

Why Study the Past?

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[0 : 0 0] Yes, today, to get right down to it, it's good to put your cards on the table, if you excuse me, using that metaphor on the Sabbath, but just where this talk sort of germinated, where it first got the general idea.

Ten years ago or so, this book was published by Rowan Williams, more about him in a moment, Why Study the Past. Yes, I vaguely remember, I've read it, I thought thoroughly, I vaguely remember what's in this volume, I did read it, and then of late I've read this wonderful, I think, magisterial, I'm quoting from folks on the back of the book, if you trust that kind of thing, magisterial, an instant classic, remarkable, from other philosophers, commenting on the great philosopher Alvin Plantinga's book, Knowledge and Christian Belief.

This is a distillation of his book, Warranted Christian Belief, which I'm sure is a classic, it's just like a lot of things written by professional philosophers, a lot of it's unreadable, but it's apparently very profound.

But this is a profound book, and I think I understood about something on every, about every tenth page. So, a book vaguely remembered, speaking to a book I sort of understood a bit of.

I'm going to marry them today and sort of produce this kind of talk, so it's not too discouraging, but this is sort of, these are the sources I've been dealing with in putting together these notions, these thoughts today about, as it's called, why study the past.

[1 : 4 2] I looked, I just yesterday, I happened to, I don't often, I don't even own a copy of an American dictionary, the American Standard or something, and I thought, oh good, I'll get some help from the dictionary, last minute, brilliant insight, and I just looked up past, and it said, that which is over.

So, I thought I'd start with that. The past, where today we're studying that which is over, and at least it's thought to be over, whether or not it's over, is something that we'll talk about today.

I hope we have a lot of time today for conversation about such an interesting but vast and endlessly discussable thing, the past.

The former Archbishop of Canterbury just mentioned Rowan Williams. He tells the story about, in this book, Ronald Knox, a Roman Catholic biblical scholar, I guess a couple of more generations back now, a big name in his day.

Mr. Knox apparently was asked, when he was a four-year-old boy, when he was four years old, apparently he had trouble sleeping, and he was asked, what do you think about when you're awake, in the middle of the night?

[3 : 0 0] And this four-year-old fellow said, I think about the past, said a four-year-old. There you go, a strange answer indeed. It's safe to assume, says the Archbishop, that he is a bit unusual, and I think that's right.

How many four-year-olds do you know who wake up in the middle of the night and say, I think about the past for a while? I wonder what past he was thinking about. The past is always available for pondering, is at least the truth we can take away from that delightful anecdote.

You can always think about it. Even a four-year-old boy, apparently, can think about the past. And the past, of course, raises, to put it mildly, endless issues.

They're always in front of us in different ways, issues from the past. Delightfully, I would think, you can always think about it. Methods of its study, presuppositions that we bring to our inquiries about the past, formally and informally.

What, we can even ask, what, after all, is the past? That's more of a, if that's not precisely a philosopher's question, might be the kind of question that a philosopher would ask.

[4 : 16] What is the past? Even is, we could ask, is the past really past? It may still, after all, be here, the past. Again, that would be more of a philosopher's inquiry.

Speaking of the past, recently I heard, I think it was on the CBC, it must have been on the CBC, I heard an Oxford classicist. Now, they're the folks who study antiquity. Mary Beard, her name.

Wonderful person to hear her interviewed. A classicist of some note, apparently. And in the interview, she recounted a number of jokes, actually.

And one of them I'm going to recount for you today. Again, here's a joke I'm going to tell you from antiquity. There's the real, that's real past, past.

Here follows then a joke, and I want to sort of introduce it appropriately, I hope appropriately. Paul in Rome, or Paul in Corinth, just to emphasize this, might have heard this joke.

[5 : 25] This was told at the time of our Lord in Palestine, certainly in the Greco-Roman world. Paul may have heard this joke, for all we know. It may be dangerous to tell a joke in a learner's exchange introduction, but I will count on your patience and your courtesy.

I've told this joke to a number of people in the past, some have found it quite funny, others, very intelligent people, just looked at me, evidently not quite getting it. So, if you don't find this joke funny, or even if you don't get it, I'll ask you rather boldly, just pretend to laugh, if you don't mind.

And I will nod when the joke is over. Sometimes people, that's it, then they laugh, it doesn't work. So, here's a joke from the real past.

This is from antiquity. Miss Beard apparently is an expert on humor in the ancient world. It can be quite poignant and strange a bit, as you'd expect from such a different civilization.

And yet, they were human beings like us, and they experienced the same world that we experience. A fellow walking along a street, let's say he's in Corinth, is staggered to see an old acquaintance.

[6 : 50] I cannot believe it, he says. Here you are. I heard that you were dead. I can't believe it. Here you are.

The other fellow happily responds, obviously from his point of view, yes, well, here I am. I'm quite alive. I'm still quite here, you can see, yes. Well, the first fellow responds, yes, I can see that.

You are here. But, I must say, and I do not mean in any way to give offense, but I must say that the friend who told me that you were dead is usually more reliable than you are.

Thank you. Thank you for that laughter. That seemed quite sincere. A friend who told me you were dead is usually more reliable than you are.

That's a strange joke. I wonder if Paul did hear that. Maybe some guy at Corinth told him that joke. The moral of the story, at least for our purpose today, is very obvious, isn't it?

[8 : 01] When thinking, perhaps better, when deciding issues about the past, or even deciding not to decide things about the past, the big issue is probably who or what is a reliable source.

Who are you going to trust about the past? Belief about things and trust are deeply implicated, aren't they?

They inhere. What you believe and what you trust are kind of the same thing, I think. Again, you philosophers and ethicists and whatnot, you can tell me if that's kind of too loose a generalization or if that's just true.

What you believe is deeply implicated, deeply connected with what you trust. Belief and trust go together. Last week we heard such a good word about Jonathan Edwards speaking about the past.

We're always thinking about the past, aren't we? Jonathan Edwards, the great 18th century American, or he was a North American theologian. America wasn't American yet as a nation in his day.

[9 : 13] He believed in, as we heard last week, the supreme rule in us, if I may put it that way, the supreme rule in us of the affections.

That's such a simple but a profound thought from Edwards. We think all the time, but the affections, the heart, the will, perhaps you can say our complete sensorium, the whole mystery that God created us to be in the world shapes us in what we will assent to, what we will trust, what we will believe.

We assent to what we trust, perhaps especially about the past, because it's not immediately there for us to see. We have to trust someone's word about the past.

Holy assent, to stay with Edwards for just a moment. Holy assent. This is what is so remarkable about Edwards, it seems to me. Holy assent or holy affections.

I wonder if I overread Edwards here, but some of his interpreters think this is what Edwards gets you to. Holy affections will begin to turn your belief into knowledge.

[10 : 39] And if you don't think that's profound, I don't think you've thought about it. We all have a million beliefs about a million things. But what amounts to knowledge?

That's something quite unique. Now we see through a glass darkly, then face to face. That could almost become, I've got a lot of beliefs now, but someday it'll be knowledge.

As the affections become holy, one's belief begins to turn ever so, step by step, from one degree of glory to another, into knowledge.

Real knowledge is, a philosopher will tell you, here's the past being addressed by a philosopher. belief to become knowledge is a kind of miracle. That certainty, that immediacy of knowledge.

We'll talk about that in a moment. Beliefs about right now, or beliefs about that very strange country called the past, or beliefs about the great things of the gospel, as Jonathan Edwards calls them, heavenly things, may indeed become knowledge.

[11 : 58] If the affections love enough, and are settled in what they love, where is found that more reliable word?

word is the story of life. It's the story of how we look, study the past. Whose word will I rely on? You know, my friends' witness about things is usually more reliable than yours.

So today, how is it with the past? And always, how is it with our affections, affections as we grapple with things that we believe and love about the past?

We don't just study the past, we end up loving something about it, or hating something about it. The past is profound. It's a great subject to ponder the past.

There's an introduction. Let's say a word of prayer before we give you the body of this. Lord, we thank you that you have given us this mystery of life itself, that we can live in the world and remember a past that you have given us as we live into a future.

[13 : 14] Help us to understand these things more, not as an end in themselves, but as a way of understanding and loving the gospel more and more in our lives.

We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen. It may, of course, be dangerous to study the past. You'll agree.

People have been known to get stuck there in very strange ways. More specifically, of course, religious folks, that would be folks like you, all of you, kind of religious, you're in church on a Sunday.

Often we get stalled in our favorite church times, I think we can safely say. This is a bit of Roland Williams that I'm borrowing from here, but it's obvious stuff.

Some Roman Catholics, I love Roman Catholics, they believe a kind of very good church existed in the Middle Ages. I'm more and more sympathetic to that myself as I get older, but I know it's open to much contention.

[14 : 22] Or the Church of the Fathers is often the norm for some. Some Protestants, again, are beginning to love the Fathers more than they used to.

The Church of the Fathers can be very interesting, those first five, six, seven centuries. Or, of course, more in our circles, if I may call it that, the 16th century Reformation Church achieved for some a great time of renewal in the Gospel.

I'm sure that's true. It's apparently at St. John's there's a specific date in the 16th century when a certain liturgy happened and we're going to visit, we're going to live at that moment in history for a while, apparently.

In our time, and this is quite characteristic of our time, I think, the marginalized Christians are sometimes seen as the real best Christians.

They achieved a really great Christian form. I'm not sure if it's still happening out there right now. It shows how ill-informed I am about many things. Do you remember the Celtic Christian phenomena when it was quite popular a few years back?

[15 : 34] Maybe it still is in some places. The harp sound, if you recall. The creation-loving, it's really schnerky of me to call them the elf Christians, but there they were.

I wouldn't mind being an elf Christian. They were kind of, that'd be nice. Forms of Christianity take shape, have taken shape in the past, and the past reveals that.

There's a reason to study the past. You can get to see different forms of our faith. If you don't study the past, well, you're stuck with just what's going on right now.

You could go on in this vein, of course, for a long time, about different forms of the Christian faith. There have been many shapes, many expressions of the Christian confession. It is even in dispute, and this comes about through study and inquiry and pondering the past, doesn't it?

It is even in dispute if there could be one true good in normative Christianity. Maybe we should look around for that one true good normative Christianity. Look through the past, find the one you most like, and say, that's me.

[16 : 41] But other people will say, well, maybe there's different forms of it because the Spirit wants to shape and form different forms of Christianity. Cultures demand that, perhaps.

Is it necessarily various, this Christian thing that we're all involved in? Looking at again, studying the past will raise these kinds of issues. Why study the past?

There is, again, one reason. The past presents, almost by definition, doesn't it, various vistas of things. And it's interesting to say, to get your own reaction.

Oh, do I like that way they did Christianity in the year 1000? Or how about at 1500? Or how about at the year 250?

In that part of the world or this part of the world, you see different forms of the faith are out there. Again, there it is. It is even in dispute.

[17 : 41] If there is a normative Christianity, perhaps we think there should be and we want to see it. There it is. In our time, that, obviously, this is an obvious thing to say, isn't it?

Have you noticed this? In our time, the past is hotly disputed. I think that's a safe generalization. You might say, well, maybe it's always been hotly disputed.

Well, I'll bet that's the case, but I think now it's more hotly disputed than it has been in the past. The past says, I have to quote her at least once a day, or else I'm not going to heaven.

The past says, an American novelist named Marilyn Robinson. The past, yes, yes, you'll be forgiven for that. She says, this is one of her most poignant one-liners.

She says, and I won't bother, it needs context, but Marilyn Robinson said, the past is a guilty thing. She's talking about many modern attitudes currently in the world that dominate the intellectual landscape in modernity.

[18 : 57] Marxism teaches by definition that the past is a guilty thing. It has to be because Marxism hasn't realized its utopia yet. The past is a guilty thing.

The Enlightenment, more of this as we proceed, like we generalize, has taught us to believe that the past is a very guilty thing. Very bad. Overcoming the past is almost the definition of the Enlightenment, the 18th century movement that so dominates our culture to this day when surely it does.

We have now, after all, come of age. What were they before we came of age? Authority should always be challenged, the Enlightenment has taught us.

Hierarchy, tradition, inherited wisdom, all of this must go or at least be deeply challenged. Yes. We need, says one contemporary philosopher, I can show you where he says this, we need a dictatorship of the future, he says, replacing the dictatorship of the past.

Yes. There's a word from a real modern. We've had enough of the past, we need a dictatorship of the future.

[20 : 21] For what it's worth, the context there, he sees reviewing a book by a scientist, high-powered scientist, head of the UN, you know, panel on global warming, and he says, yep, this is absolutely true, we need a dictatorship of the future.

He says, point blank, time for democracy is over, we've got to put the world under the authority of the UN and the global warming science community because without that dictatorship of the future, there won't be a future.

So, away with the past, let's have a dictatorship of the future and forget about democracy. You know, that's the voice of the modern, really speaking quite bluntly.

So, why study the past? Well, there are stories of the past, big narrative pictures which will tell you what you may or may not believe responsibly. That's out there in spades in our culture right now.

If the past is not in some measure studied or thought about, someone else will do it for you. Is that true? If you don't think about the past, don't worry, somebody's going to do it for you and it will inform everything you learn, everything you believe will have a hidden narrative about the past which controls the whole story that you're being fed by educational institutions, by politicians, by journalists, by the media, you'll be saturated.

[21 : 48] You'll believe the big story of the past that they're flogging. If the church doesn't think through the past, the world will do it for us. That's for sure.

I'm quite sure of that. Maybe I'm too sure of that. There's an irony in this, isn't there, that the past has a kind of negative authority that a lot of people feel has to be destroyed.

We've got to get rid of that. It has a kind of authority we've got to destroy that authority so that our new vision can take hold. Study the past, some people, to get rid of it, to destroy it.

Its influence needs to be countered. It is worth noting, this is an aside, a footnote, but I think it's relevant. Is it not worth noting how remarkable it is that we have our capacity for remembering at all?

It is one of the gifts that God has given us. We have these faculties. Again, we take them for granted. I have the faculty of perception, for instance.

[22 : 55] That's why I think you're all in front of me right now. Are you? Are you up there? You've been a bit quiet for a while. Perception. We perceive the world.

The fact that we remember things is a remarkable gift that human beings have. We have these faculties. We perceive the world. Strangely, we know that there's a world around us.

This world, this is not easy to understand. It's not settled. This world forms belief belief in us to think, because you're there, is you-ness being formed in my mind?

Or, am I forming in my mind that you're there? Who knows? The world forms belief in us, or we form belief about it.

Philosophers can discuss that forever. The Enlightenment view, most associated with Immanuel Kant, I know most of you read a bit of Kant before breakfast every day, so I won't, it insists that our faculties form beliefs, for the most part.

[24 : 13] We see the world because of the way our faculties work. We know our impressions of the world, but not much else. The world in itself we don't know, so the Enlightenment tells us.

We have no access to it. we've all been taught to believe that, one way or another. It's actually taught, as Alvin Plannick says, in most mainstream, prestigious theological faculties for the last couple of hundred years.

We can't really know God, but we know experiences of God. You see, a whole different worldview about Christianity comes from buying the Enlightenment view of how we have perceptions of the world.

I don't really know God, but I know my feelings about God. study the past. It's amazing what you find there. Awareness, our ongoing knowledge that we're here in the world is just simply a stupendous miracle.

And we remember the world has been here for longer than the past, say, 14 seconds. It has been. We just know that, don't we?

[25 : 23] But we can't prove that, really. It's hard to prove. Philosophers in the last 250 years know they can't prove things like that. It bothers them, but they can't. All of us believe this, though it is hard again to prove.

It is a basic belief. It is foundational. It is believed, this is crucial, it is believed without evidence.

Nor does it need evidence. evidence. We just know it's true. Evidentialism, one of the pillars of the enlightenment, falters badly here.

The modern world says you should only believe what you have evidence for. Well, that's a dubious proposition, but it's held by a lot of people. The past, a kind of living capacity to live in a continuous story.

That's my definition of what the past is. Have you got one? I want in a conversation time at the end. Please give me yours. The past, this living capacity to live in a continuous story that we know comes from behind us, so to speak, is just a human given.

[26 : 35] By the way, is belief in God a given in your life, would you say? Is it just a given? A human given, it's just there?

Is belief in God a given so that belief in God needs no evidence? Do beliefs about the past, all things in the past, need evidence?

I don't know. I don't know. St. Paul says things like, you will recall, things like, since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power, divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.

Paul there is evidently thinking about consciously or unconsciously, he's echoing the psalmist, isn't he? The heavens are telling the glory of God.

Bertrand Russell was once asked, what will you tell God about why you didn't believe in him when you die? And Bertrand Russell answered quite boldly, not enough evidence, God, not enough evidence.

[28 : 00] That's why I didn't believe in you, no evidence, you didn't provide me with any evidence. evidence. Not enough evidence, God, not enough evidence.

Is that not remarkable? There in a nutshell, as they say, is the enlightenment view of the world versus our faith. Give me evidence.

Paul says the evidence is all around you. It's a given. You already know there's a God, and yet you go on saying, give me evidence. It's everywhere around you.

Or there is another form of disagreement between our faith and the modern world. There you go. That was all that aside. That was a footnote. But again, what about the past?

Why study the past? Is there a faithful way to view the past from within a Christian worldview? Is there evidence evidence for the Christian claim that comes from the past, for instance?

[29 : 12] And I have to say, largely to a question like that, I have to say, I don't know. I don't quite know how to answer that question. It's a difficult one.

Christians have to think that one through. Why study the past? For a start here, here's the kind of thing that study of the past in this regard will help us with, I think.

The Bible is received by Christians as a divine gift, isn't it? All Christians share that belief, and a divine gift which records, among other things of course, records a past.

Sometimes this past will be referred to as, I find it somewhat helpful, I hope you do, the past as recorded in the Bible will be called salvation history. Salvation history.

Further, there are significant variations in saying this truth, as we all know. Our friends in both the Roman Catholic world and the Orthodox world will place the Bible firmly, to say the least, within a living, seeable, publicly knowable community called the Church.

[30 : 27] They will really emphasize that, won't they? Yes, we have the Bible as a gift from God, but it always lives within the interpreting community called the Church, with its long tradition of interpreting the Bible.

There's a Roman Catholic talking, right? That's an Orthodox person talking too. Yes, they always talk that way. God's community, this community, they believe, carries a kind of tradition authority livingly within it.

So it's the Bible, church, tradition, there it is, there's the, if we can say it, the Christian evidence. It's visible in the world as God's promised community with the Bible.

our tradition, if I'm generalizing here, and I get open to much contradiction in conversation when we get around to conversation, our tradition, Protestant it's usually called, the Anglican circles, it's low church, or sometimes it's referred to by historians as the Anabaptist tradition, tends to see the Bible as utterly supreme, and watches, if you will, as readers early communities work out their salvation in fear and trembling.

We really prioritize the Bible, and we watch different teachers and different traditions of reading the Bible form often different kinds of communities.

[32 : 06] That's why in the 16th century, Europe started to split up into all sorts of confessional communities, because the Bible had been let loose, and people began to say, here's what it says, and other people said, here's what it says over here, and the story of Protestantism has continued with this rich, wonderful variousness as the Bible speaks to people, and other Christians look on and say, no, there should be more of a unity of the church, but that's an endless 500-year-old conversation that will maybe end when the Lord returns.

why study the past? Are we not in the early 21st century uniquely positioned to see where these different visions take the church?

I think we are living through a time when these sort of issues are being re-evaluated. You see movements like Evangelicals and Catholics together, you see lots of books by Evangelicals now being written, but what about the fathers?

Let's recover the fathers. There's a lot of re-evaluation of tradition and the church, not just in Protestant circles, but across the whole of Christendom.

Maybe the study of the past is really getting more important in our time. What will the church be if we move into a third millennium? What kind of dynamic between scripture, church, tradition?

[33 : 42] How will we work these things out? That's a wonderful reason to study the past. I think it's enriching and it's expanding and it gives you a wonderful sense of the marvelous breadth and glory of the gospel as it careens down through history, doing wonderful things.

Is the truth about our faith, truth claims about events in the past, again, are they evidence dependent?

When we study the past, do we say, it will give me the proof of my faith? May we believe responsibly only with evidence or is there another way to believe responsibly?

Should the body be a kind of evidence itself? Do you consider the church one of the evidences, say, of Jesus' resurrection?

Is the church a proof of the gospel? Again, I don't know quite how to answer that, but I think study of the past will make you face up to questions like that.

[35 : 01] The early church, you know, actually thought like that. Rowan Williams is very good on this. The church was a kind of proof of the gospel.

The early church thought that. That's why martyrdom was so treasured by the early church. It was a sign of the sacredness of the body, a sign of her holiness.

The early church was at times extremely concerned with who was in and who was out because the church was seen as a holy space that God was creating in the world.

That's an amazing vision of the church. It seems quite foreign to us right now. Maybe it shouldn't be so foreign to us. Our culture certainly has decided that serious, responsible belief has to be evidence-based.

What we believe about the past has to have a lot of evidence to back it up. Anything you must believe must be in principle publicly knowable is a deep conviction of our culture.

[36 : 25] It's so deep it seems even strange to notice it. Well, of course, if you believe something, you should have evidence for it that's discussable with others.

And that knowledge should be based on agreed first principles which build good arguments to an agreed upon conclusion. There it is.

And it's thought that our faith is seen as quite deficient here and therefore may not claim the status of real knowledge.

I was thinking this too. I read on occasion quite frequently the Christian magazine from the States' First Things.

I just opened it up almost randomly and there was a quote from a prominent Harvard scientist, E.O. Wilson is his name, writes, right from the heartlands of prestigious intellectual culture in the West.

[37 : 30] And he just says point blank, you know, it really is time that we just got rid of all these faith positions. It would be best if we could just get rid of them.

Just get rid of them. That's not knowledge. He knows what knowledge is. And religious knowledge isn't knowledge. Get rid of it, he says.

It's just out there everywhere, more and more in our culture. The new atheists, I think, are just the loud public voice of it. It hovers in the background.

A lot of guys think that way. You just get rid of this religious stuff. It isn't really knowledge, you know. It's just the noise of the past, the outdated past.

We've grown out of that silliness. The past faith is a guilty thing. Let's just get rid of it. Put it to death.

[38 : 33] There it is. How are we to think about these things? Can someone give me the time? I don't have a 20 to 10. Thank you very much. How are we to think about these things?

Our faith does after all rest upon claims about past events, doesn't it? we say it in the creed all the time.

Are we to accept the demands of the modern world for what counts as real knowledge? Or is there another way forward here, a more subtle in a sense way forward for the Christian and for the church, which is deeply responsible?

This is where, as you can tell, Mr. Plantinga comes to the rescue. To state it bluntly, yes, the Christian worldview does claim, should claim, a distinct way of knowing.

There is a distinct way of knowing that we should know more and more. I think as the past comes to haunt us and is used against us, we're going to have to sharpen up our defenses against this increasingly hostile world out there.

[39 : 54] The church, after all, is a witness to a unique presence in the world which appeared in Palestine in the first century. Everything we do here today at St.

John's, Vancouver, is if people pressed us over coffee, what are you about? We'd have to get around, strangely enough, we'd have to say, well, in Palestine 2,000 years ago, back when they told really good jokes, want to hear one?

We, there was this man named Jesus and our community is formed around him. 2,000 years ago in Palestine. What kind of knowledge do you folks claim to have about some rabbi who lived 2,000 years ago in a place called Palestine?

This witness contains a promise. Here is a crucial moment that, well, guess the church will relearn. This witness contains a promise that it will, with power, form belief in persons.

It is a form of perception, the gospel. So would argue Mr. Plantinga. And he's got heavy duty authorities to quote on this.

[41 : 13] precisely not the witness, but the object to which it witnesses has power. Our witness doesn't have power, but the one we witness to has real power.

He formed knowledge itself, our Lord. He's the Lord of knowledge. The enlightenment doesn't know that, but he is.

He formed how we know things, our Lord. He's really good at knowledge. He's even better than Immanuel Kant. And we have to learn that again.

Our Lord is good at these things. The believer, says Aquinas, happily quoted by the reformed philosopher Alvin Plantinga. The believer, again, says the medieval theologian.

The believer has sufficient motive for believing, for he or she is moved by the authority of divine teaching, confirmed by, says Aquinas, the inward instigation of the divine invitation.

[42 : 27] There's real knowledge. There's real knowledge. The Heidelberg Catechism, likewise, says his word is true, is a deep rooted assurance created in us by the Holy Spirit.

There is a sense of the divine, says Calvin. There is a sense of the divine, an internal witness of the Spirit.

an internal witness of the Spirit. This witness, this kind of witness, it could be multiplied, of course, through the fathers, through the Middle Ages, through the Reformers, through Pietists later after the Reformation.

This witness, the church, must recover in a deep gospel intelligence and learn how to say it again. How can we learn to say this again?

Here is one way to try and say it. And this is an example of saying it to people of a certain intellectual bent.

[43 : 38] The census divinitatis, that's Calvin's Latin that Mr. Plantinga wants to use, is a belief producing faculty.

Is a belief producing faculty or power or mechanism that under the right conditions produces belief that isn't evidentially based on other beliefs.

See, that's Paul saying the heavens are telling, but Bertrand Russell says, show me the evidence. belief in God.

But no, there's a belief which isn't evidentially based on other beliefs. Belief in God doesn't need evidence. It's basic. On this model, isn't this fun to read this light, happy prose?

On this model, our cognitive faculties have been designed and created by God. Do you believe that? Our cognitive faculties have been designed and created by God.

[44 : 54] Manuel Kant didn't believe that, I think. The design plan, therefore, is a design plan in the literal and paradynamic sense. It is a blueprint or plan for our ways of cognitive functioning, and it has been developed and instituted by a conscious, intelligent agent.

The purpose, I'll end this soon, I promise, the purpose of the senses divina taught us is to enable us to have true beliefs about God.

Did you figure out that there is a God one day? The Bible says you didn't, in a sense. And when it functions properly, it ordinarily does produce true beliefs about God.

These beliefs, therefore, can meet the conditions for warrant. You're warranted in believing in God, even at Harvard, I think. That's me, not Plantinga.

When they do, if they are strong enough, then they constitute knowledge. I love that little phrase, if they are strong enough. How they get strong enough, Plantinga would tell you from his tradition and from Edwards, is because our affections are so in love with the high and beautiful things of the gospel that our belief starts to become knowledge.

[46 : 24] There it is. The alternative to this way of understanding knowledge, we're drawing to a close here, I promise. The alternative is simply to surrender to the Enlightenment project.

For instance, Rudolf Bultmann did a full and complete surrender to the Enlightenment project. It's interesting to note, Bultmann is probably the most influential New Testament scholar of the 20th century.

Enormously learned, enormously influential. His word would be small g godlike in the major places where clergy were trained in the Western world.

This is, he was it. Massively learned, undoubtedly. But unfortunately, every inch a modern man. He says, the historical method, he says, includes the presupposition that history is a unity in the sense of a closed continuum of effects in which individual events are connected by the succession of cause and effect.

That's his way of saying, no supernatural mysteries in my worldview. I'm a philosophical materialist because the Enlightenment has taught me to be so.

[47 : 41] So, the New Testament is studied professionally by the people who train clergy as if none of its truth claims could possibly be true. And we wonder why liberal churches abound in the Western world.

Because the clergy there, the bishops, they were taught not to believe. They're children of the Enlightenment. A wonderful thing about a man like Plantinga has a world-class intellect.

He goes right to the heart of that and blows it up. God created our faculties. God knows how knowledge works.

And Christians should not be ashamed to make that confession. God knows how knowledge works. When you see this truth, you realize that the New Testament witness is, as Richard Baucom says, a novum, N-O-V-U-M, and he used the Latin term.

It's a unique witness to a Jesus who stands in absolute glory and majesty above all others. That's obviously what the New Testament says about Jesus.

[49 : 00] Mr. Bultmann, you see, has decided beforehand, as a child of the Enlightenment Project, that that cannot be true. There are no such people, says Mr.

Bultmann, says the Enlightenment Project. But the New Testament says that's who Jesus is. And to live in the epistemological environment called the church, a place where knowledge happens in a certain way, is simply to bow the knee and say, I agree, I submit to the apostolic witness to Jesus.

Yes, there's what it's come to in our time. This is being decided all around us right now, I think. how to think about the past, what kind of authority it might have, how belief is formed in people without reference to the past, or with reference to the past, all of this is being asked again in our time, and it's working itself out in our lives directly and indirectly.

There it is, there's the battle we're in right now, as I draw to a close. I wonder if the well-known fury and abusiveness of the new atheists, to say nothing of an older atheist, much more intelligent than the newer atheists, I think, a man like Nietzsche, who has had a gift for abuse like no other, it's not difficult to discern perhaps why they're like that so frequently.

Mr. Plantinga, and I learned this from him, I should have learned it earlier, but from him, I see it so clearly now. Mr.

[50 : 50] Plantinga emphasizes so strongly, atheism is a form of wish fulfillment. Freud was no fool, he had it just upside down, thought that belief in God is wish fulfillment.

The Bible and the Christian tradition so clearly see that no man doesn't want to believe in a God, wants to be God himself, doesn't want a judgment, doesn't want to give thanks, and so has this mighty wish fulfillment that creates millions of other gods and sometimes maybe the more tough minded, just like the let it all hang out.

No God in my life, no. it's wish fulfillment. Mr. Plantinga emphasizes, I think that's true. Martin Hediger, Mr.

Plantinga here quotes Richard Rorty to this effect. Martin Hediger apparently, as Mr. Rorty says, could not stand the thought that he was not his own creation.

And that's what unbelief really gets down to. I want to be my own creator.

[52 : 14] Well, that's a lie. We have a creator. So, let's think about ourselves, the past, the gospel, on heaven's terms.

Not on the terms that the modern world tries to overwhelm us with, which has been overwhelming us in the modern world for a long time now.

And let us believe with clarity and with great intelligence the things of the gospel. I think I tried to get re-baptized in these things by listening to Rowan Williams and listening to Alvin Plantinga and hearing them sort of unofficially in conversation.

Both men of God in their own ways, I think. the spirit forms belief in us, and more than that, forms holy affections in us as we love the things of the gospel.

Let's love them with all of our minds, as the tradition, as scripture tells us. Let's love these things with all of our minds.

[53 : 26] Give thanks for people like Mr. Klandiga, spend his life thinking hard about these things and helping the church find her balance again in our time.

There's a mouthful, boy. May I say a word of prayer just before we have some good conversation. Lord, we thank you for your glory and grace in calling us to be a people, belong to you, and we pray that you will teach our minds to think about the things of the gospel in a way which gives you deep glory and benefits us always.

This we pray always in the name of Jesus. Amen.