

OpenTheo

#66 A conversation with Douglas Murray on identity, myth and miracles

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Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

A special edition of the show in which Tom Wright sits down with noted cultural critic Douglas Murray to discuss Douglas' own journey in and out of faith, the church and culture, and whether Christianity can make sense of a post-Christian world. Originally aired as part of The Big Conversation from Unbelievable? in partnership with the John Templeton Foundation.

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Transcript

The Ask NT Wright Anything podcast. Well hello and welcome to another edition of the show with me Justin Breiley, Premier's Theology and Apologetics editor, the show has ever brought you in partnership with Premier, SBCK and NTRight online. What an exciting time we've had with NTRight over the last week or so.

Very pleased to be bringing you this week and in the next two weeks some of the exciting special content we've recorded with Tom recently. Today on the show you're going to hear the first part of the recent conversation I moderated between Tom and cultural critic Douglas Murray. So we'll be continuing that next week as well.

And then another treat the week after, it'll be the special live edition of Ask NTY Right Anything that we filmed at our unbelievable conference this past weekend. And what a conference it was. Thank you so much if you were able to be part of it.

But if you weren't you can get hold of all the sessions now as a digital download and you can do that at the website unbelievable dot live if you'd like to get all of the great sessions that NTRight and Tom Holland and others contributed to as part of that conference last weekend. Unbelievable dot live. So some special extended editions of the show in your podcast feed today and in the weeks to come before we return to the usual Q&A format of the show.

Do feel free to be in touch by the way to ask questions yourself at askNTRight.com. It's the show page. You can register there for the newsletter as well, bonus content and of course to put a question to Tom yourself. So today's show is this conversation between NTRight and Douglas Murray on identity myth and miracles.

Do we need a new story to live by in a post Christian world we were asking and it was part of our big conversation series. Now I'd love to know what you think of this conversation. We've actually got a survey that's linked with today's show.

So go to the info, click on the survey. We'd love to hear what you make of today's show. It's very simple multi-choice survey and do sign up at the big conversation dot show for more of these conversations on big questions between big thinkers.

And today on the program we're talking about identity myth and miracles and asking can we find a story to live by in a post Christian world. We do live in a post Christian culture and many secularists have welcomed the fading of the West Christian identity. But the question is what is it being replaced by and how should we address what many believe is a growing meaning and identity crisis in the West.

We're going to be asking can Christianity still make sense of the modern world and to help us do that NTRight is a senior research fellow at Whitcliffe Hall at the University of Oxford. He's the former Bishop of Durham and the author of numerous books including his latest broken signposts how Christianity makes sense of the world. Our other guest is Douglas Murray he's associate editor of the Spectator magazine and author of books including The Madness of Crowds, Gender, Race and Identity.

And during the course of the conversation we're going to be making time for your questions as well. So we'll have some of those towards the end of today's show. If you've got a question whether you're watching via our YouTube channel or on one of the many Facebook pages who were sharing tonight's video then do feel free to put a question in the chat in the comments and we've got a team who are going to be looking out for those and sending them through and we hope to be able to ask as many of those as we can towards the end of the program today.

Well thank you so much Douglas and Tom for joining me on the show today. I think this is the first time we've had you both together for a conversation. Now I'm sure you're both aware of each other a little.

Douglas have you bumped into Tom's work before coming on the show tonight? I certainly have and read parts of it over the years and actually I've recently been reading at the recommendation of many people. His excellent biography of Paul which I've been immersed in. So yes very much so.

Fantastic and Tom you actually have both sort of had a little bit of a to and fro in the pages of the spectator actually in as much as I know that you recently responded to an article by Douglas didn't you? Yes yes I've read Douglas in the spectator frequently and I've now read his book *The Magnus of Crowds* as well with great enjoyment and a rather scary interest because it's quite a dystopian vision but the article in the spectator did to me what articles sometimes do which made me pace around the house for half a day thinking I really have to write something about this and thinking that obviously you haven't got time don't do it and eventually the worm in my head turned into rather rather quick prose. I was thinking of an article but it turned into a letter but I hope it was stimulating anyway. Well I certainly did find it stimulating and we'll maybe come to that issue in a moment's time but before we get to that Douglas how are you have you been coping with with the past Covid year how have things been? Like everyone you know it's a bleak time in lots of ways and has things that are salvageable in it had fun more time to read than I normally do.

I very much enjoyed that I've had the opportunity to do a lot of thinking a lot of writing I said at the beginning of the pandemic and in a way those are sort of writers that rather well set up for it and the writer is to be able to deal with solitude and that indeed you must have solitude so we're rather practiced at it but nevertheless I'm nothing can prepare you for something as strange as the era we've been through and I suppose you know maybe not leap straight in but I do think that certainly my readings back over history and the history seem to bear out one of the things I feel at the moment which is that they have a disorientating effect on the civilisations across which they roam all sorts of strange things come out of the woodwork strange beliefs strange fears things you didn't know were there and I think that's very much the case in our society and across the world in the last year as much as it has been in history. As Justin knows I wrote it at the book last year called *God and the Pandemic*. The publishers put a subtitle something like the coronavirus and it's aftermath hoping that the pandemic would be over in a month or two but that the book would still sell and now it's a bit well we're still waiting for the aftermath of the year later but that was really in response precisely to what Douglas has just said that particularly in America but also in other parts of the world the sudden arrival of this pandemic and all that it's meant has produced all sorts of apocalyptic speculations and is this at the end of the world and or does this mean that God is punishing us for some specific wrongdoing or whatever and it came as a shock to

many people that there have been pandemics and plagues and so on over history reasonably frequently and it's just that in the last century we in the west have been protected from major disease like this so we were kind of unprepared.

I see it as like a sort of wartime conditions in that everything is different and we just have to get through it and when we look back there will be all sorts of things where we say oh what a pity that had to happen or this this came about or whatever so I think there's a lot of navigation and negotiations still to be done. It does present an interesting context within which to be having today's conversation we're asking can we find a story to live by in a post-Christian world and I wonder if we could start with your your own story Douglas for those who perhaps haven't come across you before or don't know this particular aspect of your life you did make claim to a faith yourself at one time so tell us a little bit about that and what happened along the way. Well I'm not like most people from Britain I'm not that comfortable about speaking about myself I know we live in an era where everyone volunteers up their personal story first I tend to always want to do it last if at all yes I mean it's not a it's not a secret that having been said I was born and brought up a Christian the believe in Christian from I think most of my life including through my adult life and I'm now in I suppose a self-confessively conflicted complex situation of being among other things an uncomfortable agnostic who recognizes the values and the virtues that the Christian faith has brought I think I sort of laid out how I think our civilization our culture has got to the stage that it is at the moment and its current uncomfortable relationship with faith I tried to lay that out in the strange death of Europe I I still believe what I wrote there was was accurate as a diagnosis of the era but it's it's a very uncomfortable as I say position that something about me is in because I say you know you there has been a period of rejection of faith particularly what in our lifetimes has been known as a new atheist movement which made claims that were self-confessively wrong that for instance I actually think is a late friend of both Tom Wright's and mine Rabbi Jonathan Sacks once said you know that the claim that for instance morality was obvious was was obviously wrong the claim that that basic ethics that we might share are self-evident is self-evidently not the case why don't have to be an ethicist you know that just need to travel you need to read look and listen and I know that's the case so there has in my view I think we spoke about this before Justin that there has in my view been an interest in movement in recent years which I think Tom Holland you mentioned earlier a certain example of people saying actually if we go back and look at this what we have and what we like does does have roots in this in the Christian story now that the following question from there I suppose is or what do we do about it and I think that a great a great failing of our time has been the tendency to talk past each other on this the religious tend to say well it's easy you just have to believe if you if you recognize these virtues and values then then believe and doesn't take into account the fact that very many people today it is it is harder than that for sorts of reasons we could go into but I would just make one other observation which is that even outside of faith I have an added discomfort which is the discomfort of a non-believer who

is disappointed by the behavior of a believing church now many people think that that's paradoxical but it isn't at all I am I not only was brought up in but but afterwards sought the church as it was as it has been in England and its jewels and gems of the King James Bible book of common prayer and much more and it's been my experience as it has been for many other people brought up recent decades and last century and more that that what has observed the church giving up its jewels and and becoming something else and actually that that irritation I feel from the outside albeit from the outside at the moment that irritation I feel about the church hasn't gone away even whilst being outside it a fear comes back to that article that provoked Tom Wright's excellent letter my fear is it is constantly the church is not doing what so many of us on the outside would like it to do which is to be preaching it's gospel to be a certain it's truths and it's claimed and so when when one sees it falling into all of the latest tropes and one just thinks well that's another thing gone it's just like absolutely everything else in the in the era everything in this boring monotone ill thought out and shallow dialectic and I am so as I say I'm I'm a disappointed nomad here and I don't know if Tom you can help it anyway here but but what I mean perhaps you could firstly some thoughts on what Douglas has shared there about his own his own journey but also obviously his disappointment in a way as what he sees the church has become today I very much understand that I remember the late great Bishop Stephen Neil who I knew maybe 30 years ago he died at great age around then saying that every time he went to a modern Anglican service he came away with his deep sense of loss because he had grown up like Douglas with King James Version and the Book of Common Prayer and just felt that the contemporary litiges just didn't cut it and I get that too I grew up similarly with very traditional words etc I suppose for me that still remains I have been able in many contexts to go on using traditional litiges as well as modern ones but for me the essence of it isn't so much the words and the culture and so on and obviously that's a very English British actually English thing the Book of Common Prayer and the King James Bible and I've been privileged to know Christians from many many different backgrounds many different parts of the world and particularly when I was Bishop of Durham I was able to see we had what 250 parishes in the diocese very wide range from traditional to modern to this to that but I was able to see the church at work the church being the church on the street the church being the one group to whom the local council could turn to find out what on earth was going on that terrible sync estate or whatever it was and to see the church actually caring for people being the family for the family list etc not all churches do that but that gave me this wonderful sense that all the theory that I as a theologian knew ought to be happening was happening on the street in some of the places that never hit the news and never hit the newspapers and never get quoted on the radio or whatever but there are many many many ordinary Christians not that there are ordinary Christians but you know what I mean who are simply doing Christianity at ground level and that's the thing that is so exciting and I think when you see that you look across at the new atheists and it's rather like people who like Douglas and me love classical music and overhearing a conversation between people who are tone deaf you just think well it's a great shame for

you that you don't get it because actually this world of music is so rich and amazing and that's how I feel about the new atheists it's too bad and yes there are arguments but actually the arguments aren't necessarily the crucial thing what matters is something something else which many many people still have and we talk about post-Christian Britain or Europe but actually there are many new Christian movements confusing often and often getting muddled and so on as we all do but there's a great deal to be encouraged by as well as and as Douglas knows I share his frustration when it appears that the church is simply jumping on the latest trendy bandwagon I mean one quick example and then I'll shut up about 10 years ago when the debate on women bishops was really getting going and David Cameron in the House of Commons said rather disdainfully about the Church of England yes it's time they got on with it they should get with the program and I wrote a cross article for the Times to say no we are I hope going to have women bishops not because it's the program that our society is moving in some sort of spurious progressive idea but because right from the beginning the first person who Jesus told to go and tell other people that he'd been raised from the dead was a woman that the foundation of the apostolic ministry comes with Mary Magdalene on the day on Easter day and from there it's all downhill and so I totally agree that church shouldn't just be jumping on the agendas it should be exploring more what is in its own textbook just just before we get to that that spectator article that Tom responded to Douglas just staying with the New Atheism for a moment because in a sense arguably that has been part of the story of how we have you know ended up in an increasingly post-Christian West but but I know that you were friends with one of the great New Atheist Christopher Hitchens so did you disagree with him when you were you know having lunch as friends and that sort of thing what was your relationship with the New Atheist did you outgrow them I don't know I think I friends with all of them some still I remember I clearly I knew Chris around the time that I started to lose my own faith and I had been asked actually as an inspector we always have a Christmas sort of a poll of writers politicians and others and asked them a question and that year it must be about 2008 that year the question was do you believe in the virgin birth and I think it was the last time I said suddenly in print maybe the first as well I said yes of course and I remember I saw Christopher in Washington a little while later we know each other for some years reviewed a number of my books and I remember he raised this over drinking his apartment he said I saw your answer in the spectator and thinking oh gosh and he said he could have knocked me over with a feather I didn't know you and he so said something like I didn't know you were that way you know it was very shocked very very shocked and we agreed not to discuss it at the following lunch yes I mean I I've I've spent my life surrounded by people who have strong opinions and that includes very religious people of many faiths and and many secularist nafiest I think there has been I just alluded to earlier there's been I think a fruitful dialogue in recent years actually on this I've just throw one thing in if I may which is that one of the things tonda said lose to something I find very interesting which is a retreat that can happen in faith from faith of assertions ethical claims and much more into effectively a social action group now I

know that's not what you were referring to but I'm very interested in the way that this has happened I've seen it in America I've seen it in Jewish communities a lot as well there's actually a term I would I would muck it up if I tried to do it in Hebrew now but there's a there's a there's a term for effectively the doing of good works and you can see some effectively basically non believing no longer believing sort of Jewish communities falling into this same white shardudism will be doing good works doing charity and soup kitchens and and and much more and I find that very interesting I find it noble and much more but I don't think of it as religion I don't see it as as that but that is the problem with our word religion and religious isn't it that the modern as in post-18th century view of religion is precisely something that is divorced from the rest of ordinary life and that's been reinforced by I think an overall misinterpretation of the idea of justification by faith apart from works as though okay if we believe in faith and that sort of religion you shouldn't be bothered about all that other stuff at all whereas in the New Testament it's very clear Paul says on two or three occasions if you're in this game be zealous for good works and he doesn't mean moral good works to earn your salvation or anything like that it's that from the very start the church was designed to be an outward facing what's going on in this community and how can we help kind of movement and they found that that was shocking to many people because there weren't too many other people in the ancient world who lived like that who were looking out for the poor not only their own poor but other people's as well Paul says while we have time do good to all people especially those the household of faith but there's a sense that following from Jesus himself there is that agenda that that that we are about God's plan to put the world right and we're not we can't do it all ourselves because it's a much bigger thing than that but we can be people who are bringing about signs of God's restorative justice in the world and of course from the outside that can look like just people running soup kitchens well I'd rather people ran soup kitchens than didn't run soup kitchens and Douglas would agree but it's actually about a vision of the whole of life and if we think if that's why I worry about this word religion and religious it didn't mean in the first century what it means now either so I would rather talk about God the Creator and God the reconciler and redeemer of creation focused of course on Jesus but with then the followers of Jesus commissioned to do those things which say to the world there is a different way to be human and following Jesus is the key to it yes I mean you're you're you're you're slightly unusual or becoming slightly unusual in this regard in that you're a theologian a bishop and um and a very prominent faith uh face in in the faith who does say these things and um this seems to me to be um uncommon at the moment and I I this the what one hears from prominent bishops archbishop season is an attempt to slip into the the rhetoric of the era and indeed slip into the ethics and the ethical claims of the era without making those foundational assertions that as I say I think that many people are hungry for and and is this where the the issue of the the article let's go to that and put you know name that elephant in the room but you Douglas published an article which was highly critical of the church of England's current approach to anti-racism and so on uh Tom and feeling that they were essentially bowing to a certain certain woke ideology essentially and and

not sort of doing what they should do as the church so what was your response to that and how much truth is there in what in Douglas's concerns about the direction of the church having since read Douglas's book *The Madness of Crowds* I see more clearly than I did at the time where the energy for Douglas's article was coming from because clearly Douglas has mapped out in as I said before rather disturbing way um the the large movements often rooted in various forms of early 20th century Marxism connected with Foucault and people like that um that have then generated some of these great movements um and then to see the church getting on board with that you think hang on what's going on my initial response was this is actually a problem that Jesus himself faced he says at one point that the kingdom of God is breaking in violently but the men of violence are trying to get in on the act in other words there were other people saying it's time for the kingdom of God at the same time as Jesus was did that mean that Jesus should give up talking about the kingdom of God no it meant he had to go on explaining what he reckoned it did mean as opposed to what the other people were saying and so there is bound to be a confusing convergence between a genuine Jesus following desire to see for instance social justice it's written right across the New Testament that there is neither Jew nor Greek slave nor free no male and female and about the point from act 17 where Paul says on the Ariapagos hey God made all people from the same stuff from the same stock we belong together and rather than and of course then we get into the trap which Douglas has written about as well of the modern idea that were all identical including there being no difference between male and female etc versus the postmodern idea which collapses into dozens of different competing identities each trying to claim the high ground of the victim etc etc and again I think Douglas and I are on the same page on this one but then my point would be that the church in being true to itself and not simply relying on contemporary rather shallow ethical maxims but being true to its original gospel actually has the makings of doing what at its best some of the woke ideologies are seeking to do which is a genuine passion for justice and forget the fact that the Marxists have come in on the act of course they have because if the church misses out half of its agenda it shouldn't be surprised if other people come rushing in from the side to fill it in so that's that's where the issue I think has to lie but I was grateful for what Douglas said because it seems to me if an elderly theologian has anything to offer to the world it may be the reminder of some of the deeper richer stuff which is out there which is in the bible for goodness sake and which can refresh and renew a vision of what we all should be about go ahead Douglas yes I think this is very important it gets to another point I've written about Fermat in recent years which is I think in no just I think maybe when we spoke before we spoke about this that sometimes people claim that the sort of public ethics of the time are sort of non-existent that is not quite true that they're trying to dig down in quite a forceful way at the moment what I was writing about in that article was just one example of that but as I think I said to you when we spoke before what I think of as being the most striking failure of the time is the failure to embed any ethic that does not rely on the Christian ethic in regards to the equality of everyone in the eyes of God our age is

struggling very badly with an attempt to replace that ethic or find another way to do it and there are various ways which it's tried to do that human rights and ideology is one way fairly developed but I think not successful and another is effectively the landing on equity as the answer when it can't be the answer but I see what that I see what people are struggling to do which is to try to maintain and hold on to this exceptionally important gift of the Christian inheritance without the idea of equality in the eyes of God and the value of every individual in the eyes of God you are left with these attempts to assert that for instance everyone is the same or can be and it's it's clear that we can't be and that we aren't there's one of the great things if you take if you take away the worry about the the loss of the foundation then it's it's it's fine we can live it I I very much see Douglas's point from from where I sit the only way really to get this sorted is to use a tried phrase to go back to Jesus because in the Jesus of the gospels as opposed to the Jesus of popular much popular imagination you find a rigorous re inhabiting of the entire Jewish tradition and a redirection of this vision of what would it look like if God was in charge that's the question of the kingdom of God just supposing God was in charge how would it look well it might look like a man who had two sons and one did this and one it might look like and then he heals somebody in the crowd whatever it is it's a renewal of human beings not in order to be identity over all equal now but in order to be certainly equally valued and equally though uniquely in themselves part of an ongoing program that God has launched not human beings at this point and so when I then come forward into the 20th and 21st centuries with that I find myself saying when I was young we watched traditional morality go out of the window it was sex in the 60s it was money in the 80s you know we don't need to obey the old rules we're going to do it differently we're the modern world now and then what's happened is the invention of and I think Douglas and I agree on this the invention of neo-moralisms which is what the woke ideology is really all about and it reminds me sometimes of I think it was colligula the Roman emperor who might have been Diocletian I'm getting this wrong it's late at night who put new laws up so high that nobody could read them and then blamed or punished people for not obeying these new laws that you just invented and that's that very much what's going on at the moment it's a society can't live without morality but if you've banished all the older morality you've got to invent some more from the ground up and we're doing this on a very very basic very flimsy basis it also goes back to what you what you mentioned the Cameron kind which is what exactly is the project because there's an added cruelty isn't that to we're writing the laws in a place where they cannot be read there's an added cruelty if you haven't even finished writing them yet and you tell people to get with them quite quite one of the questions underneath the our era is is what exactly are the laws what are the rules here the Christian ethic has a set of rules it's it's they can be debated around endlessly it's everyone knows but but there are foundations then you cannot deny they're not wholly abstract no the era we're in the era we're starting to do with the goodness of sorry when we don't know yeah yeah but the the Christian morality it seems to me is to do with the goodness of creation but the need for recreation for redemption recreation but a

recreation which doesn't say forget the old ways we'll do it totally differently I mean which is what we've got in a lot of society at the moment oh just don't worry about what everyone used to think we're going to do it totally differently we're going to change the meaning of words as well as as well as the meaning of behavior but rather to say no try seeing the world from the perspective of a good and wise creator who is revealed in a thousand ways whether it's music or beauty or whatever it is as well as the structures of reality but this world is out of joint and the great Jewish vision and again I knew and am grieving about Jonathan Sacks bless him he saw this so clearly the great Jewish vision of God's passion for the world to restore the world and the vocation of the people of God to be somehow modeling that and showing it forth and saying this is a self-evidently good way to be human and so it isn't just thinking through ethical theory it's about how the community actually lives and for me again this is all about following and worshipping Jesus and I know that's that was folly to the Greeks and scandalous to the Jews in the first century and it still is today but if you put that as the coping stone in the middle everything else will actually fall in place coming back to you then Douglas given that to some extent you're both in agreement on the fact that to lose the Christian story and the moral underpinnings that's given culture leaves everyone scrabbling to kind of essentially invent their own morality and everyone gets very confused and angry with each other in the process I mean where do we go from here I suppose is the question and is there a way back even to you know what now it's the genius sort of out of the bottle though isn't I mean and we go back to that once Christian age where apparently everyone was more or less agreed on things yes I say that in strange depth of Europe you can't you can't wish things you know and wish them unknown or wish them unlearned and this is something I think is very important in all dialogue between believers and non-believers I just wanted to say I wouldn't like it to be anyone to take away from this that but I I simply think that the church has a PR problem it isn't just that I think that the presentation is is wrong or there's a mistake in for instance falling into the religion of anti-racism or anything else it's that I do believe that doing that means that the church fails to tell its own story we had an article in the inspector I think last week from my friend former Bishop Michael Nazir Ali he made a very powerful point about the figures in the church for instance who were profoundly anti-slavery and not just you know Wilberforce, Charlemagne and others who you know saints in the seventh century, Christian saints in the seventh century who were martyred and objected to the slavery in their own time there is what I'm trying to say is that it's not just there's a PR misunderstanding it seems to me within the church and it's missing a trick it is that this is not a fair summary of the Christian story it isn't a fair summary of the story of the church and what it is is the adoption of a fair style and profoundly hostile analysis of the church which sees the church for instance as being a I don't know a white enterprise but it clearly isn't like Tom Rij has seen congregations across the world being at services throughout the Middle East across Africa the beleaguered communities sometimes show absolutely extraordinary and inspiring levels of faith and I don't recognize the negative interpretation of the church which I see from some people trying to force a different ethic

on the church today but as I say it's not just in the history of the church but in the story that the church has to tell about itself today but I think that there is an era being made because for instance to go back to something which as Tom Rife knows I wrote about him in the Man's of Crowds if you look at the great era of the ideology which is trying to embed today it is that it has spent no time bothering itself over the question of forgiveness now it's not just that I think that the church is missing a PR trick in not addressing this I think that the church does everybody in society the most enormous disservice if it doesn't say this is what our faith is built upon we have been thinking about this and trying to practice it at least for millennia so at least give us your ear for a moment and that's that's really important I was talking to a good friend just this morning on email who has been writing a short article about wokeness and he wanted me to comment and I said the one thing you need to point out is that all the woke morality is simply about you guys are wrong and you guys are wrong and you're full of hate and you're this and you're that and there is no sense that if you repent we'll forgive you you just have to grovel and it's a morality of I hate to use the word Pharisees and because actually that's a slur on the first-century Pharisees but that's what in the popular discourse it's about it's about we've got this right and we're making up new laws as we go along as Douglas has said and you lot are wrong and you're staying wrong and we're glad you're wrong and we're going to rub your noses in the dirt and it seems to me that's rather like certain revolutions I mean revolutions that eat their own children where some of them in the French Revolution notoriously ended up decapitating quite a lot of people who had been among the leaders of the early movement and it's not really complicated it strikes me that in everything you've said there that in a sense they're just even if we are in a quote-unquote post-Christian world we're not in a less religious world in the sense that these ideologies become quite religious but but not in a very grace-filled kind of religion and you've spoken about that yourself Douglas that there's that kind of aspect to the way people then grasp certain identities and certain causes and ideologies and that becomes their sort of their identity their religion and and I suppose this is the problem isn't it we we are meaning seeking story-driven creatures and if it's not going to be the story of Christianity it's going to be another story and the question is can we live together with these very different stories which often bump up against each other yes sorry Douglas go ahead and then Tom respond oh okay um I think this is this is true I've often thought I hesitate to say this in fact I did distinguish the illusion but I've often thought that one of the interesting points about what Jesus teaches is that much of it is as if there's Tom right well no it's much of it you can find in some of the contemporary Greek thought some of the thought is is is around the Roman world but nothing nothing prepares for the demand to love your enemy it seems to me so completely revolutionary and so completely counterintuitive that it has um that and I think we recognize it with my mistakes I think we recognize in our eras well with all when we see this being practiced that's why I come back to this that it's not just about missing missing a trick it's missing an opportunity to display your failure when when people see actual forgiveness it is I think among the most humbling most moving things you can ever

witness as a human being there was an example a couple of years ago when at a church in the South America very unusual but appalling crime when a young white crazed there's a white supremacist or some kind walking to a church and then shot the some of the worshippers and the next day there was an interview with you know it was a black congregation and the next day there was an interview with one of the families and the mother of somebody just lost her son said that she forgave the killer of her son I thought this a couple years ago I was doing a tour with um some people came friend Cornell West professor Cornell West of Harvard who by his own definition is a revolutionary Christian socialist um so we have a lot to disagree about I was very struck Cornell always refers to people as brother brother this brother that some people think it's an annoying tick of his I rather like it um but I was actually bowled over one day when he referred to this shooting and he said that brother who went into that church and shot up that congregation and I was so so moved and so amazed that that he would refer even to this person who had done this unforgivable thing by any analysis an unforgivable thing would still refer to this man as his brother it seemed and it seems to me this is an example of living and displaying a Christian ethic which if it was just seen a bit more it would have a profound impression in the world I totally agree with Douglas there and again I want to stress that the problem with that is that you can't just do it by you and me saying and anyone else who's listening by the way you should be going out and getting on with it though we all should and it is difficult but yes but it can only ultimately become instantiated in a community and in the settled habits of somebody's life when you have at the heart of the faith the story of Jesus going to the cross to defeat the powers of evil because without that then forgiveness is a lovely idea for other people to practice but too hard for me as it were but if Jesus has actually dealt with evil in his death whatever that means and you have to have lots of discussions about how that plays out of course then who am I to go on actually holding it against this person or that person and that's why forgiveness then has as its positive side reconciliation forgiveness shouldn't just leave you with as it were a zero bank balance it all then to open the way for reconciliation that's of course what Archbishop Desmond Tutu has done so spectacularly and I know South Africa is still a very difficult and dangerous place but when I was young we were all talking about the coming bloodbath in South Africa and the fact that there wasn't a bloodbath and that there was a peaceful transition of power was largely due to the fact that Tutu and a lot of others were going and praying with leading politicians reading the Bible with them and then when the transition happened having that amazing commission of truth and reconciliation with white thugs and black thugs confessing their sins seeking reconciliation that should still be sending a shockwave around the world both in Northern Ireland and in the Middle East haven't helped us what's going on at the moment and so on and so on this is the only way to live ultimately but you can only even glimpse a chance of doing it if you've got Jesus himself in the middle I'm sorry to sound like a cracked record but perhaps you would expect us to know and always to come back forward to the churches if I say it's come back to the point it's the most important thing to do this a bit lotion and and as a Christian and it is as I say it is an enormous relief to

hear it I mean you say it's an enormous relief there Douglas in a sense for you obviously you you came to the point where you couldn't believe that this story was literally true but you miss it you even described yourself as a Christian atheist I mean the culture at large has probably a lot of other Douglas Murray's out there and people perhaps the whom Christianity has never figured in their life but if Christianity is the story that did work and the stories that we're now telling aren't working and putting us out of joint can you see any way in which the Christian story even as a non-Christian could start to make in robes again is it is it simply about the church standing up again and being a bit more confident? I'm not sure I said only as confidence I said many years that I see an enormous opportunity for people of faith to be speaking into perhaps a more receptive crowd than before I do see that I do think to perhaps rather hack need reference from Matthew Arnold but I do always think that the interesting thing about the CFA is there's no reason why it can't come back in the C doesn't only withdraw you know it's it's the point of tides and but for that to happen what would be on offer would have to be radically different from everything else in the society that's on offer that's one of the reasons why I've been very interested I can't remember we talked about this with Justin for but I've been very interested in recent years watching contemporaries of mine who have seen through looked at said at the same some of the same problems that I have and have come to conclusions of their own in religious sense I've been very struck for instance by not a large number of people very small number of people but people I think I was being very intelligent thinking people who for instance converted to Catholicism and I see I can think of one person who is an angry one person who was born and brought up in both of them and somebody else I know who was an atheist throughout and I don't think this is typical by any means I'm not trying to say that I'm just saying that among people I know who are very thoughtful who thought about these things have come from a wide range of different directions they have they have gone towards that and what has struck me most is that they have gone to the most traditional form of that faith I'm talking about people who've gone into Tridentine mass attending Catholicism they don't go to the weaker forms of it because they want to drink as directly from the well as they can yes and and that seems that seems to me to be as I say why why it saddens me to put it no stronger that that a religion with this inheritance with all of this to offer would offer the most watered-down version of itself to the extent that it is a version that is indistinguishable from everything else on offer in society yes I very much understand that I think at the same time there is a sense which is deeply rooted in Jesus himself going and eating with sinners doing things that nobody was expecting a Messiah a prophet to do and breaking the social taboos in order to be on all fours with the people who really needed him there was the shock that went through the system with that but that's happened again and again throughout Christian history that Christianity has is a missionary religion and missionaries find that they they do their work better when they're actually on all fours with the people that they're trying to get to know not as it were saying here is this amazing unattainable ideal and I'm up there somewhere and maybe you could find your way up if you're lucky because that's how it sometimes

comes across to people and so there's this tension the whole time between that wonderful rich thing as you say drinking from the well itself which of course for me is what I think both reading the bible saying my prayers going to ordinary worship services that's what it's all about it's absolutely central but there is a two and a throw and again it's because of a belief in the goodness of God's creation that actually these people out there are created by God God loves them and I am called to love them as well and to get alongside them and not as it would appear to some hold myself away from them by going to something so recondite that the average mortal would never even have the slightest idea what it was all about there is I think that tension is always going to be there.

Well if I may say so just very quickly on this and I completely agree but a very interesting thing that's happening at the moment is that the the the abstract um um not getting involved in the nitty-gritty of your era is actually what is happening mistakenly we ran a piece just this week I don't have to keep plugging the spectator but we ran it the least just in the new edition at this week by vote um intelligent young clergyman um talking about this just saying look the latest again I also don't spend on bashing the church of England but um he said the latest thing this week is an edict on church memorials and there is going to be an expectation of um that that memorials in churches across England is connected with for a little bit of this slavery will have to be reconsidered and this clergyman just says I was so moved by it he said I have four churches that I oversee if I am to spend my time going through this he said first well no one has ever complained about a memorial ever to me so if I'm to spend my time doing this I will not be able to spend my time ministering to the people in my parishes so it is a straightforward as I say what strikes me is that there is a drive for what is mistakenly thought to be a drive that will satisfy and impress people in the era when in fact it will take the church precise way from its activities yeah it seems to me an example of a massive misunderstanding of where the church's priorities ought to be in order to impress the rest yeah of the country I fascinating conversation oh time is slipping by so fast though and I did promise those who are watching on YouTube and Facebook uh some opportunities to ask questions we had a lot of them coming in keep them coming by the way if you'd like to ask a question you can do so in the chat on wherever you're watching on Facebook or on YouTube well I'm going to call time on today's podcast just there come back next week and we'll play out the Q&A that came in and there's just a lot more fantastic interaction on the back of some great questions from the audience between Tom Wright and Douglas Murray but you've been listening to the big conversation that took place between anti-right and Douglas Murray a special livestream edition of the show again would love to know what you think of this do take our quick multi-choice survey linked with today's show and do sign up at the big conversation dot show for more conversations like these for now thanks for being with us this week you can find out more about the podcast further videos how to ask a question yourself and other resources by registering at ask anti-right dot com thanks for being with us see you

next time