

Comparing Eastern and Western worldviews

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Preacher: Ellis Potter

[0 : 00] Well good evening everybody. Welcome to this Be Thinking Talk. My name is Peter Wells. I am the elders of the church here. Some places are recognised and some people who are new to us here. So welcome to everybody.

The Be Thinking Talks are things that we have put on over the past years. It's really to help Christian students who are thinking through how their faith relates to their studies. That's where we started. Our aim goes a little bit wider than that this evening. So I'll explain that in a moment. Can I introduce our speaker? This is Ellis Potter.

Ellis was a Buddhist monk for a number of years and became a Christian. So he's got an interesting take on these things.

He worked for a long time with the Brie Fellowship. The one in Camtons-Veaux. How many people here are Swiss-Germans?

[1 : 08] Okay. Anybody from Camtons-Veaux? I thought Katie was working on that. So you worked in Camtons-Veaux for how many years?

18 years. 18 years. You may not know this, but there was a little community there, started by Francis Schaefer in 1955.

There were rats. And it was set up as a residential community where people could come and ask questions about life, the universe and everything.

And it had a remarkable impact. Waymo is a tiny little village, but the impact of that community and of its founders, Dr. and Mrs. Schaefer, really spread across the English-speaking world.

So it was a remarkable work which Ellis was involved with. And more lately, he's in a teaching ministry across Europe and is involved with a church in Basel.

[2 : 11] Is anybody here from Basel? Lausanne. And also in Lausanne. So we're very pleased that Ellis is here to talk to us.

I'll leave him to explain his title and where he's going to go this evening. But I think that's all the introduction.

Can we have a full welcome for Ellis, please? Thank you.

Has the title been given?

Not yet. Oh, so I am completely free. What shall we talk about? I think the idea was that we would compare worldviews.

[3 : 32] Different basic ways of seeing the world. As Philip said, I am a Christian. I used to be a Buddhist.

I have some familiarity with both the Buddhist and the Christian worldview. And so it might be interesting for you if I would compare them.

When I talk about worldviews, I think in terms of absolutes rather than relative or particular worldviews.

When I was a child, I asked absolute questions like most children ask. I would ask, how high is up? How far is far? How far?

And drive all the adults completely mad as children are supposed to do. In my case, I never grew up. I've continued until now to ask absolute questions.

[4 : 30] And I recommend that people ask absolute questions. To think down to the bottom and out to the edge of reality. To see what the shape of reality is.

And how I fit into it or don't fit into it. What is reality like? And how can I belong in reality in the best and clearest and most appropriate way?

So, I would like to go back and take a very broad look at worldview and how people see the world.

I'd like to go back to the beginning of reality. There are, in my understanding, basically three absolute views of the world.

And they're very simply organized into one, two, three. And that would be monism, dualism, and trinitarianism. Monism is not at all the same as monotheism.

[5 : 39] Monotheism is the belief in one God. And monism is the belief in one one. Monism is the belief in one. It's a very powerful idea in the unity of all things.

Something's going wrong with my microphone. Can it be stabilized? Or am I wearing it in the wrong place? Can you put the thing in your back left pocket?

Back left. I don't have a back left pocket. Back right pocket? On your belt. On my belt. On this side.

Yes. Sorry. I'm technically incompetent. I have to be guided. Good?

Is this better? Will this be more? Oh, great. Okay. Now we're good. Excuse me. I was recently in Bulgaria and the souvenir I brought back was a bacterial infection.

[6 : 45] And it's packed up in my sinuses. And you're blurring from time to time. Three basic worldviews.

Monist, dualist, and trinitarianist. And they are radically different in some ways.

But there are similarities between the three major ways of understanding reality. And one of the main similarities that they have is their understanding of the history of reality.

They all understand that reality had a perfect beginning. In the beginning, everything was perfect. Everything was as it should be.

And then something went wrong. And now we exist in a situation that is not right. Something is wrong and we suffer.

[7 : 42] We have confusion, sickness, alienation, fear, anxiety, and death.

So we have all manner of distortion in our present situation where we live. Almost everyone believes that.

There are very few people who believe that everything is perfect. Who never complain. Who never say that is wrong. Or this should not be.

Very, very few people. And they tend not to live very long, actually. Because it's not possible really to cope with reality with this idea.

Because something is wrong. The situation is just not perfect or as it should be. So, a perfect beginning.

[8 : 43] And then something has gone wrong. And we look for it to be made right again. So we look for some kind of restoration or some kind of salvation.

Those of you who are Christians will recognize that that is the Christian understanding of history. In the beginning, a perfect God made a perfect creation with perfect people.

And then something went wrong. There was sin, rebellion, alienation, self-centeredness, death. And that is the situation in which we live now.

With all of those things that are wrong. And we look for everything to be made right again through Christ. It's very simple.

It's like ABA. Which is the basic structure of European music. Home, go away, come home again. I'm a musicologist by training.

[9 : 44] And it's interesting to me that the basic structure of music echoes and reflects the basic structure of the history of the cosmos. That's why it's such a powerful art form.

But I don't want to talk about art and music. Well, I do want to talk about art and music. But I'm committed to talk about philosophy instead. If the three major worldviews have a similar view of history and they all think something is wrong now, it's very important to know what was reality like when it was perfect.

Because if we know that, we know what is wrong. If we don't know that, we can just say, Ouch. Something is wrong. I wonder what it is.

But if we know what right is, if we know what the perfect beginning is, then we can see, oh, this is wrong. And this is wrong. And this is not as it should be. And these things need to be corrected.

And most people do this. Most people have an idea in more or less detail of what is wrong and what needs to be made right.

[11 : 01] So in monism, the perfect beginning is a total unity. And perhaps I can help you understand how people arrived at this view, at this concept.

A long time ago, people looked around them and they saw that there is a lot of unity in reality.

There is one earth and one sky and one sun and one moon, one human race, one cycle of day and night, one cycle of four seasons, one water cycle.

There is a very strong unity that is the basic structure of the reality in which we live. There is also diversity. But the unities are stable and faithful.

And the diversities are not stable. The diversities change. We can't really depend on the diversities. And so a logical conclusion could be drawn that unity is good and perfect and diversity is wrong, derivative, alternative, illusion, evil, causing suffering.

[12 : 28] And then the logic extends what we need to do is to realize somehow again the perfection of the unity.

You see how that works? We see that unity is strong and stable and universal and that diversity is more particular and relative and unfaithful and undependable.

And so we see that unity is a more basic reality and diversity is problematic. So we want to realize the unity again as a way of salvation, as a gospel, the gospel of unity, the, yes, the salvation of unity.

unity. And so there were many major concepts and techniques that were developed to return to the unity.

And meditation is one of the central ways that were developed. Meditation is very different from thought.

[13 : 48] Thought is a function of relationships. But relationships are a function of diversity. You see?

And then you're in diversity. So thinking doesn't help to realize unity. But meditation is a process of being weaned away from thought, of being delivered from thought, of being free from thought, of being free from linear mental activity into a stable, centralized activity that doesn't go someplace or recognize and understand relationships between things, but centralizes and vibrates in a unity. This is meditation. You see the difference between meditation and thought. And meditation is very powerful.

And it is, in some ways, therapeutic. If you meditate, the alpha waves of your brain will increase. Your blood pressure, your stress levels will drop. It can help with the cholesterol even in your blood. meditation is therapeutic in many ways.

[15 : 20] It makes you feel better. If it didn't, there wouldn't be billions of people meditating because they're not all idiots or masochists.

They do it because it helps. Because there's some kind of profit, something that they gain from meditating. It's not just an idiot idea that someone invented.

Extremely intelligent people meditate. Extremely intelligent and lovely people are Buddhists and Hindus who are also monistic.

Those would be the two big monistic religions. ones. If all is one, and you see that is the central idea of monism.

That's the central idea of Buddhism and Hinduism. If all is one, which is the central idea of the New Age movement, then you are God.

[16 : 23] Well, that doesn't sound so bad. That might actually be flattering. But if all is one, you are me. you might not like that so much, but you have to face the facts.

That we're saying all is one. It's not just a nice cozy thought. It is a vast, total, absolute, unifying concept.

All is one. It is a ground framework concept of what reality is like. it's not a game. It's a very serious thing.

It's a very serious hope. All is one. There is salvation in the one. The one is perfect. Two is not perfect.

Unity is perfect. Diversity is not perfect. If everything is one, you are the moon.

[17 : 27] one. If everything is one, you are the Milky Way and all the stars. Because we're talking about absolutes. Diversity is a distortion, an illusion, if we believe in the perfection of absolute.

Because in the absolute, there are no relationships. relationships. So, in monism, hatred is evil because it is a relationship.

And love is evil because it is a relationship. So, there is a concept of compassion, which is very different from love.

compassion is a unifying energy that supports those who are equally caught in the illusion of diversity into realizing the unity of all things.

That is the compassion of the Buddha. It's utterly different from the love of Jesus Christ. Sometimes it's translated as love by Buddhist or Hindu missionaries on the very sound missiological principle of dynamic equivalence, which is what Christian missionaries are taught.

[18 : 59] You go into another culture, if you begin in Europe, you go into another culture, and you have to translate yourself and the concepts of the Bible into dynamic equivalence.

And so you have in Papua New Guinea the concept of the peace child, because the Lamb of God didn't make any sense. There weren't any lambs. It was just total nonsense to them.

So the missionaries had to see who are they, how did they function, and they realized that sacrifices that they made in order to have resolution and unity and peace among themselves were what they called the peace child.

And so they presented Jesus as the cosmic peace child, the divine peace, very clever, very effective. People understood and got saved.

But Buddhists and Hindus are not less intelligent than Christians, and Buddhist and Hindu missionaries are not less effective than Christian missionaries. East has met West, and many Buddhist and Hindu missionaries have come to Europe and to North America and have done a lot of very effective work, and many people have been converted.

[20 : 17] And one of the things they do, similar to how Christian missionaries work, is to use dynamic equivalence. And so instead of saying compassion, they will say love, because it's a word that we recognize, and we have some involvement with, and it is somehow similar to compassion.

So we begin with love, which isn't really exactly the concept, and then gradually we are educated to come to an understanding of compassion.

So I'm giving you an understanding in two minutes of the difference between love and compassion.

So you're having the crash course this evening, and I know it's very compact, and there's a lot of major ideas that I'm saying to you, and they might not all stick, but I hope that you get some picture of these huge concepts, and how they relate and compare and contrast to each other.

If all is one, there cannot be any conflict. Who is going to fight? If all is one, there cannot be any jealousy.

There cannot be any fear. There cannot be any misunderstanding. There can only be a perfect piece of unity, a solution of all the problems.

[21 : 53] An example would be a drop of water. A drop of water has many problems. It worries about evaporation. It's frustrated.

because its purpose is to have fish swim in it and it's too small. It's lonely. So what is the solution for the drop of water? To go back into the ocean and to become one with the all.

And that it never worries about evaporation. Fish swim in it. It's at one with all its brother and sister and cousin drops of water. water and there is perfect peace and unity.

That's a very effective illustration. And it's very emotional and it's very attractive. And when we think about it, when we give ourselves to the illustration, we have feelings, we have emotions, we have sensations of peace and the fulfillment of longing.

meaning, I don't know if any of you experience certain feelings when I describe this to you, but I think probably some of you do, because it's very powerful, which isn't the same thing as to say that it's true, if you see what I mean.

[23 : 08] Hitler was very powerful and the idea of national socialism was very powerful, which isn't the same thing as to say that it was true. It's just that we can't make a joke of it.

we have to take it very seriously, and we have to make some serious decisions about whether we're going to be involved in it, trust in it, proceed in it, encourage other people, invite other people into it, or we're going to decide, no, this is not the way of salvation, this is not the way of identity and unity and the solution of problems and the cessation of suffering.

You probably know that Buddhism as a religion, as a movement, was started by a man named Siddhartha Gaptama in about 500 years before Christ.

And he tried one extreme and another extreme and then he found the middle way. And when he pursued the middle way, then he sat under the tree and he meditated for 40 days and 40 nights and then he was enlightened.

And when he was enlightened, he opened his eyes and he saw the planet Venus on the horizon, the morning star. And he knew that he was enlightened because he knew that he was looking at himself.

[24 : 40] Do you understand? he knew he was enlightened because when he looked at the planet Venus, he knew he was looking at himself because he had become one.

He had realized unity. He had escaped diversity and the cycle of birth and death. That is the curse of reincarnation.

He had escaped into pure unification of being. I was a Zen Buddhist monk.

There are various forms of Buddhism and they're quite different from each other. Some Buddhists are very religious. Some Buddhists are atheists. Some Buddhists believe in individual salvation. Some Buddhists believe that no one is saved until everyone is saved. And they tend to be the more missionary types, because their salvation depends on your salvation.

[25 : 44] We have to all be together. You don't just enter nirvana and tra-la-la, go off in paradise on your own. And that is called the Mahayana, the great vehicle that believes everyone has to be saved together.

So there's Mahayana, Theravada, Hinayana, Nature and Soshu, Tantric, La Mystic, Pure Land, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, many different kinds of Buddhism.

And the people in the different kinds of Buddhism will tell you that their form of Buddhism is the really, truly original Buddhism. We have a similar phenomenon in Christianity.

Christianity. So there are many people who believe that God is a Methodist. But of course we know he's a Baptist.

And we have similar funny business and misunderstanding among ourselves. So I think we can be understanding that the Buddhists have different groups and they don't all have exactly the same ideas of how we should proceed toward enlightenment.

[27 : 01] But as a Zen Buddhist, I can tell you that Zen Buddhism really is the original, true Buddhism. It's quite special.

It's the most radical form of Buddhism in some ways. So Buddhists are monists. They believe in one. But Zen Buddhists don't believe in one.

They believe in nothing. nothing. But it's not a negative nothing. It's a positive nothing. It is a pregnant nothing.

Let me explain. We say, we can say, it is possible that it will rain tonight. And that's true.

It is possible that it will rain tonight. That possibility is real. and it is nothing. You can't see it, weigh it, measure it, you don't know what color or shape it is.

[28 : 08] It is nothing. It is unrealized. It is unmanifested. It is a possibility. If it rains, it is no longer possible.

If it doesn't rain, it is no longer possible. the possibility is real and the possibility is nothing. Now, here's the thing.

Everything that is is possible. Can you think of something that is that is not possible? Is God possible?

Yes. Is the devil possible? Yes. Is life possible? Is death possible? Is your imagination possible? If you imagine another planet with five-legged green people, is that imagination possible?

Yes, it's possible, or you would never have it. Everything that is, every thing, every thought, every imagination, every emotion is possible.

[29 : 16] So, possibility is the source, the mother, of everything, and possibility is nothing. Buddha is possibility.

Now you know. Buddha is tathata, tathagata, suchness, undifferentiated quality.

Buddha is possibility. So when you realize Buddha nature, you realize possibility. So when Siddhartha Gautama was enlightened, he realized possibility, and when he saw the morning star, he realized the morning star is, therefore it is possible.

I have realized possibility, the morning star is me. I am at perfect peace. There can be no conflict, because all is one.

And I am. So the statement of enlightenment is very similar to what God said to Moses on the mountain when Moses said, what is your name?

[30 : 35] And he said, I am. I am that I am. In Latin, sum I am for the purpose of my own being, which is a heavy thing to say.

I am the cause of myself. I am. This is the statement of enlightenment. It's very similar, possibly a counterfeit, but very similar.

I am is the foundation. But we're going to see a very radical difference in trinitarianism between the I am of the God of the Bible and the I am of monistic enlightenment.

In Zen, we say, if you see the Buddha, kill him. It means if you have an idea that absolute reality is outside of yourself, and you need to relate to that absolute, you must destroy that idea.

You must not see the Buddha. You must be Buddha. And you must not become Buddha, because you always are Buddha.

[31 : 59] Buddha. Do you understand? It's a bit radical, but it's not silly, it seems to me.

It's very powerful and very inviting. So the question is, is it true? Is it the way reality is? Is reality basically one?

and in order to be right and to belong correctly to reality, do I need to realize unity? Tathata, possibility.

So that is the basic monistic hope, is to realize unity. And so there are these various techniques, meditation, mantra, mandala, have you heard of these things?

Mantra. Mantra is taking words that have meaning and repeating them aloud and then internally until they become a vibration.

[33 : 04] And the vibration becomes finer and finer and finer until it becomes the basic shruti of reality, which means basically quanta.

You know, all matter is made up of atoms, and in the atoms there are electrons that circle around the nucleus, and they change orbits if they get excited or relaxed, and that changing of the orbit is the smallest motion and the smallest period of time that there is in physical reality, reality.

And that is the vibration of the mantra. The vibration that is common to all reality.

You see? and if you use a mantra until you vibrate in the vibration that you share with all reality, then you move very strongly towards unity with all things.

So the mantra is a very important tool. Would you object if I did a mantra in this church? I will not call down evil spirits or anything.

[34 : 18] Would you like to hear a mantra? Because I want you to have some experience of the power of these things and the therapeutic value of them.

Aum. If you do that ten times every morning your life will change.

Perhaps not for the better, but you will notice that it has an effect on you. Could any of you feel it? It feels, it's something, it's a therapy.

It's like doing stretches or something, it has an effect on you, it's not nothing. And the effect that it has is centering and universalizing in the vibration.

It focuses your consciousness into the vibration of the cosmos, into the song of the planets and the galaxies, and it connects you with all of reality.

[36 : 01] And it's very strong. Also the mandala, do you know this square or circle that's a geometric design and then it has a center and you use it for meditation?

The mandala helps you to focus on the center and that's a major concept in monism, centering, you center. And the reason that's so important for salvation in monism is because life is thought of as a wheel that turns.

and this symbol is so important that the wheel is on the flag of India. This is very central.

It is the wheel of birth and death and it turns and you are born and you die and you're born and you die. And you are born again into the suffering and then you die and you're born again into the suffering because you don't manage to be enlightened in one lifetime and you have to try again and again and again thousands of times.

So if you are evangelizing Hindus, do not tell them they need to be born again because they will say, oh I know and again and again and again.

[37 : 16] You need to think of another image, another illustration from the Bible. So if we are born into suffering and die and born into suffering, what we want to do is to be free from this constant turning of the wheel of birth and death.

We want to be liberated. And we don't get liberated by flying off the edge of it into outer space. We get liberated by coming into the center of the wheel.

If you have any wheel of a car, a bicycle, or a wagon, what is in the center of the wheel? Hmm?

Axel? And what is in the center of the axle? Depends on the axle. And just for instance, if there's a rod, what is in the center of the rod?

A molecule, perhaps. And what is at the center of the molecule? A mison, or a gluon, and what is in the center of that? And when you come to the center, the center, the center of the wheel, there is, of course, nothing.

[38 : 30] And the nothing does not turn. The nothing is liberation. It is the pregnant nothing.

And so you meditate on the mandala in order to bring your consciousness into the awareness of the nothing, of the pregnant nothing, so that you can be free from suffering, free from this constant cycle of birth and death and samsara and illusion and maya, all these different Sanskrit and Japanese and Chinese terms that get applied to it.

Excuse me. So, this is in a grossly reduced form, monism. But it's oversimplified, and it's really reduced, but I really think it's an honest, true presentation of what monism is for you.

And I hope you can see by now that it's not a joke, it's not silly, it's very powerful, and it is very logical.

critical. The problem of the very different conclusions of monist and trinitarianist is not a difference in the logic, it's a difference in the presuppositions, it's a difference in the starting assumptions.

[40 : 04] So, logic begins with unity in monism, and logic begins differently in Christianity. And it's not that one has good logic and the other has bad logic, it's that the functioning of logic has different starting points.

And so, the conclusions of non-Christian religions are not necessarily irrational at all. They might be wrong, but they're not irrational or stupid.

They begin at a different starting point. And so, the question is, what is the true starting point of reality and why? Maybe a word about dualism.

A long time ago, people also looked around and they saw that reality involves opposites everywhere. everywhere. There is hot and cold, light and dark, sweet and bitter, up and down, soft and hard, male and female.

You see, everywhere, there are opposites, wet and dry. And when the opposites are in balance or harmony with each other, life is better.

[41 : 31] And when the opposites are disharmonious with each other, there is suffering. So, if the weather is too wet, we suffer. If it is too dry, we suffer.

If there is harmony, we don't suffer. If our diet is too fat, we suffer. If it's too lean, we suffer. If there is a harmony and a balance, we suffer less.

Now, this is the yin and yang concept of reality being in opposites and suffering coming because of disharmony or imbalance with the opposites.

So, the way to salvation is to restore the opposites. That's logical. And so, there are many techniques, macrobiotic diets and feng shui and putting multiples of opposites, earth, air, fire, water into harmony with each other in our life and environment.

There are all these very complex practices and techniques that are used in China and are taught within Taoism and Confucianism to bring salvation through harmony into human life.

[42 : 55] And this is basically a dualism. I have difficulty with the dualism intellectually and philosophically for a couple of reasons.

One is that not everything seems to fit a dualism. For instance, what is the opposite of a river? This is difficult.

What is the opposite of time? This is very difficult. So, some things don't really seem to be covered by this concept.

And another thing is that if a dualism is absolute and perfect, it is necessarily static.

Because if anything changes, the balance is destroyed. So, when the dualism is static, it's basically monism. So, the dualism becomes monism when everything is still.

[43 : 55] dualism. In Christian terms, when we consider the dualism, we realize that the one thing you cannot have is victory.

If you have victory, it's totally unbalanced. You have to have harmony. And the biblical worldview involves victory.

victory. And so, Europe has been founded more largely on the biblical worldview than some other continents. And so, Europe tends to be more achiever society and military and empire building and colonization and things like that.

Because we have this concept of victory in our biblical background. and then, in some ways, perhaps, we misuse it and misapply it and exaggerate it and distort it.

But you can see some basic differences of the huge cultures of the world depending on what the basic idea is upon which they are built.

[45 : 09] The biblical worldview I call Trinitarianism. And the Bible describes reality as being unified in the absolute.

And we speak about the absolute, the absolute beginning, the absolute perfection. So, the absolute perfection of the God of the Bible, there is unity, a perfect unity.

And there is diversity, a perfect diversity. And one of them doesn't come first. God is not one God who manifests himself in three ways, and he is not three gods who form a committee and cooperate with each other.

He is originally both unified and diversified. I'll give you a proverb. You don't find it in the Bible. I made it up. God alone is God and God is not alone.

Now, that may seem very simple, but it only applies to the God of the Bible. God alone is God and God is not alone.

[46 : 23] And this is a description of God before the creation when there is only God. When there is no space and time, there is only God. God alone is God and God is not alone.

If you say Buddha alone is Buddha, silence. Brahman alone is Brahman, silence.

Allah alone is Allah, silence. There is no other. He has no son. The Bible is quite unique in this.

God alone is God and God is not alone. So we have in the biblical worldview, unity, and diversity in the perfection of the beginning.

We also have form and freedom. We experience forms in our reality, the form of gravity and the form of the laws of thermodynamics and the various basic structures in the reality in which we live.

[47 : 37] And we experience freedom. So the law of gravity gives me freedom to walk across this stage. If there were no gravity, this motion would continue and I would just float and spin and soon I would die.

I'll give you an equation. Total freedom equals death. Now that's very politically incorrect these days because what we look for in our post modern times is total freedom.

But freedom without form is death. If I were free from the form of gravity, I would have total freedom and I would be dead very soon.

The only reason freedom is lively is because of the form with which it has a complementary relationship to produce a living situation.

If the freedom were isolated and total, there would be almost instant death. Total freedom equals death. So we experience both form and freedom.

[48 : 50] How does the Bible describe the absolute? God is described as having the form of three persons and the three persons are not identical to each other.

So for instance, God the Son has the form of going and obeying. God the Father has the form of sending and commanding.

That's quite different. It's not identical at all. They are equally God. The Father has authority and he gives it to the Son.

And the Son, in his obedience and in his going, is not a junior or apprentice God waiting to get his license to practice Godness.

He is fully God. He is God who obeys,! Which is also politically incorrect. That doesn't make any sense in an achiever society.

[50 : 01] The boss, the wealthy, the powerful are more human. But if you consider parents and children, the parents have authority to describe reality to the children.

And the children need it. The parents describe play in the garden, not in the street. They describe the form of reality to the children.

the children could not describe reality for themselves. They would die. Which are more human? Parents or children?

Which are more human? The parents or the children? Neither or both. They are both more human. So the children are not apprentice people waiting to graduate and to join the human guild and to be full members.

They are human. They are fully human. And they are under authority. Why is that? The Bible tells us that the reason that is is because people are made in the image of a God who functions in the

same way.

[51 : 24] It's not something wrong that we have this structure in our life. It is a reflection and expression of the perfection of God who has form and freedom and a uniqueness of identity in three persons.

We experience objectivity and subjectivity. This desk is objectively here. This table is objectively here.

And we all see it from a subjective point of view. When I look at the table I see that it has two legs. How many legs do you see? Four.

Well, you're obviously wrong because I'm the speaker and I mean I have to have some rights. The thing has two legs. So how many do! you see?! It's a conspiracy.

I could get paranoid here. How many of you see four legs? How many of you see three? Yes, so you see we've got a compromise here.

[52 : 33] This is great. So what we want to do in a democratic society is vote to find out how many legs the table has. It doesn't really work like that. There are other ways of discovering it objectively has four legs.

But I truly see two. When I see the table I see the table of my chemistry professor in high school and I see Mr.

Corbett. You do not. You cannot. But I really do. The subjectivity is real. It's not just fantasy.

It is a necessary part of reality and it functions in a complementarity with objectivity to make the full reality.

I don't believe in objective truth. I don't believe in subjective truth. I believe that all truth is both objective and subjective and the objectivity and the subjectivity function in a complementarity like light.

[53 : 46] Light is a wave and light is a particle. And if you look at it one way it's only a wave. If you look at it another way it's only a particle. But if you take away the particle you don't have half of light left because it's 100% wave and it's 100% particle.

It's a 200% reality. and the two things the wave and the particle function in a complementarity. They don't function in a paradox.

They're not irrational or transcendental or unintelligible. They do not function in a paradox. They function in a complementarity which means that they do not function in competition.

They need each other. They support each other. They complement each other in reality. The illustration the Bible uses most often is marriage. Marriage is male and female.

And which is more important? Is marriage more male or more female? It depends. Those of you who are male chauvinist pigs will say it's more male.

[54 : 58] And those of you who are liberated women will say it's more female. But most of us will probably say it's equal. But it isn't 50-50.

Because if you take away the woman you don't have half of a marriage left. You have nothing. It's 100% the woman and it's 100% the man.

And then in a complementary relationship is the reality of marriage. marriage. Well this is the way the reality works in which we live.

And the Bible describes an absolute that also functions in that way. So that the reality we experience is not radically different from the original perfection.

The original perfection has objectivity and subjectivity. You have the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father does not change. He is perfect. The Son views the Father perfectly from a different point of view than the Holy Spirit views the Father perfectly.

[56 : 08] what they see when they see the Father perfectly from different points of view is slightly different. The differences are perfect.

The differences are holy. Perhaps that's a new concept to you. That the subjectivity is holy and necessary and right and appropriate and basic and original.

So when the Bible describes God as having unity, diversity, form and freedom, objectivity and subjectivity, then we see that those things are not the cause of suffering.

They're right. They're the way things should be. Now somehow we do suffer in connection with all of those things, but the things in themselves are not the cause of suffering.

They reflect the perfection of God. We also find in God hierarchy. The father gives authority to the son.

[57 : 18] The father commands the son. And so we have in our experience hierarchy of human relationships. Parents and children, husbands and wives, employers, employees, governments and citizens.

We have these hierarchies. And the hierarchies themselves are not the problem. There is a malfunction of those hierarchies that causes suffering and confusion and frustration. And in a minute we try to find out what that malfunction is. In the original perfection of God, as the Bible describes God, there is personality. And personality is self-aware consciousnesses in relationship with other self-aware consciousnesses.

The relationship is the basic, the foundation of the personality. In many psychological models that we work with contemporarily, the identity is the basis of the personality.

[58 : 32] But the Bible doesn't describe personality that way. If you consider the opening of the Gospel of John, many of you will know this, it's a very famous passage.

John is laying his cosmological foundation, the basic structure of reality, identity, and then he's going to build his Gospel on it.

He's a very great philosopher. And he says, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

So we see that relationship is the foundation and precedes identity. the identity of the Word was God comes after the relationship the Word was with God.

So relationship precedes identity. Identity does not precede relationship in the biblical worldview. Now, in the worldview of our European Western Industrial Society and psychological man, homo psychological or whoever it is, identity precedes relationship.

[60 : 00] First, you identify yourself, you satisfy yourself, you fulfill yourself, you establish yourself, and then you begin to have relationships.

This is a standard procedure. But the Bible does it very differently. you begin with the relationship and then you know who you are.

So the need of the other is much more profound in the biblical anthropology than in our contemporary psychological models. And we see this in the creation.

God made the sea and the land and the animals and the fish and the plants and everything, and he said, it is good. And then he made Adam and he said, it is not good.

It is not good for the man to be alone. Why not? I like to be alone. Because God is not alone. God had said, let us make man in our image.

[61 : 05] So God is saying us and our in community, in conversation. And then here's Adam in the creation, alone. He cannot say us our hour.

He can only say me and mine. He doesn't know who he is. He is certainly not in the image of God. Because God has relationships.

And in the creation there aren't any relationships. So Adam names the animals and he does things and he works and he tends the garden and he's very active and he still doesn't know who he is.

Poor Adam. So then God made Eve to be a helper, an ezer for Adam. And the helper appropriate for Adam, it does not mean the woman who comes to clean on Thursdays.

It's not the auxiliary or the support group or something like that. What she's going to do, she's going to help him to know who he is. he needs her to have his identity.

[62 : 13] And when he sees her he gets very excited. He says, ah, here now is flesh of my flesh and bone of my bones. Now I know who I am. I am the one who relates.

I am in community. That's who I am. And without community I am not. I don't know who I am. because God is in community.

God is not alone. So Adam is not alone. We experience needs. We need to eat and be warm and wear clothes.

But deeper than that we need to be seen. And you see this with little children. All day they cry, Daddy, look. Daddy, look.

This is the song of childhood. Daddy, look. And if it's a choice between Daddy looking and eating lunch, Daddy always wins.

[63 : 13] Because to be seen is a deeper need than to eat. If Daddy doesn't look because he's always at work or drunk or in jail or dead, then the need is not met and the child is horribly distorted.

And this is the condition of all of us. We're terribly distorted because we're not adequately seen. We're not known as we need to be. We also need to be heard. When we speak, we need people to hear us. Even if they don't agree with us, we need them to hear us or there's a horrible frustration in our being. Terrible disturbance. difference. We need to make a difference. If I bake bread, people should eat. If I build a house, people should live in it. You see this with children. They put the blocks on top of each other, voila, difference. And then they knock them down, voila, another difference.

[64 : 18] This is absolutely essential for their practice of being, is to see and to demonstrate, I make a difference. Where I have been, the room is a mess.

And where I have not been, the room is clean. I am I. This is absolutely essential for being a human being, to make a difference.

It's also very difficult for parents. And it's not a convenient part of life, but there it is. So we need to make a difference.

And we need to be wanted. We need people to say, be with us. You are wanted. Why do we have those needs?

Are they from the devil? Are they result of sin? I don't think so. I think we have those needs because God has those needs.

[65 : 22] needs. And we don't often think about God having needs. But outside of space and time, God as a trinity in community among himself has those needs.

He needs to be seen, to be heard, to make a difference, and to be wanted. But he doesn't suffer from those needs. Having those needs is perfect joy for God because they are the foundation of trust.

If there are no needs, trust has no meaning. If I say, I trust you completely, drop dead any time you want, I don't need you, but I trust you completely, you see, that has no meaning, it's complete nonsense.

I have to need you in order to trust you. And so the needs are essential to the character of God because trust and love are essential to the character of God.

So, among God you have three persons and each of them empties himself to fill the needs of the other two.

[66 : 41] This is love. 1 John chapter 4. Love is an atoning sacrifice. A sacrifice that makes it possible to be together.

That is love. It's not an emotion, it's not a Valentine's Day card, it's not an I heart brighten, or whatever it may be. It is an atoning sacrifice.

So, each person empties himself to fill the needs and meet the needs of the other two. That means each person is emptied once and filled twice.

And the double filling makes an energy increase exponentially and constantly until it is so great that God says, let there be light, and there's a universe.

And the Bible has a name for this energy. It's called love. God is love. He is other-centered among himself.

[67 : 51] That is the core, atoning sacrifice. Each person of God is centering on the others. The center of Jesus is not Jesus.

The center of Jesus is the Father and the Holy Spirit. The center of the Father is Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Spirit. And there's this constant sacrifice, this constant emptying, and this constant trust of being filled twice.

And that's why there are three. Two doesn't really work. God is three persons. And there's not four, because we have economy in the creation, and an uneconomical God would not fit as the creator of our universe.

So, four is unnecessary. Three, three is the right number. Three works. Two doesn't, four doesn't, three. And that's what the Bible gives us. It gives us three persons.

So, God is other-centered. And here we come to the reason all these things, unity, diversity, form and freedom, objectivity, subjectivity, malfunction, why we suffer in the context of all these things.

[69 : 08] God made people, Adam and Eve, to be other-centered, because he is other-centered. And so, the center of Adam was not in Adam.

It was in God and in Eve. And the center of Eve was in God and in Adam. And they were perfect. They had perfect trust.

They didn't know they were naked. they had no concept of vulnerability. It was perfect trust to each other. And then, the serpent came to Eve and said, you know, you don't really need to trust God to tell you what is good and evil.

You can know it from yourself. You can be independent. You can be a liberated woman. And Eve considered the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil.

And she realized, well, you know, that's true. I could be independent from God. Wouldn't that be interesting? Here I've been going along trusting God. God has been telling me what is good and evil.

[70 : 19] But I could know it for myself. I don't need to trust God. I can be independent. I'm going to do that. So, she did. And she died. She imploded like a black hole.

I think a black hole is a good description of hell somehow. Have you ever noticed that God is three persons and the devil is one person?

God is love. God is other-centered. The devil is self-centered. He has to be. There's only one of him. God is the self-centeredness implodes in death, in fiery death, in a singularity that swallows everything up.

And so, he's sucking in us, drawing us to himself to get sucked into his singularity. This is temptation. This is being consumed. This is a roaring lion devouring whom he may find.

all the biblical pictures begin to come into focus when we see it like this. So, Adam and Eve, when they became self-dependent, self-centered, became dead.

[71 : 34] They imploded on themselves. And then, all of their children were born into the same condition of a self-centered implosion, which is kind of an explanation of original sin.

I'm not sure how satisfactory it is, but maybe it does a little bit. And then, we add to the implosion by our own sins, our own self-centeredness.

And then, everything is covered with the dust of death. Suffering, death, fear, alienation, anxiety, terrible situation.

What is the solution in the biblical worldview? The solution is that God himself will enter into the creation and become part of it.

Merry Christmas. And then, being the creator and the creation, functioning in eternity and in time, in the supernatural and the natural, he did one thing.

[72 : 50] He emptied himself. Just like God does in eternity, he emptied himself, literally, drained of blood on the cross. He emptied himself to meet the needs of the others, us.

And it's interesting that he didn't do this in heaven and he didn't do it on the earth. He did it suspended between. He did it as the Pontifex Maximus, the great bridge builder.

He built a bridge with his own body between heaven and earth, the supernatural and the natural, the uncreated and the created, eternity and time.

He bound all of reality together by his own person and his own sacrifice. life. It is as if reality had been split in some kind of a platonic divorce and Jesus used his own body as a great staple to hold it together.

And now reality holds together because there has been this great healing by his blood. Do you know Humpty Dumpty?

[74 : 03] for those of you who are Swiss or Asian, Humpty Dumpty is an English egg. And he is a symbol of every man.

And there is a poem about him. And it says, Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. It's very significant philosophically. A wall has two sides.

You see? It has the objective side and the subjective side. It has the predestination side and the free will side. A wall has two sides. And Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.

He fell off the wall. Which side did he fall on? See? It doesn't matter. Both sides are deadly because both sides need the other side in a complimentary situation.

So Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall. That was fine. But then he fell off on one side or the other and smashed on the ground. Here's this egg. Splat. So Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.

[75 : 07] Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again. Good night children. Sweet dreams. That's just awful.

Why do we do that? There's a fifth line that's missing. And the fifth line is but the king could.

All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again but the king could. And what did the king use for glue to put Humpty Dumpty together again?

His own blood. And then you have the Christian message. The king uses his own blood to glue every man, you, me, everyone, together again because we've fallen off the wall and we're smashed.

And he uses his own blood to empty himself to invest, to make the atoning sacrifice so that the entire creation can be remade.

[76 : 21] All the stars, all the elements, everything that is broken and twisted and covered with the dust of death, is being renewed, remade in the way it should be as the creation of God because of the power of the sacrifice of Jesus.

So this power that comes from the crucifixion, from the emptying, the other-centeredness of Jesus, the power is so great that the whole universe is recreated, and people made in the image of God, significant and responsible and choice-making, have the possibility to receive this power into themselves and to become new persons, to become new creatures, to be remade in the likeness of Christ.

love. So we have been dead in self-centeredness, imploding on ourselves, and the blood of Jesus gives the possibility that we will be remade as other-centered creatures in the likeness of Jesus. And then we make a beginning and we learn and grow and increase in other-centeredness. we grow in love. So that would be the Trinitarian worldview.

Now just a quick review. Monism, which is basically Hinduism and Buddhism, the perfect beginning is unity. There's one. And we suffer because there is an illusion of diversity in our consciousness.

[78 : 10] And then we suffer all kinds of things. salvation is in realizing the unity again. And then we are saved. In dualism, the original perfection is equal opposites in perfect harmony and balance with each other.

We suffer because imbalance, disharmony, somehow has come into reality. Salvation is restore the balance, restore the harmony.

harmony. In the biblical worldview, the original perfection is other-centered in community.

We suffer because we have become self-centered. And salvation is in taking the power of the creator who invests himself fully again in the creation by emptying himself to recreate it, by receiving that power and becoming new creatures, new other-centered creatures in the image of the original perfection and growing eternally in love in that reality.

unity. So I have preached three gospels to you this evening. I have preached the gospel of unity, the gospel of dualism, and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[79 : 41] And then you think about these and see which might be more appropriate, more full, more powerful, more true, more real in reality.

unity, and then we all make choices. So that's basically my little lecture, but we could have a time of questions.

Let's see, it's a quarter of nine, we could have 15 minutes, if you want to ask some questions. Yes? The way I understand it that you describe it is the three different worldviews all take different starting points and they just work logically from that.

And what I ask is, monism takes the, they all work by observation. So monism sees that when things are one, they're together, they're good, when they're not separated, when there's happiness and togetherness.

Dualism sees conflict and opposition, harmony and opposition, things like that. But I don't see how you can, by observation, how you can arrive at the Trinitarian view, because you're saying it's about not being self-centered, about being other-centered.

[80 : 59] But surely that, well, why can that logically not just be two? Why can't it just be me putting mine to myself and someone else? That's pure trust. Why it's just the trust where I need to be by myself?

Because the reality in which we live involves more than two people. It involves community. And basically, people come in sets of three, in the image of a Trinitarian god.

There is mother, father, child. There have been Christians who have developed an idea of a tripartite understanding of the human, a tripartite anthropology, and they would say body, soul, and spirit.

I'm not happy with this because it leaves out things like heart and will, and also the whole picture is self-centered.

My body, my soul, my spirit. I would rather say the anthropology is mother, father, child, and that the healthy, real situation is an other-centered situation, and that the other-centeredness of Adam and Eve, in its right functioning, produced a third, a child.

[82 : 16] And so we see that people really come in sets of three. If there was just two, then very soon there wouldn't be any, because you would both die, and that would be it.

There needs to be a third, and in the right relationship, of two that are different, not the same. we see that there's this terrible American saying that says, God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.

But there's a truth to it. The two have to be different, and then in the complementarity of the different two, there's a third. So we see God is three persons, and people come in sets of three.

Well, you're dealing with absolutes and particulars, not only absolutes.

So you have the biblical absolute of God, and then you have the particulars of our experience of life. And the question is, do they fit together? Do they correspond?

[83 : 31] Do they belong together in reality? So you're not only working with absolutes, you're working with particulars. And I'm not expecting the particulars to be absolute. I'm expecting them to fit together in the same reality with the absolutes.

Yes? I'm a Buddhist, so it's been really, really interesting listening to your characterisation of Buddhism and the idea of monism.

On a couple of problems I had with it, me, spring time was the sort of conflation with Buddhism and Hinduism. Yes. You know, I'm not sure how many works on so many, let's say, doctrinal points. No, it doesn't. It doesn't. In details, not at all. Right. And I suppose you're wrong, but funnily enough, one of the things which my Buddhist teachers drum into me and the rest of the people who work with me is that Buddhism is monist.

And it's one of the things which they drum into. into it. So I think you probably addressed that in some extent when you talk about different types of Buddhism.

[84 : 54] But one of the, as an example of why they're saying Buddhism isn't monist, one of the I suppose most famous if you can say that, the sayings of Buddha from the sutras.

I don't know if the Prajnaparamita Sutra, do they call it the Mahapraha Prajnaparamita Sutra? Are they called it the Buddha or not? Yes. Yes. The great bridge that takes us to the other shore. Okay. Right. That's something. So in the heart sutra, the Buddha addresses Sariputra and famously says, and this is, he says form, Sariputra, you use the word actually form to mean differentiation and emptiness meaning nothingness.

He says form and emptiness, form is emptiness. Exactly. Emptiness is form. Exactly. There is no distinction. Exactly. But the point about this in terms of the definition of monism is that what is playing out on the one side you have emptiness which is non-differentiation as you said.

And then on the other hand you have differentiation which is form. And these two things are non-dual. These two things. This is in western terms.

[86 : 17] It's called dialectical monism. Yes. I don't see the heart sutra as dialectical. No. No. I see it as absolute because it begins kanji, zaivo, roko, shin, in kanji and it means here or sariputra everything is nothing beginning with the nothingness of the five senses and moving through the nothingness of the six levels of consciousness.

And so it's not dialectic. The nothing is the center. And so it's not really monist. It's knownist. I have to admit that if you know the diamond competition the movement that they use they basically say we've got a problem with differentiation.

So differentiation is causing all sorts of things. So let's negate it. And we negate and negate and negate and negate until we reach nothingness. Now because nothingness from a Buddhist perspective it describes as an extreme philosophical extreme nothingness itself has to then be negated.

And the only way you can negate nothingness is to reintroduce differentiation. And then you negate nothingness and you have this unending dance of nothingness.

Somethingness. The Wu Li Masters dancing. idea of non-duality. And the tantric path plays with this in a much more elaborate way. So they move towards personality, towards individuality.

[88 : 02] From the beginning of the emptiness, once you've negated, you have to come back. How can you not? divide. And so you have this bouncing with this nothingness, this pregnant nothing that gives birth and birth and dies and birth and dies.

So you have this, you have this, and what I'm inviting people to do is to compare it with the biblical worldview in which you have relationship and other centeredness. And they're both very strong, and they're both very clearly presented over hundreds of thousands of years by very intelligent people. And what I'm asking is, which really describes reality better? How do we actually live? Do we live in this back and forth becoming and unbecoming, or do we live in relationship?

And the Bible says, we live in relationship, and that is the ground. And the Buddhisms would say, we live in this kind of dialectic, this becoming, unbecoming, and that is the ground.

And for years I believed that. But I became a Christian, and one of the main reasons I became a Christian is because gradually it became clear to me that it takes less faith to be a Christian than to believe in anything else.

[89 : 22] I believed in Buddhism, I was not unhappy with Buddhism, I loved my master. My master is Joshua Sasaki Roshi, and he still lives, and he's a hundred years old, and he still teaches in California, and he's a great guy, and I have a tremendous respect for him, and I think he's made a big mistake.

I think he has too much faith, I think he's too religious, and I'm very suspicious of religion, a little bit like Marx. I think it's the opiate of the people, people. And so, I think we should have, as Jesus said, faith like a mustard seed, not faith like a coconut.

We should have the smallest thing that gives growth and life, and when I consider other basic views in relationship to Christianity, they each seem to me to take more faith than Christianity.

Christianity. So, when I was questioning Christianity, a phrase from a song, from an operetta by Gilbert and Sullivan played like a loop through my brain.

It was a very strange thing, and it was the opening aria of Poobah in the Mikado, who, Nankipu comes to the town, and he wants to ask about Yum-Yum, because he's fallen in love with her, and he said, do you know where Yum-Yum lives?

[90 : 50] And Poobah steps out and says, why, who are you who asked this question? And that played. And so I'm asking these questions, why is God, you know, all of these things, and I thought, well, it's a very Jewish question, so who was asking?

That's a very good question. Who was asking? And then I realized, in the biblical worldview, I am asking.

And in the Buddhist worldview, as I understood it, asking is, which is very strong, and very emotional, and very deep for me, asking is.

There's a great freedom in asking is, because I am liberated from asking. And in Christianity, I'm burdened with asking, but I am established in the asking.

asking. And then it seems, it takes less faith, because I have no memory of not asking. From the beginning of my consciousness, I've been saying, why, why, why?

[91 : 57] And that seems to me to be who I am. And the Bible sustains that. It authenticates that. It validates that. And then I realized, well, this takes less faith.

I'll buy it. So I received Christ. And I'm still asking. I hope I never quit. The point of Christianity is don't grow up.

Jesus said, you must become like a little child to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Adults not allowed. Sophistication not welcome. You have to be like a little child.

And of course, when you meet Christians, you meet a bunch of sophomoric sophisticates, which is very bad press. It's very bad advertising for the gospel of Jesus Christ. And I would really like to apologize to you publicly for that, because it's really not helpful.

Yeah. Yeah. And I'm really sorry. I want to make that clear. Good. Maybe we should draw a line, because it's getting to be nine-ish in.

[93 : 03] But it was lovely to be with you, and God bless you all. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you very much for coming and thanks to the observance.