just in that tension right now. And I'm sure many of you have similar things where you are." But what it was was a secular version of a Christian eschatology, which then in the 19th century, he says, "Warming to his theme, you end up with Karl Marx." Who did his PhD on Epicureanism, on Lucretius and so on. And for Marx, it's going to be a cataclysmic thing that we're going to achieve this utopia.

But it's still basically a Judeo-Christian vision, but without God. Like Hegel and Marx are kind of twin problems in the 19th century. For Hegel, it's still again a sort of Judeo-

Christian vision of progressive revelation.

But again, without God. Hegel, you have progress without God. Marx, you have apocalyptic without God.

But it's still, that's why there's some good stuff in Hegel and Marx, because it is still in the Judeo-Christian tradition. But when you take God out, other things have to come in instead. This is a very, very short and oversimplified version of a much longer argument, which could and should be made.

But then the trouble is that the church faced with secularism, instead of saying, "No, no, we have this thing called the Old Testament, and we're going to read it and relearn eschatology from that." The church has said, "No, no, we've got to go back to Plato." And we've got to say, "No, no, secularism is quite wrong because there's a place called heaven." And that's where our souls really belong. And we're going back there one day. And you think, then what happens to the Old Testament? The Old Testament becomes a book of allegories and figures, which are really about the soul going to heaven, but all under the figure of the people inheriting the promised land.

And then that cuts the nerve of any, whether you call it social engagement or whatever, which then leads to the social gospel movement at the end of the 19th century, but people aren't fed up with that. And so it goes. But it's only when you see the roots of all of that back in the 17th, 18th century, and some would say back in the nominalist controversy of the 12th century, as you tell, I'm not really a modern philosopher, I just play around with this stuff, but it is fascinating to me to see how all of those different movements have affected theology, public life, biblical scholarship, etc.

We are all heirs to those problems, and unless we recognize at least some of them, we won't understand why we trip over the things that we do. This question, modern Western theology has messed up Christianity, and yet has been exported around the world. Did Westerners relearn theology from non-Western Christians? - Non-Western Christians.

I would hope so. I said to you before, one day there are going to be books written by Chinese Christians in the present, which aren't translated into English yet, on the basis of the 60, 70, 80 years of the Chinese church living through what they have lived through, and they will have an enormous amount to teach us, and I hope that I and others will be ready to learn it. But before we get there, why not be learning from other parts? But it gets complicated because what's tended to happen is that many churches from the two-thirds world have sent their brightest and best to study at Harvard or Yale or Princeton or somewhere, which is fine, they'll give you a good education, but often such places will teach them varieties of modern North American liberalism, which they then struggle to, so if they then go back to their original country, are we hearing the echo of modern North American liberalism, or are we hearing a genuinely indigenous product, and should we worry about that, or do we have to say that's all part of the mix? And that's a real

problem.

But I would say, you know, I want to learn from anyone and everyone. I've been around the British and American scene long enough to have no thought that what we do in Britain and America is necessarily superior to anyone else. Far from it, I've seen an amazing amount of folly, and stupidity, wrong exegesis, etc, etc.

And I'm eager to learn from people. So like when you showed that film clip and said what you did about Dalit and eating together, I'm thinking Galatians 2, there it is. If we'd had stuff like that 40 years ago, rediscovering the so-called new perspective on Paul would have been a lot easier and a lot more obviously relevant, whereas some of us had to claw our way to it.

So yes, we should be doing that. Interesting, exciting. This question from myself, when it comes to the attributes of God, right, which is part of our systematic theology, how much of that attribute of God was impacted by platonic thought versus a Biblical Hebrew idea of God and who God is? That's a great question.

I'm not sure I can give a very good answer because really we're talking about the fourth and fifth century and then on beyond into the medieval period, which is not my field. I mean, when I studied theology here, we did the course we used to call Eden to Calcedon, that is Old Testament, New Testament, and the Greek Fathers as far as 451 AD, the Council of Calcedon, and then we would jump ahead and do a bit of Reformation, a bit of 19th century. So we never really did the Middle Ages.

They now do. The Aquinas has made a comeback. So the abstract attributes of God has never been something that has formed me deeply reflection on that.

At the same time, I'm wary of jumping too quickly into a Hebrew thought versus Greek thought thing, because that can go wrong in a number of ways. After all, the Jewish world of Jesus' day was a Greek-speaking Jewish world. Most Jews in the wider Roman Empire may have had some, ancient Hebrew, may have had some Aramaic, but they were network Greek-speaking.

Even the Dead Sea Scrolls people who are writing in Hebrew are clearly influenced by Greek thought, so that trying to get a razor blade between them is a dangerous thing, historically. At the same time, yes, if people are drawing on Plato and Aristotle, the high probability is that they're going to come up with abstract formulations, which really rather leave behind the strange, dangerous God of Mount Sinai, should we say. Just like this is a good illustration.

If you start with the Council of Chalcedon, 451 AD, where you have Jesus as fully divine, fully human, and all that's all laid out, you would never in a million years, if you started with that, arrive at the portrait of Jesus that you get in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Jesus is a much more vivid, real character, whereas Chalcedon has made him an abstract combination of attributes. And so I would say the same about God as a whole.

The God of the Old Testament is alive. He's doing things, and he's doing things here, but not there, and he's doing puzzling things which scare us and worry us. And if we kind of reduce God to attributes, now the people who do that would say, "Oh, we're not reducing God, we're simply trying to speak clearly about him." So it's more complicated than I'm making it, but that would be my instant reaction.

It's very complicated because of different cultures, the Hindu, but this is mostly atheist, but the Islamic cultures have tried to understand and describe God in different ways. And sometimes there is this dissonance between us come out of systematic theology, and of course they take this as. Any modern Hebrew work done within Judaism on that? Not my field, I wouldn't know.

It wouldn't surprise me because I'm constantly aware as I move from one circle to another of all sorts of... I sometimes just autobiographically, I've sometimes described my own pilgrimage in terms of imagine being invited to a party where there's lots of people in a crowded room like this only more so, and everyone's talking in a very buzzy fashion about exciting things, and you think this is really exciting. Wow, fantastic being part of this party. And at a certain point, you notice there's a door in the side of the room.

What's going on through there? And you...poker knows through the door. There's another party going on through there. And they're all talking about something else, and they're just as excited.

And you suspect that actually this is going to go on and on and on right around a large building. And that's the world of academic theology, that we're all working on this or that or the other. My son is doing his doctorate in Oxford at the moment.

He's working on stuff that I've never looked at. Oh my goodness, we have great conversations, but I'm aware that he's part of whole sloughs of conversation that I just hadn't been part of at all. So, yeah, thank you.

I'm sure this has come... I'm curious of you as a Pauline scholar reconciled Paul's teaching on equality in the new creation, with some of his writings on the role of women. Oh, yeah. Paul usually gets a bad press on the question of women.

And slavery. And slavery. And slavery? Well, yes.

There are obviously different issues, but with the women question, the two key passages, the first Corinthians 11-1 following, which is about women's headgear and all that, which people sometimes ask me if you could meet Paul today, what would you ask him? And probably my top question was, can you just explain to me what first



Corinthians 11-1, 11-2 following is all about? Because some of the argumentation there is very puzzling and complicated, and I've looked at several different theories that maybe he's actually quoting somebody in Corinth and then refuting them, which he does elsewhere in the letter. That's possible, but I've never yet been convinced by any one of those theories. But then there's the passage in... First Corinthians 14, at the end of First Corinthians 14, this is the women should keep silence in the churches, which cannot mean that women can't lead in worship, because already in chapter 11 he has talked about women leading in worship.

And it looks as though, and I was helped by... Some of you remember Kenneth Bailey? Great man. For British right or right? American. It was American, but he was a missionary in the Middle East for many years, and I once said him to a lecture on this, and he said, "In some Middle Eastern churches, you get men on one side and women on the other, which they still segregate, but the sermon would be in classical Arabic or in proper, decent Arabic, but a lot of the women from whichever village it was wouldn't necessarily understand that.

They would speak a demotic dialect at home, and the women would get bored with the sermon and would start chattering among themselves, and the preacher would have to say, "Well, the women please be quiet if you want, know what's going on, your husbands will explain it back home." Now, that may be a simplistic illustration, but I was struck by that, that has the feel of a real community living with the current puzzle. It certainly doesn't mean that women shouldn't speak in church, because they say he assumes in chapter 11 that the women will do, and the question there is should they or shouldn't they be wearing head coverings when they're doing it. But for me, the crucial passage is Romans 16, where when Paul has written what I would describe as probably the greatest letter ever written, namely Romans, he entrusts it to a woman named Phoebe, who is a deacon in the church in Kankretai, and when you entrust a letter to somebody in the ancient world, they are taking that letter to the recipient, and because it's a corporate recipient, somebody has to read it out.

The high probability is that the messenger will read it out, and the more or less certainty is that the messenger who knew the author will be asked to help explain it. So it's highly likely that the first person ever to read Romans in public and to exegiate it was a woman deacon from the church in the Eastern port of Kankretai. Now, from there on it's all downhill, basically, you know, that if Paul is happy to do that, then all sorts of issues have to be thought through in the light of that.

And when I'm asked this question, it's often about the New Testament in general, so I will just drop in the role of the women at the tomb, that in John 20, when Jesus is raised from the dead, and Mary Magdalene meets him, "Jesus does not say, 'Mary, please will you go and get Peter, because I've got something really important to tell him which he's got to do.' He says, 'Go and tell my brothers, I'm ascending to my father and your father.' Now,

I've said to people, the foundation of all Christian ministry is the announcement that the crucified Jesus is raised from the dead and is now the Lord of the world. That's the beginning of all Christian ministry, and the person chosen to be the vehicle of that is Mary Magdalene. And again, basically, this is one of those mic drop moments, rest my case.

Amen, wonderful. Tom, you have written about this, and we've talked a little bit about it, and this is about Christians engaging in politics, etc. If you can speak for a couple of minutes, you've written about it.

I've just the rise and the thinking that's going on today in political theology since the 70s, and how a freshly thing has happened going on. Yeah, again, it's not my field. I know people who work in this field, and I know, I respect what they do, but I haven't taken a detailed part in it.

The work that I have done in those areas, some of which, you know, there's a book of mine called 'God in Public', these are sort of essays trying to probe into what are we talking about in a world that thinks it's now a secular world when we have Christians in politics. And I have tended to look at the bigger pictures of which agendas Christians should be pushing towards, or working towards. But it varies enormously.

I mean, it varies even between Britain and America, which are quite similar in some ways. It certainly varies between, say, Germany and France and Italy, which each have quite different traditions of how you think politically. France very definitely secularized.

Italy is still basically knowing that the Pope is just down the road, and really he calls the shots even if we disagree with him. And Germany is still living with the legacy of Luther's two kingdoms, where you have the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of God, and never the train shall meet with all the problems. You know, they're in quite a small bit of Europe, those three countries.

You've got three radically different views. Switzerland, different again with its reformed tradition where the reformed, of course, as in Holland, the Reformed Church wanted to see all of life under the rule of God and would go into politics to see how that would work out. Now, you see, all these are fallouts from the philosophical and cultural movements of the last three or four centuries.

And where one happens to be, where one happens to start from, is going to make quite a difference to what then is going to be possible. So on politics is the art of the possible. I tend to work on the glimpses of the ideal, if you like, and I'm well aware that in real life, I could give you an ideal lecture on what marriage is all about, what husbands and wives are supposed to be all about, and I would get back home and my wife would say, "So what did you tell them today then?" Well, yeah, we bring things down to, I have a cartoon which is in a frame at home, which is a bishop driving home from church, and his

wife is sitting beside him.

You tell he's a bishop, he's still got his pointy hat on. And the husband of the bishop is saying to his wife, "Have you considered how much more effective my sermon would have been if you hadn't shouted, "Ha!" [laughter] So one can see an ideal, but I've tended to try to sketch the role of the church vis-a-vis, and what I've said today I think would be true in a communist country. It's certainly true in North America.

In North America it's far more complicated, because still a lot of Americans believe that they are a Christian nation in some sense or other, but how that is cashed out by a lot of the people who believe that, I find deeply worrying and disturbing on biblical grounds, that it seems to me it's not respecting the stuff we've been talking about all day today. And then in Britain we're just muddled, you know, we as usual muddle along trying to put bits and pieces together and sometimes getting things right and off and getting things wrong. We've never been like the French dominated by a philosophical paradigm, which we're trying to work out.

And so I'm simply walking around the question, I'm not even answering it. But insofar as politics is the art of the possible, I would pray for Christians to go into politics locally, nationally, internationally, diplomacy, etc. and to be people of prayer trying to make wise decisions, knowing that there are compromises to be made, like Nehem and the Syrian, you know, in Second Kings.

He discovers that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel because nobody else can heal his leprosy. And they say, "Look, I've got to go back home. I want to go back home.

My boss will want me to go into the house of Rimmen, his God. And when he bows, I will have to bow. And I hope that's okay.

And Elisha says, "Sure, go in peace." You know, that's politics in a sense. But then of course the other half of the story is Elisha's own servant who thinks, "Well, we can do a bit of a deal on the side here." And it doesn't work like that. The question is, is the glass half full or half empty? So we're working for glass half full people in politics.

Hi there. Before we go any further, I want you to know about a very special e-book we're releasing this month called Critical Race Theory and Christianity. This e-book draws from two unbelievable podcasts with Neil Shenvie, Rasselberry, Owen Strand and Jermaine Marshall, addressing questions like, "Has so-called woke ideology taken over parts of the church or is white privilege a problem in the church?" And is Critical Race Theory compatible with the gospel? I'd love for you to have a copy of this powerful e-book as my special thanks to you for your gift to Premier Insight today.

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So please, go to [premierinsight.org/give](http://premierinsight.org/give) and make a donation today. That's [premierinsight.org/give](http://premierinsight.org/give). And don't forget to download our newest e-book, Critical Race Theory and Christianity as my special thank you. When you were in the House of Lords, you were un-energetic.

You campaigned quite a bit for the debt free. Did you feel you were able to progress? Yeah, I mean, the Jubilee 2000 movement, which some of you will remember from 22 years ago, the millennium thing, Christian Aid. And I've worked with Christian Aid leaders quite a bit, especially when I was in Durham, have been pushing very hard then for the remission of global debt.

This was fascinating because lots of people around the world knew that this campaign was going on. When I spoke in America, some churches knew about it, some had never heard about it. And that was a little weird, that it just wasn't an issue, and yet the Americans were deeply implicated in the poverty of the two-thirds world because of unpayable debts that have been loaned generations before.

And because a country can't go bankrupt, those unpaid debts would just accumulate compound interest in a way which, if it was an individual, you'd just draw a line. This person would go bankrupt, and you'd start again. This is a well-known case.

But we did achieve quite a lot in the late '90s, and around 2000 itself, Tanzania felt the benefits, the Philippines felt the benefits, various other countries felt the benefits. Because if you're paying off compound interest, you grow the wrong crops because you sell them at a higher price and you undercut local initiatives and farmers, et cetera, all of that stuff. It's fallen off the agenda a bit now, but I did speak about this in the House of Lords at one point because a rumor went round that we were prepared to remit some foreign debts as long as if we gave, or we were prepared to do aid for the two-thirds world and remit debts, as long as they then bought our products, particularly military hardware, this was firmly denied by the government at the time in, I was probably talking about 2007, '08, something like that.

But some of us as bishops were determined to keep these issues on the table, but that too is about the art of the possible. If you happen to be there and be able to make a speech when that's going on, you can get it on the agenda, but you will know that in England, about 26, I think, of the Church of England bishops, our members of the House of Lords, you're not there all the time. I will be there for maybe three or four days a month because I had a d'Assist to run at the other end of the country.

So you rely on there being two or three of you in the House of Lords at any one time to make whatever speech is required at the time. And that's, in human terms, that's an

incredibly hit-or-miss way of going about it, like shooting at arrows at targets in the dark. But often you would find that actually the day that you planned to go there, there was a debate which you could contribute to and so on.

So again, the art of the possible. Okay, an important question. A vision you have articulated is both compelling and robust.

What are your key thoughts on how we as the Church get from here to there? Yeah, key ideas, key thoughts, key action plans. I think one of the main things is local communities actually doing it. It's one of those funny things that when a Church in a particular area starts doing certain things which gain the attention of people around about, other churches notice that we could do that too.

Or they've tried that. It wouldn't quite work for us, but if we tweaked it a bit, we could do it like this. When I was Bishop of Durham, I saw this quite a bit.

That we'd be sharing some best practice. And people who'd had an initiative locally, it may be quite a small parish to do some of the things we've been talking about. I could tell you endless stories about what was going on in those parishes.

But for instance, a really, really, really poor parish where the coal mines had shut, the steel industries had closed, the fisheries were decimated by European Union regulations, etc., etc. A lot of poverty, a lot of homelessness, a lot of youth unemployment, etc. And the churches would get together and would run a credit union, illiteracy training skill, a computer training skills, a family drop in, etc., etc.

As a sign of hope on the High Street, in one case they took over an old redundant bank. The bank had gone because there wasn't much business happening in the town. So the churches took over this building and it became a sign of hope on the High Street.

And it wasn't that they had any grand strategy. These were just very ordinary local Northeast people who saw that there were some crying needs, and they said their prayers and they did what they could. And then of course the local council is so delighted if people are doing that that they will help them and they will encourage them and so on.

And I was thrilled to see very ordinary local Christians doing things which made the power brokers in the local government, etc., sit up and take notice. There was one estate in the wrong bit of Sunderland where nobody from the council would set foot. There was one clergy person, a middle-aged single woman who lived on that estate, knew everybody, knew everything that was going on.

The council would go to her to ask what they should do about this and that. I thought, that's great. That is the church as we wrongly say, punching above its weight.

But projects which, it's what Grace Davy, the sociologist, calls cascading grace. That two

or three people who get together with an idea and prayerfully try a particular thing, when it then seems to have an effect, it trickles out. Not trickles down, trickles out.

And other people see and take notice and think, maybe we should do that. That's just for starters, he's quite a trivial answer in a way, but that's what I've seen work and it is very exciting when it does. And a final question is a lot more, as usual, of course, what happened at Lambeth comes out.

So we're not going to look at that one. It is related to the creeds. I believe we stick to the nice and creative, all of the creeds in the church.

But we do sense that something missing in the creeds don't we, because the focus on Jesus and his life and his life. Is there a place for fashioning a creed that goes together? That's a good question. You mean as a new innovation now? Yes, but not for everybody.

I come and go on this, because the creeds are what they are. They're part of the historic deposit of the faith. The creeds are saying that in the third and fourth and fifth centuries we had major problems about whether Jesus was genuinely fully divine or only partly or derivately divine.

And a few other debates, but that was obviously the big one. And the church settled it. It was hugely controversial at the time.

And when we say that creed, we are saying we're basically with Athanasius and against Arius, etc., etc. That may not seem so important now, but if we were to let slip on some of those things, the heresies will creep back very quickly and easily. The problem comes if people see the creeds, which they were never intended to be, as a miniature systematic theology telling you everything.

And people do often do that. Indeed, when people teach courses on systematic theology, often they take the creed and they say, "Let's work through." And I think I say this in my book, "How God Became King," that if you imagine Matthew, Matthew, Matthew, and John seeing the creed, one Lord Jesus Christ, and his Son of God, conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, you imagine Matthew, Matthew, and John saying, "Hang on, we spent a lot of time and effort telling you about all the stuff in between. We think that's pretty darn important.

How can you just skip over it like that?" Now, the proper answer would be the creeds aren't skipping over that because you say the creed in church on Sunday, and you also read the gospel in church on Sunday, so that they ought to complement each other, and you ought to have the whole gospel story in mind when you're saying that. But there wasn't anything controversial about what happened in Jesus' public career going on in the third and fourth and fifth centuries. So they didn't need to put down a marker about it, but it's only now if people look back that it then contributes to the idea that actually

the only thing important about Jesus was his death and resurrection, or his virgin birth, death and resurrection.

See, when I became bishop of Durham, I discovered quite quickly that as well as a lot of other parishes, there were two big chunks of church life in the North East of England, one of which said, "Our soul aim is to get people to go to heaven when they die." So they need to believe in Jesus now, then their soul will be saved and they'll go to heaven. The other chunk over here was saying, "We have observed Jesus as this amazing person who goes around healing people, bringing hope, giving food to the hungry and talking about the plight of the poor, etc. We're going to follow that Jesus." And the first group would look at that lot and say, "No, no, no, we live that to the politicians and the social workers." And the second group would look at the first group and say, "You know, we can see the real issues on the ground.

How can you ignore these people who are crying for help?" And sometimes even the second group, the social activist group would say, "Give away, lions!" Like, "What a pity he died so young!" You know, because he was just getting going. It was my job as bishop to interpret those two groups to one another and to show how there's a larger framework of biblical missiology within which they both have a place, but they need each other, but when they get each other, they will be reshaped by that larger whole. So, I'm not sure if I'm really answering the question.

I know we do the gospels quite regularly, but exactly the problem that you have said happens that the creed is read as some kind of a doctrinal statement. And of course, part of the problem as well is that Paul, as the earliest Christian writer, doesn't say very much about Jesus' public career. People have often said, "Well, the gospels weren't written then.

Maybe Paul didn't know that much." And I think you have to remind people again that Paul's letters are not systematic theologies. They are occasional letters written to people who are already practicing Christians, who've already been taught about Jesus. He says in Ephesians, "Assuming that you've been taught about him as the truth is in Jesus." It's a very interesting phrase.

They did know the traditions about who Jesus was and what he did, who was this person who then died on a cross. And particularly, they believed he was Israel's Messiah. Now, the early church tended to forget that as well.

By the third century, the Jewishness of Jesus and what it meant that he was Israel's Messiah was easily forgotten. When you then have Christianity over here and Judaism over there in the fourth and fifth centuries, they don't want to go too close to that. But as a result, there's so much about the New Testament which they miss.

There's so many of the connections which are made. This is part of a whole other

conversation which biblical scholars have with systematic theologians, sometimes amicably and sometimes less amicably. Thank you, Tom, for this question and answer session.

Can you sum it up for us? It's kind. You put on your schedule that I was going to sum it up. You gave me a whole half hour to do.

I don't need to have an hour. I'm not sure I have a half an hour to say. You may be surprised.

Normally, I'm quite happy to fill half an hour with words. I think I have laid out before you the kind of distilled version of what I've been trying to study and teach and write about over the last 50 years. I'm aware that in this room probably, unknown to me, many of you come from quite different educational backgrounds, PhD levels, study courses, etc.

Some of it will be very familiar to you. Some of it will be quite new to you. For me, the text is the thing.

I am sometimes criticized by people who might call themselves conservative evangelicals for not saying this or not emphasizing that. I come back to it. When I was young, the word evangelical, one of the things it basically meant was people who take the Bible very, very seriously.

People who believe that we have the book that God intended us to have and that if we find ourselves saying, "Oh, well, Paul didn't really mean this," or, "Oh, well, we can discount this bit of Isaiah," then chances are we've gone down the wrong road somewhere. I've been committed throughout my life to wrestling with the text, including the hard texts, and living with the questions that result. I've found again and again that the questions are hard because we've been approaching them from a particular angle, because our culture has told us to.

Once we get a larger historical perspective, we can see things more clearly. For me, the historical study of early Christianity has been absolutely central. Again and again, stuff emerges which jumps off the page and says, "That's what we need right now." I shall cherish this day for the example of that.

I will want the details from you later. I'm not a person saying, "Unless we eat at the Dalit table, we're not doing this project." Because most modern Western Christians have never thought about that kind of issue at all. If we had, we would have been reading Galatians 2 in a much more three-dimensional way than we have for years.

Those connection points come when you're working hard at the history on the one hand, and then keeping your eyes open in the real contemporary world and the challenges of the church today. Things will come from surprising quarters. I read in quite a random fashion.



I find a writer I like and I may totally disagree with them, but I will read them and learn all sorts of things, even while I'm disagreeing, rather than just boringly read the people I'm going to agree with anyway. I would commend that to all church leaders, but the heart of it all is being so soaked in the scriptures. I don't know what your personal daily disciplines are, but for me over many years, I have found myself day by day, not when I'm ill like I am at the moment, but normally day by day, spending longer and longer in scripture every morning.

Some years ago I decided that as well as reading right through on a regular thing, I would actually read the Gospels through by Rotor. So either half a chapter or chapter a day, that's just constantly going on, because the Gospels are the very center of it, and so much Western Christianity has taken them for granted. Oh yeah, he did all this neat stuff, then he died for our sins and that's all we need to know.

But actually so much of the quintessence of the faith is in page after page of the Gospels. One final to close, one final comment. You have probably heard of this.

So Jesus is the King. He's the present King. I love what you said.

I've said that. I've shocked people and I've said that there is a Jesus with a body in heaven. There is a Jesus with a body in heaven, which is quite a shocking thing for people who have not worked through, that there is a man in heaven, but a resurrected man, and he can live with that space, and he came into that space after the resurrection, and which is a very beautiful thing to understand.

Along with that, I don't know whether the Western world has understood sufficiently how important the doctrine of the resurrection of the body is to our cultures, and hopefully finally yours, because it is not found in Buddhism. It is not found in Hinduism. It's not found in Islam.

Nowhere, only our faith tells us that we will come back in a resurrected body. There are other faiths. Hindus also talk about the soul and the cycle, and you go and become part of the infinite Brahma who created the caste system and all of that stuff.

But there is no where, and sometimes now I feel we failed in articulating the resurrection impact on this world, and that we will, in the kingdom, we will all be back with resurrected body with whatever body, whatever kind of kingdom it is. And so this is phase one, but it's not going to get over. Any comments on that whole resurrection thing? Absolutely.

I grieve over the way in which, even in apparently well-taught Western evangelical churches, the resurrection is downplayed. It comes up at Easter, of course, for me. Hall of the earth, God raises from the dead, and it comes up because people are aware that liberal theologians have denied it over many years, and so much Western theology of

the last two years.

Western theology of the last two or three hundred years has assumed that the resurrection didn't happen, and that when the disciples said he was raised from the dead, what they really meant is God still loves us, or our sins are forgiven or something. And saying that somebody who was physically dead is physically alive again is not a way of saying God still loves. And so the most incredibly good language was saying that had they wanted to, but the result of that is that a lot of Western theology has been hamstrung, really, by not putting the bodily resurrection at the center.

I saw this two or three years ago, a young man who was my godson, who was a lovely guy, died of cancer in his late 30s, leaving a widow and two little children, their lovely family, deeply Christian. And I went to the funeral, as did lots of people, because my godson was quite active in various spheres, and it was a big church, and it was full. The only time resurrection was mentioned in the whole service was when they brought the coffin in, and the first words are "I am the resurrection and the life," says the Lord.

The rest of the service was all about how our dear brother, friend, godson, etc, was now basically upstairs having a party with Jesus. And as the service wore on, I felt sorry and sorry for the two little children. Obviously, sorry, because they'd lost their dad.

But what are they going to think? When we're told that he's having a great time having a party with Jesus, I mean, I don't want to unsay being with Jesus, which is far better, but I would have longed to say there is a new day to come when God will remake heaven and earth, and we would all be raised from the dead. That's what the church should teach. Of course, the time to teach that is not at the funeral, because people aren't ready for that at the funeral.

You have to teach it in the ordinary course of things in church life. But you're absolutely right. I began today by saying creation and new creation.

I actually even thought had there been a whiteboard I might have written up, Genesis 1, Revelation 21. The Jews are, of course, the exception to your rule, because although liberal Jews now, like many liberal Christians, don't want to know about the resurrection. But there are some Jewish teachers who still are very emphatic about bodily resurrection.

You get bodily resurrection when you get a good creation and a God who is going to put the world right, in other words, God the judge. Good creation plus judgment equals resurrection. If the creation isn't a good world in the first place, then whatever God's going to do in the future, it won't be anything like that.

And if the world was good, but God is not going to put it right, then why have resurrection? That's why, as I say in chapter 6 of my book *History and Eschatology*, I am

encouraging you to read that book, by the way. You may have noticed. Chapter 6, I emphasize that one of the things that resurrection is doing is affirming the goodness of the world, affirming the goodness of all that makes us who we are at our best, et cetera.

Which is why belief in the resurrection is an act of love responding to God's love, because when God raised Jesus from the dead, that was the ultimate act of love. God so loved the world. God said, "I'm not satisfied with letting this world go to hell.

I'm not satisfied with letting these lovely human creatures of mine disappear forever. I am going to raise them from the dead, and the start of that is I'm going to be at the centre of that myself." So when we believe in the resurrection, it is the response of love to the act of love, which I think epistemologically is enormously significant. When you do that, all sorts of other things fan out from there, which you don't get if the resurrection is simply a metaphor for "go to heaven when you die", which even in some evangelical circles, it's become like that.

Day factor. The people might not actually say that, but that's how it functions. So thank you.

That is really singing my song. It's one of the reasons I wrote both "Surprised by Hope" and "The Bigger Book" on which that space, the resurrection of the Son of God, was in order to try to put that back in the middle of the discussion. Of course, there are many, many liberal theologians who still say, "Oh, that's crazy stuff.

We now know that that doesn't happen. Dead ones, people are dead. That's the end of it." To which my response is really interesting.

So you now, modern, scientifically minded people, have discovered that dead people don't rise. I think you'll find that Homer knew that. I think you'll find that Socrates knew that.

I think you'll find that Seneca and Galen and all these people, they were perfectly well aware that once somebody dies, there is no resurrection. The Christians announced their faith in a world where everybody knew it was crazy. But it made sense because what they were doing was new, creational stuff which created a horizon of expectation and possibility back to the arts and the imagination, etc.

created a world in which, "Wow, maybe there is such a thing as new creation. Why? Well, maybe God really did raise Jesus from the dead." So it is absolutely central and remains so. Thank you.

Shall we give? Come on. Big hand. Thank you.

Well, thank you for being with us on this week's show. Hope you found these sessions on Global Mission helpful. Again, you can find the links to the videos with today's show.

Links also there to the podcast archive of the show and our website, [premierunbelievable.com](http://premierunbelievable.com). Registering gets you bonus content, the newsletter, the link to ask the question, and you can support us there, of course. For now, thanks for being with us. Next time, we're back with more of your questions for Tom.

For now, God bless. See you soon.

[Music] [ Silence ]