

Are Christians Stupid?

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Date: 25 January 2003

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[0 : 0 0] Well, it's great to come to a place where you know people love you and take you seriously and value what you have to say. And I've already gotten my honorarium right here, I noticed. So thank you. Thank you very much, St. John's Shaughnessy.

In fact, if I hung out in Shaughnessy more, I'd know that this is where the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club has its breakfast and not out where the boats are. Silly me. I was assigned this topic, Are Christians Stupid?

And it's good to know that your expertise is valued. So the answer to the question, Are Christians Stupid? Yep. In fact, I brought a list of some stupid Christians.

Maybe this isn't the time to read it. But instead, to try to demonstrate quickly that I myself am not stupid, but I'm going to immediately refer to Aristotle.

And you know that you're dealing with a high-powered intellect when somebody begins with Aristotle. So let me fool you for a little while longer and mention Aristotle. And Aristotle said there are two ways of defining a term.

[1 : 0 6] And we academics always want to define terms. So we're going to define the term stupid for you immediately here. Aristotle said you could define it in the abstract by telling about the concept, or you could define it by definition, by, that is to say, examples, exemplification, providing some examples of what you mean.

So let's begin with that. I have sought the richest resources available, the most infallible sources available. This is a series of examples of stupidity that I have brought from the Internet.

And if it's on the net, of course, it must be true. And so, in fact, to even deepen the aura of pseudo-reliability here, I've even reduced these to the sacred status of print.

So I'm going to read these to you now. Here are some examples of stupidity that show up in the product labels of our time. Some of you may have seen this kind of list before.

On a Sears hairdryer, do not use while sleeping. Take it from me, it's important that you don't use it while sleeping.

[2 : 0 9] On a bag of Fritos, you could be a winner. No purchase necessary. Details inside. Gosh, Martha, I just better rip these babies open.

I'm going to pay for that one. Oh, okay. On most brands of Christmas lights, you probably noticed this, for indoor or outdoor use only. So no stringing it from inside to outside now.

You know, pick one. Pick one. On a bar of dial soap. Directions. Use like regular soap. Takes half the fun out of it, actually.

On an American Airlines packet of nuts. Instructions. Open packet. Eat nuts. Eat nuts. Which saves time because I'm on those short flights.

You don't want to be sitting there wondering, you know, what to do. You want to just get right at those nuts and American Airlines is there to help you. On a Swanson frozen dinner. Serving suggestion. Defrost.

- [3 : 14] You know, I don't see what people like about these things. On a packaging for a Rowenta iron. Do not iron clothes on body.
- Ooh. Yeah. A little lower. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. On children's cough medicine. Do not drive a car or operate heavy machinery.
- Billy, put that down. On a night hall sleep aid. Warning. May cause drowsiness. Gee. You think?
- And on a child's Superman costume. Wearing of this garment does not enable you to fly. Now, Teddy, I paid \$17.99 for that at Walmart.
- Get up there and try it again. No, Dad. And then, of course, the funnier examples come unintentionally, where the translation doesn't quite make it from the country of origin to our own country.
- [4 : 17] On a Japanese food processor. Not to be used for the other use. Now, what would that be? You know, you can chop things up with these warring blades, or you can, I don't know, extract a gambling debt.
- I don't know. What would it be? My own personal favorite, lastly, to confuse you perhaps a little further, but to conclude this part, on a Swedish chainsaw.
- Do not attempt to stop chain with your hands. Or genitals. That takes care of that.
- So, you might wonder why I was asked to address this question. Why would a bunch of folks get together on a Saturday morning to ask the question, are Christians stupid?
- Well, I think, more seriously, it's because a lot of people think Christians are stupid, or they'd have to be, to be Christians. Some of the leading scientists of our day, Stephen Weinberg, the late biologist Stephen Jay Gould, the great Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson, they're all quite convinced that you really can't be a Christian and know what you're talking about.
- [5 : 33] There has to be some kind of mental blockage, or some kind of psychological problem that would keep you from seeing the facts the way they are. There are lots of high-powered, smart people who think that Christianity is a form of mental defect.
- So, it's not as if my hosts, who gave me this title, are making this up. Not only in the rarefied world of Nobel Prize winners and advanced particle physicists, but also a little more close to home, a lot of people think that Christians must be unintelligent.
- At least, that's their presumption. Because of some of the work I do in tracking religion in North America, I frequently interact with members of the news media, whether it's a secular or a Christian.
- And I'd have to say now, having done 40 or 50 interviews a year for 8 or 9 years, I've gotten to know a number of journalists in Canada and the States. This week, the Washington Post and CBC TV again.
- And I remember one time, this happened, but this has happened a number of times, but this is a particularly good example. I was talking with Global TV in Winnipeg, and the young 26-year-old, going to be a star someday reporter, was talking with me, and she was asking about conservative Christianity in Canada, something to do with that.
- [6 : 41] And I had finished my remarks, and the camera guy was folding up his lights, and the sound guy was wrapping up his cords, and so we were off the record, and she said to me after a half-hour interview, you know, Dr. Stackhouse, you seem to actually believe that.
- I said, well, yeah, I do. You mean to say you actually go to church? Yeah, most weeks I go to church. Really?
- This was stunning to her, so she literally stopped talking about 30 seconds, and then came back and said, you know, I had a roommate, something like you, in college. You know, she was reasonably bright and had a sense of humor, and she was a Christian too.

Two people now, you know? The first was an anomaly. Now there was a trend. Two, you know? 26 years. So I have stunned more than a few journalists by tipping off that, in fact, I actually believe Christianity.

I don't just write about it or study it and observe it from afar. So there's lots of people out there who really wonder whether Christians are stupid, and frankly, all you have to do is watch a fair bit of Christian TV, and you begin to think, yeah, maybe we are, you know?

[7 : 52] And if that's on the inside of the tribe, you may feel that way. But let's ratchet it up a bit, because yes, it may be true that Christians are stupid, but it may be even worse. Christians may actually be insane.

Christians, I think, those of us who are Christians, and I know many of you are here this morning who are Christians, many of us just take for granted some of the peculiarities of our faith, and I think we forget how really odd our faith looks to other people.

One of the most obvious examples of this is the Christian ritual of prayer. Christians pray, and they think they're actually talking to God. And what's even stranger, this is the really weird part, Christians think they're talking to Jesus.

Now, Jesus was a great guy, but he died 2,000 years ago, and Christians refuse to face that fact. I mean, he's gone. And yet Christians will say, ordinary looking Christians, Christians like you, that they actually talked to Jesus before breakfast this morning.

Now, what's that? I mean, if somebody had said to you, yes, I've just gotten off the phone with Julius Caesar, had a good chat with Napoleon before breakfast this morning, you'd say, yeah, well, let me just call someone for you.

[9 : 06] 9-1-1, you know. I mean, either Christians are right about this, or they're possibly psychotic. Right?

They've taken leave of reality. How can you say that you actually talked to Jesus of Nazareth this morning? Any other ancient historical figures you're close to that you'd like to share with us this morning? It seems impossible.

And, of course, Freud thought we were insane. And many psychologists since then have thought that this projection, this idea that you're actually talking to the supreme being of the universe, let alone this particular historical figure that Christians are wacky enough to think is the supreme being of the universe, and they can talk with him even though he's long since been dead and gone.

Christians may not only be stupid, they may, in fact, be psychotic. Now, some of you who aren't Christians this morning may be edging quietly toward the doors at this point, and understandably so.

But let's see. We seem to be relatively normal. Let's see if we can make some sense of that. So this pair of questions, are Christians stupid? And do you have to decide between faith and reason?

[10 : 12] Now, such a pair of questions demands that a speaker not equivocate or obfuscate in any way, that he eschew circumlocution and paraphrases, that he come directly to the point and declare himself with a boldness, yes, the boldness that the situation requires.

So, to the questions, are Christians stupid? And must I choose between reason and faith? I want to say both loudly and clearly simply this, no, yes, yes, and no, yes, no, no, and yes.

That's what I want to say. So, with my colors nailed firmly to the mast, with my courage screwed to the sticking place, and with my position vividly ambivalent, let us proceed to the no answers, and then, logically enough, follow up with the yeses.

No, then. Christians aren't stupid, and you don't have to choose between faith and reason. Two, three, let's see, let's see, three answers to this. No, first.

No, number one. Lots of Christians plainly aren't stupid by normal criteria, by education, by accomplishment, by success in the world, and so on.

[11 : 28] There are so many examples of apparently non-stupid Christians that it seems kind of a stupid question to ask whether Christians are stupid. Most of the leading figures, historically the scientific revolution, were Christian people.

Those that gave us the primary way of thinking as smart people today were themselves Christians. to pick another kind of example of so many we could pick.

The highest academic and most elite academic society in Canada is the Royal Society of Canada, Canada. And a number of fellows of the Royal Society are outspoken Christians. No fewer than two of them sit on Regent College's board.

And so the Royal Society of Canada, Canada's highest academic body, has a number of outspokenly Christian people. Outside the realm of academia and the university, lots of smart and intelligent and accomplished people.

The two men who are going to be one or the other, they're our next prime minister likely, Paul Martin, John Manley, both of them are professed and practicing Christians, I understand, from people who know them personally.

[12 : 30] Mr. Martin is a Roman Catholic, Mr. Manley is a Protestant, and of course, Mr. Prechin is a Christian too, although you may be wondering what my point is there. Two out of three though, you know, that's pretty good.

Beyond these individual examples too, we look around the world, and look even starting at our own country, the data from the 2001 census isn't available yet on religion, it'll be published sometime this year by StatsCan, but still, likely over 70% of Canadians call themselves Christians.

Now, is it the bottom 70% intellectually? I mean, what are the odds that at least some of those people are reasonably smart? Probably pretty good. There are over 2 billion Christians in the world now, and again, some of them demonstrably not stupid.

So, the first response to the question, are Christians stupid? Do you have to choose between faith and reason? Empirically, seems to be, apparently not, because there sure seem to be a lot of fairly smart Christians by any normal, everyday standard of smartness, so to speak.

So, why the question? Because the question does continue to nag, even if you point out that kind of obvious empirical evidence. Well, secondly, it may be, the second question is the key, that there's a sense in which, if you're going to be a Christian, you have to choose between faith and reason, that these are two different modes of apprehending the world and of making up one's mind about it.

[13 : 59] Let me talk for a little more about this nexus of reason and faith and faith and reason. First, reason and faith. The point I want to make here is that every human being, whether they're Christian or not, whether they're religious or not, exercises faith as an extension of the way we live in the world.

And the nature of faith is deeply connected, in fact, intrinsically connected to reason, to what we think we know. Faith is nothing other than taking a chance on or taking a risk with someone or something on the basis of what you think you already know.

Now, you all came into the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club this morning and saw this nice set of chairs and tables and you probably all plunked yourself down in a chair. And you didn't, probably, do a full engineering structural analysis of the chair to make sure it could bear your body weight and would continue to do so for as long as you continue to stress the chair.

But in fact, for all you know, the chair couldn't hold you up and would collapse immediately when you sat down. Or maybe, more comically, some of the pranksters who go to St. John's Shaughnessy had sawn through the legs to just leaving a quarter inch of wood left so that about five minutes in you'd all collapse out of the floor and we'd all have a gay old time laughing about that.

But you see, now that I have warned you about the physical peril you might be in, I don't see anybody standing up. You know, you're still just sitting there like so many bumps in a log. Yeah, yeah, this chair is fine. Get on with it.

[15 : 33] Right? But you actually don't know anything about the chair. Now, does that mean that you're stupid? Does it mean that you are ignorant and willfully so? Well, maybe.

But, it could also be that in fact you are trusting yourself to the chair because of implicit reasons that you have. There's actually a fair bit of cognition that goes on in behind the scenes.

You're walking into the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club. You could presume from all the surroundings that this is a place that can afford to keep its chairs in good repair. Nor have you assumed that any chair that looks like that, you've never seen anybody fall through a chair that looks as relatively sturdy as that one.

All the visual signals plus the cultural signals go together and in behind your conscious thought without even, as it were, thinking about it, you sit down in a chair because it all looks right.

If you instead had come into this very same room but half the tables were turned over, several chairs were splinted on the floor and there are a couple of other ones that looked like the upholsters in disarray, you would then act differently, wouldn't you?

[16 : 39] You wouldn't just plunk yourself down and you'd say, okay, the signals are wrong and even without thinking about it you'd go, hmm, I have to wake up to this and then you'd start thinking, I wonder if this chair would hold me up. So the faith that you exercise in the chair by just plunking yourself down, not knowing for sure that it will hold you up is nonetheless rationally grounded faith.

There is a whole lot of implicit thinking going on behind it and that's why I'm glad to relieve you of the burden of your incipient stupidity. In fact, you're not stupid. It makes sense to do that. We trust things and we trust people because of what we think we know about them.

Just to pick another example in the personal realm, I'm confident that this hour of the day, let's see, it's 20 to 10. It may already seem much later to you, but it's only 20 to 10.

I'm confident that my wife is up the top of Mount Seymour where our nine-year-old is getting his ski lesson this morning on the four meters, square meters of snow they have on Mount Seymour skiing back and forth.

Now, I'm confident that that's where Carrie is. Now, my wife could be, of course, instead, dumping the kid off at some daycare and carrying on with the puerilator guy.

[17 : 57] So, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to spoil your breakfast with you. What's my wife doing, you know? But the reason I can joke about this, the reason I'm so confident that she's not, in fact, misbehaving, but she's on top of Mount Seymour, well, sure, there's about \$10,000 worth of surveillance equipment in the van, but also, also because, I mean, time codes can be faked, I mean, there's all kinds of, because I know her, because I've known her for the 22 years we've been married.

We were married at 11 in Kentucky. So, I've known her a long time. I know the kind of person she is, and when she says, I'm bringing Devin up Mount Seymour, I know that that's what she's going to do, and if she doesn't, it's because she can't, or something better has come along, but not because she's cheating on me, and as funny as that story can sound, we all know that's not very funny, right?

That a lot of people here in Vancouver this morning aren't so sure what their spouses are doing, and they can't have the same level of faith, not because of any problem with them, not because they're not faithful people, not because they're not believing, it's because they don't have the data to trust.

In fact, the data they have is sufficiently mixed that they can't trust, and they shouldn't. At some point, having faith in someone is not a virtue, it's foolishness. Somebody burns you enough times, it's no great credit to you that you continue to believe them.

We start saying, you know, you're actually not a noble believer, you're a fool for continuing to believe. And why do we think that? Because of the data. Do the data lead you to trust, or do the data lead you not to trust?

[19 : 37] So faith is, as it were, anchored in knowledge. If this is the stuff that we think we know, then faith is the cantilevering over what we don't know. But it's anchored in what we do, think we know.

So everybody exercises faith, and everybody exercises faith on the basis of reason, on the basis of their knowledge, broadly speaking. I don't mean reason in some narrow logical sense, but based on what we think broadly that we know.

So to try to decide between faith and reason is literally to misunderstand the faith-reason relationship. So it's a false choice. We can also flip it around, though.

Intriguingly, especially under the critique of postmodern philosophy, we realize that there's an important dimension. You don't have to be postmodern to understand this. Augustine understood this a lot earlier on.

There's a sense in which faith also leads to reason. See, reason can lead to faith. Reason can ground faith. But there's also a sense in which there's certain kinds of reasoning that you can't do unless you have a prior faith commitment.

[20 : 41] Let's pick an example from the world of science. Two scientists are working in a lab. Scientist A says to Scientist B, I found these terrific findings, these spectacular findings, and they actually overturn our previous hypothesis, but they're very suggestive of a new direction for our research.

And Scientist B says, well, I don't believe that. Scientist A is dumbfounded. Well, why don't you? And B says, well, because all along I've known you've been trying to gun for me.

I'm the research leader here, and you're just trying to embarrass me. And A says, no, sir, I've always had the highest respect for you. I'm just telling you the findings. No, no, no. You probably faked those findings. You got it in for me.

Well, no, I don't actually, but if you don't believe me, let's go talk to the lab techs. They're the ones who generate the data. No, they're in your pay. You know, you paid them off, and I know you're out to get me and destroy my relationship.

Scientist B can't learn anything from Scientist A because he doesn't have any faith in her. In fact, quite the opposite. So there's actually a cognitive situation that is closed off to him because he won't trust.

[21 : 48] And so there are areas of life in which we cannot learn what we want to learn, especially from people, if we don't trust them. Now, when it comes to religious faith, and it comes particularly to being a Christian, this is the appropriate analogy.

Becoming a Christian is not like deciding about a bunch of facts, what you'll believe or not. In fact, I'm not sure anybody can decide whether they can believe or not. You're either convinced you're not, right? I mean, if somebody shows you an equation, you can't decide whether to believe it or not.

You either think it's correct or it isn't. Or if somebody says that this hockey team is better than that hockey team, you look at the evidence and you decide. You can't willfully decide that the worst team is better.

You just make up your mind, as it were, as to what you think. But when it comes to personal relationship, you've got to decide to some extent, can I trust this person in order to learn more from that person?

And so there's actually a complicated back and forth about reason and faith that shows up in our lives. Now, for a breakfast meeting, we won't get any more deeply into epistemology than that. You'll be glad to know.

[22 : 52] But at least we can see that to put these on separate shelves as if they're different things, sure they're different, but they're not discreet from each other. They're in fact always in a constant interplay in our lives.

So it can't be because Christians have faith that they must be irrational, right? That can't be why, secondly. So if we say they're not stupid, that's the second ground.

Everybody exercises faith and reason. The problem with Christianity can't lie there. So let's try one third alternative. When we say Christians aren't stupid, maybe there's something particular about Christianity that's stupid.

In other words, you could agree with everything I've said so far, but maybe there's something about Christianity in particular that is intrinsically stupid. That's what Stephen Jay Gould did think. That's what Stephen Weinberg and E.O. Wilson, they think there's something intrinsically wrong with this particular outlook.

Now, I'm very much interested in those kinds of questions, but it's always a particular question, like what is it that bugs you about Christianity? What is it that you think is stupid about it?

[23 : 58] It can't just be the whole package. What in particular? And the reason it can't be the whole package is that Christianity shares a number of everyday beliefs with most other faiths and religions and philosophies in the world.

So, like, Christianity believes that there's something here I'm knocking, you know, and so does scientific naturalism. So, big deal. So, it can't be the whole package. It must be certain things you don't like.

And when it comes to answering certain questions that make one think that Christianity is stupid, then they deserve serious answers and they have to have particular answers. So, obviously, at a breakfast like this, I can't now start a catalog of all the possibilities and answer them all.

I will say, however, that for 20-some years in my academic research, I keep trying to find the questions that most people find or even some people find keep them from believing in Christianity, the ones that bug them the most.

And so far, I think Christians can respond with plausible answers. That is to say, answers that an intelligent person could plausibly hold to.

[25 : 00] What I don't think, though, I will announce, is that Christians always win the argument to every thoughtful person's satisfaction. I think the world is much more complicated than that. To put it really bluntly, I think there are good reasons not to think that Christianity is true.

And I think there are really good reasons to think it is true. And then again, everybody has to investigate those reasons if they're interested and sort it out as best you can. Friends of mine who are not Christians are themselves not stupid either.

There are some good reasons to wonder about whether Christianity is true. And the Christian apologists, like me, don't always have the shiny arguments that can mow down the opposition, even though some people hire us to do that.

You know? They sort of want to bring a robo-apologist to their campers. They sort of mow everybody else down. Well, that's not the way it works. There are lots of smart people who aren't Christians and they've got good reasons of their own.

So, there's a whole pile of arguments behind me on the table here. That's what these books are here for, is to equip you to look at those questions that interest you the most and I encourage you to look at that because serious questions deserve more than a quick response over breakfast.

[26 : 07] So let me give you a trivial response then to the rest of my talk, he says, as he undercuts the branch he's sitting on. So I've tried to demonstrate there are some ways in which we can see plausibly the Christians aren't stupid.

But I also promised you a couple of yes answers as well. Stupidly, I forgot when I'm supposed to finish. So let me ask Jim when he wants me to wrap up. Okay, good.

Because I have precisely 12 minutes more remarks to offer. Yes, firstly, some Christians are stupid and some of us are lazy.

Some of us are gluttonous. You may be sitting at a table with one or two. Demonstrably. Some are cowardly. Some are foolish. Some are mean. Some are needy.

Some of us are wrong. So we have to just come clean. Yeah, some Christians are stupid and I could have brought you a list this morning of some of my favorite candidates for stupidity and you can no doubt produce your own.

[27 : 09] This is an old characteristic of the Christian church. In fact, one of our founders of the Christian church, the Apostle Paul, writes to one of his churches in our scriptures, the New Testament, and says, 1 Corinthians 1, consider your own call, Christian brothers and sisters.

Not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many were powerful. Not many of noble birth. Christianity from the beginning has made no pretense of the fact that we are an imperfect bunch.

We are drawn from all sectors of society, all levels of intelligence and education and accomplishment. All of us are weak and flawed. So some of us are stupid.

And all of us have terribly bad things wrong with us. Some of us might be really smart, but maybe we also think we are. And we have the worst problem of being proud and conceited.

Some of us know the truth, thank God, and we've become self-righteous in the possession of it. Domineering and dogmatic, which is worse, much worse than being stupid.

[28 : 14] So all of us as Christians acknowledge that there are parts of us that are stupid and foolish and wrong, in fact, so badly wrong that we trust God to save us.

We don't think that what's wrong with us can be cured by simply some more education or reading some better books or trying harder. We love education.

We love books. We love trying harder, but we're not optimistic that those things are going to solve the problems that are, in fact, going to kill us otherwise. My father retired recently from the practice of cancer surgery.

And when you're dealing with cancer, when you're dealing with cancer, you don't just read a couple more books. You don't just try harder. You don't just say, you know, I'm just going to feel healthier today and that'll fix it.

No, you have to take drastic, life-threatening therapy at times. And in one of the ironies of life, seven years ago, my mother was on her deathbed with cancer and had to go through the bone marrow procedure down in Dallas that nearly killed her.

[29 : 19] Ideally, we would have a technology that would kill the cancer patient and then raise them back to new life so all the cancer cells are completely gone. The bone marrow transplant procedure is the next best thing.

They almost kill you and hopefully kill all the cancer and then bring you back. And I thank God that my mom is alive today and is on the right side of that procedure.

But that's how badly sick Christians think we all are. We are mortally ill with sin. We are mortally ill with it. And only the most drastic of therapies will look after us.

So are we stupid? Yeah. And there's lots more that's wrong with us as well. Let me just pause for a moment though and speak to the Christians particularly who are here this morning. Is the church helping you become better in every respect including intellectually?

Does your church have a lively, open, critical, what I would call adult intellectual culture? See, many churches don't.

[30 : 21] I think most Canadian churches don't have an adult intellectual culture. I know that because refugees from those churches show up in my classes and in my audiences and on email. They say, you know, I really can't safely ask this question in my church.

A, there's no room to ask questions. There's no form to do that. We're just supposed to sit and listen and learn. And B, when I do raise the question, everybody looks at me like I'm some kind of heretic or troublemaker.

So is there, in fact, an adult intellectual culture in your church? See, most churches don't. They have a kind of paternalistic culture where the clergy are the grown-ups and the rest of us are the children.

And the clergy tell us what to believe and then we believe it and do it. So I encourage you to think about that, whether, in fact, your church is an adult intellectual culture that welcomes questioners, that welcomes the kind of interaction that is routine at a university, that is routine in a high school if it's a good one.

And that way we show, we live, that we're serious about the life of the mind as well. So my first answer, yes, some Christians are stupid.

[31 : 30] But secondly, if stupid means the following, not able to figure out everything that really matters. And some people think that's what it means. You know, if you can't figure it out for yourself what really matters, and you believe it anyway, that's stupid.

Well then, yes, we are stupid. When I was teaching the world religions at the University of Manitoba, which I did for eight years, I would have a hundred students in my class from September to April learning about all the world's religions.

And the two religions I really didn't like teaching were Hinduism and Christianity. Hinduism, because it's so incredibly complex that it's very hard to generalize about. Christianity is a very different problem.

Christianity has a number of very simple, basic propositions that all Christians believe. but not one of those propositions do I as a Christian really understand.

Jesus is God made flesh. Okay, I believe that and I don't really know what that means. Nor do my students at Regent College, and I can tell you that because I just marked their exams.

[32 : 40] They're not going to blame it on me though, and say, well, that's fair enough, I suppose. You see, to understand even the basics of Christianity, to believe that our God is one in three, there's another one, and the second person of this trinity became a human being, okay, that's incarnation, and grew up and lived among us and showed us the kingdom of God, whatever that is, and then died on a cross and so atoned for the sins of the world, go ahead and explain that, and then rose from the dead and became new, and kind of like he was before, but kind of not, you see the technical precision, right, and then rose up off the Mount of Olives into the air, and a cloud received him, and where did he go?

You know, did he keep going up? You know, there's Saturn, you know, there's Uranus, you know, no, I mean, what did Jesus do? So, so, you see the problem? Even the most basic Christian propositions are mysterious.

We don't really understand it beyond a certain point, and yet we believe them. And for some of our friends, that's just stupid. You know, the Trinity isn't a holy mystery to be celebrated, it's a contradiction that should be discarded.

It's just a dumb idea. We believe, as Christians, that reason will not bring you all the answers that matter in life, or in death. We believe that we need to have good reason, to trust God, and then believe what God tells us so that we'll know more.

Reason, faith, reason. You see that again? We should have good reasons to trust God, but then, when we do trust God, we can learn more from him that we can't otherwise reason out for ourselves.

[34 : 23] And that's the way reason, faith, and reason normally works in the intelligent Christian life. We finally need to ask for faith, though, as a gift. I've spent much of my life trying to come up with really good reasons why you should be a Christian, why I should be a Christian, and there are some pretty good reasons, but they're not enough.

I can't think of any set of reasons or arguments that can convince anybody to make the huge mental jump from thinking that Jesus of Nazareth is a really, really, really, really, good guy to believe that he's God.

I can't think of any battery of reasons that's going to convince somebody to give one's whole life over to a God they can't see or touch or feel, but who somehow they have to know.

Well, thank God it's not up to me to come up with those reasons. The only way somebody finally comes to that level of trust is that God introduces himself to them. It is a spiritual matter.

Jesus answered him, very truly I say to you, unless you're born again, unless you actually have a change so deep it's like having a brand new life, can you even see the kingdom of God?

[35 : 37] God. No one can come to me, Jesus said, unless drawn by the Father who sent me. And the Apostle Paul again says, no one can say and really mean that Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.

So reason is not enough. Reason's good, it's important, but it's not enough. It's going to have to be a spiritual transformation, it's going to have to be a gift, and Christians encourage our friends to ask for that gift.

What do you got to lose? So you waste a few minutes talking to somebody who's not there. Well, it may cut back on your TV watching a bit, but you could afford it, maybe.

If you're actually going to have the universe open before you, it might be worth a few minutes of saying, God, if there would be a God, show yourself to me. Because that's the only way I think we're finally going to move over from reason to faith.

If you say finally, let me just say this, if you say you can't believe, you might think about why that is. Why is it that you can't believe? It's not because you're stupid, but it's also not because you're smart.

[36 : 42] Thank you. Any of you have teachers or professors who would say to a class on the first day, there's no such thing as a dumb question?

How many of you heard that? It's not true, eh? Of course there are. I deal with them all the time. So bring them on.

One of the things I find really exciting about teaching is actually taking a world-class dumb question and turning it into a wonderful answer and then the other students go, geez, that was a great question.

I thought it was dumb, but it's really masterful. So give me something to deal with here and we'll talk together. Yes, please. That's a pretty open-ended question. I apologize, but can you spend just a couple of minutes on the word and concept of paradox in the midst of all of this?

I'm asked to expatiate on the word paradox in the midst of this. Sure. Others of you can think of other words you'd like me to talk about.

[38 : 00] I love words. That's my life, so bring them on. That's great, too. I think paradox is an intrinsic part of the Christian faith. Let's remember what we mean by a paradox.

A paradox is something that seems to be a contradiction, but is in fact resolved at another level. So that a paradox is not a contradiction.

A contradiction is a real problem. It's just flatly you've got to choose that there's an intrinsic flaw, whereas a paradox seems to be a problem, but in fact isn't. And Christianity is full of paradoxes in its own doctrines.

The idea that Jesus is fully God and fully human. Now, that seems to be impossible given our normal definitions, but on the other hand, we know that we don't even understand human psychology very well, let alone divine psychology, so maybe that's resolvable.

And we believe it is, even though we don't know how it is. Or the idea that for a single human individual to hang on a Roman cross for a few hours, as excruciating as that was, lots of people have been tortured longer and died even more horrible deaths, how that was supposed to somehow atone for the sins of the world, there is no understanding of spirituality that can explain that.

[39 : 18] It doesn't seem right, that a finite amount of suffering could be, as it were, almost infinitely valuable, so we make suggestions, that it's God there, and so God's infinite, but we don't really know.

It's a bit like trying to do math when you have half the terms missing on the page. It's only suggestive. So I think when it comes to these paradoxes, the intelligent person will say, look, you Christians can only resort to the stratagem of claiming mystery so many times, and then it's going to walk, you know, you can't go, that's a mystery too, and that's a mystery too, and that's a mystery too.

You guys actually know anything? I think at some point we have to say, we do think we know some things, here are the grounds on which we think we know them, and then here are the even more basic grounds on which we trust God's revelation anyway, even if we can't figure it all out.

I've explored that in particular when it comes to the problem of evil, and in this book, Can God Be Trusted? I think that the question, why does God run the world the way he does?

Why in fact is God visiting this evil? Why do bad things happen to good people? There are some limited and useful responses to that, but none of them are ultimately satisfactory in my view, and that we have to shift the ground then to saying, can I trust God anyway?

[40 : 40] Are there good, rational, sensible grounds to believe that God is good and in control despite appearances? And the thoughtful person will need some pretty good arguments, and I think there are some, but that's the way I think we need to move.

Please. John, I think we probably all know a lot of people who have maybe been burned by, whether the church or Christians, and just have no reason to use the word reason again to trust or have any faith.

And there are a lot of, I mean, with the world, with so many religions and so many things, you know, what is it that gives anybody that sense of faith in Christianity when a lot of times they have very good and valid reasons not to put any faith in.

Thank you. So again, just for the sake of the tape, to repeat the thrust of the question, make sure I'll try to make sure, as I look at you, that I'm giving back the thrust of your question. That's an old speaker's dodge, actually, you know, is to rephrase the question so it's easier to answer.

So I've been asked, what's two plus two? It's four. Thank you. Next question. Too many of you are onto me up here, so I'll have to behave. So many Canadians have been hurt by Christians.

[42 : 11] They've been hurt by contact with Christianity, that why would they go back, you know, and especially when other religions seem newer and different and maybe more attractive, at least because they haven't tried them yet, but they have tried this one, and they've been burned by that.

But in a book that I just brought out this fall, in which I try to help Christians think about how to engage their neighbors apologetically, it's called Humble Apologetics.

And for those of you who read Apologetics, you'll be startled by the title. Humble Apologetics? Gee, there's a contradiction, no paradox, it's just flat, you know, contradictory. Because most of us understand apologetics, the art of defending the faith, as sort of a martial art.

Right? I sort of dump evidence until you finally say, yes, okay, I can see, now get out, you know. So I think that we need to engage our neighbors in a somewhat different mode.

And the first part of that book, I put on my historian and sociologist hat to try to interpret why are Canadians so resistant to any sort of Christian message.

[43 : 17] I mean, before I give you the shiny ways in which you're supposed to respond to the message, we might take a few minutes to figure out, why does nobody care? You know, I have my 20 surefire answers to 20 difficult questions, but nobody's asking any of them.

At least not to me. So why not? So one of the, I think, most important points I try to analyze there is this resistance of Canadians to the Christian faith. And one of the leading reasons is that because so many Canadians call themselves Christians, and because Christians are sinners like everybody else, lots and lots of people have had bad experiences with Christians.

Now, lots and lots of people in India have had bad experiences with Hindus, but there aren't very many Hindus here. So the very cultural success of Christianity in the past, of winning so many people to at least nominal adherents, also works against us now.

Because so many people, nominal Christians, are also pretty bad, then lots of people have bad experiences with what they think is Christianity. Christianity. And would that it were only the nominal Christians who were bad.

But in fact, some of the most serious and intense Christian communities in Canada are also harboring pathologies. Southern Manitoba, where there's a lot of Mennonites, and parts of southwestern Ontario with both Dutch Reformed and Mennonite communities, serious, God-fearing communities as well as families, also have statistically much higher incidences of domestic abuse.

[44 : 50] than the population at large. I found this also when I lived among Dutch American Christians in Iowa. In many respects, very godly, wonderful people, but also there's certain pathologies that come from being a tightly knit, small community.

I mean, we're sinners. We're all bad sinners, actually. So I think this is a real stumbling block, is the number of people who have pain about the Christian faith, whether it's the public pain caused by misbehaving clergy, or it's the private pain from having a mom or a dad or a pastor, who were mean or hypocritical.

And I think all we can do is to do two things. One is to try to interpret that experience, to say, you know, how do we make sense of that? How could somebody be a Christian yet do that? And I think theologically and sociologically we can't explain that.

But then secondly, we've got to provide an alternative in real life. There have got to be healthy churches and healthy families and healthy friendships into which we can invite people, what I call plausibility places.

They've got to have a place in which Christianity can even seem true, or all the books and arguments in the world are not going to help. That's going to be a kind of miracle for God to convert someone who doesn't see a genuine Christianity at work.

[46 : 11] So I think our churches are keenly important for this kind of thing. I was just saying to somebody at my table that the state of the Christian church in Canada, when it works, it's the best argument for Christianity we can offer.

And when it doesn't work, it's the best argument against. Please. You sort of highlighted in your thought about community, how do we make our Christian community attractive to compete with the beach today or the mountains on Sunday morning?

I find that in my life, a number of people who started out on the journey have found a lot of other things more attractive, but would still call themselves Christians, but I just don't need to be in church on a Sunday morning when I'd rather be up at Wistler.

How do you make the community an attractive place to be? So what about the attractiveness of the community over against especially the blandishments of living in the lower mainland of BC, like the beach and the mountains and so on?

That's a very good question. A lot of churches are making the mistake of trying to compete at the same level as society at large. And so our churches will also offer really good music and really good entertainment and really funny people and so on.

[47 : 27] And, well, we usually come out second best and often pretty cheesily second best because we're often not as funny and slick and we don't have as much money to put on a show as other people do.

So we come off a second rate. And so people don't come and nor should they. Walking on a beach is a really wonderful thing to be able to do. Skiing at Wistler is a really wonderful thing to do.

But, you know, if I had to choose between skiing Wistler and being deeply loved by somebody, I don't think that's going to be a hard choice. If I'm going to have a chance to have my inner self nourished and nurtured so that I feel much better about my whole life, I'll give up the walk on the beach for that.

But I won't give up a walk on the beach to be bored or to have somebody denounce me or to go to a place that seems stuck in the 19th century in all the kinds of ways or the 1950s in most cases, in most churches in Canada.

I can be bored on my own, thanks, so I don't need to go somewhere to do that. So I think that what Christian churches have to offer is what Christian churches have to offer, which is encounter with God and with people who are serious about and joyful about being with God.

[48 : 54] There are lots of Vancouverites who won't want that, just like there are lots of people who didn't want Jesus. That's their decision. What we want to make sure is that we're not turning away people who do want Jesus and do want what the church is about.

So I think churches need to be really good churches and not worry about what the world offers. It's got different products, so it's going to package them different ways. We need to package our product, so to speak, in a way that is integral and authentic.

And then those who want to will know where to find it and enjoy it. Does that help? Okay. Please. We consider ourselves an evangelical church, and we do reach out to those who are seeking, but is there a responsibility for us to go and try and engage those who really have no interest in God or really don't see it as an important thing to do?

What kind of responsibility do we have for that? So what kind of responsibility do we have to those who are apparently not interested in the faith?

I think our responsibility to them is the second of the great commandments, which is to love your neighbor as you love yourself. That imperative, of course, should guide everything we do.

[50 : 19] And I think we need to then unpack what we mean by loving our neighbor. What I understand loving our neighbor to mean is I do the good that I genuinely can do for my neighbor.

And in those few words, there's a lot of stuff to think about, right? To do the good, whatever that might be, for my neighbor that I can do. That is, that I have the resources and the opportunity to do.

Now, I have an uncle who's just a few years older than I am. He's more like a cousin. And he's a very successful, self-made businessman. He's well off financially, lives in Toronto.

He's happily enjoying his third marriage after the first two weren't so good. And we can talk about anything when we're together except religion. We go golfing together.

We'll talk about finances. We've talked about sex. We've talked about literally everything you can talk about. And he manifestly refuses to talk about religion. I don't even ask. But one day after we had another weekend together, I said, Bruce, how come we never talk about religion?

[51 : 23] I mean, you're interested in my work and you'll even read my books, but you never want to talk about it. And I'm just interested to know why. And he said, well, you know, you're a PhD in religious studies and we'd probably get into an argument and, you know, you just win.

I said, oh, okay. But that's not a good answer. This is a highly intelligent man. And we talk about and argue about everything else. What's the problem? It's not about that. But I knew it was a bogus answer and I just let it slide.

What it really is, is that that's too close to home. You know, you're my blood. You're my kin. And I can't be that vulnerable with you about that issue. Because I'm the only member of our extended family who's not a Christian and I feel vulnerable in that way.

I don't think I can let you in that far. Okay. The thing is, I keep loving Bruce and whenever he wants to know more about the Christian faith, he knows who to ask. Right?

So I don't have to keep trying to tell him because he knows I'm a theologian. So if he wants to know more, he just has to pick up the phone or send me an email. And if that day comes, great. And if it doesn't, I've done the good I can do for him.

[52 : 32] The openings that are there to serve him. I think the Christian church is in danger of wasting resources, trying to get the attention of people who really just want to be left alone in Ski Whistler.

Instead of looking for all the people who really do want to come and don't feel welcome because we're not paying attention to them. I think of the high school Christian club I was in. And we were so insecure in, you know, high school, right?

And we're trying to get the captain of the football team or the president of the students council or the cool kids to pay attention to us and maybe come to our club. And meanwhile, there's 30 kids over here, losers, right?

Who want to come. But we don't really want them because of our insecurity. We want the cool people to validate us. And so we waste all this time trying to be cool instead of loving.

And I'd say, well, that was a high school mistake which adults shouldn't be making. Let's let people who really want to just eat and drink and tomorrow we die. Off they go. I don't see Jesus running after people in the streets saying, pay attention to me.

[53 : 35] I'm relevant to you. He just does what he does and loves people as he has the opportunity to do so. And they sort themselves out. Please.

Speaking of all these issues, I don't want that I'm having trouble answering. Particularly with one person. When I share the scriptures, God has revealed all we need to know about it to make a decision.

Again, coming back, but how do we know that God is going to reveal more about himself? Or he's going to reveal something that tells us what he's revealed already is different.

He changes something. How do I deal with that question? Okay. That's an interesting question. I don't know how many of you could hear it, but of course the people listening on tape probably didn't.

When I'm dealing with somebody and trying to convey to them, the question is saying, out of the Bible, here are the things you need to know in order to be able to come to make a decision about God and about Christ and so on.

[54 : 38] And the comeback is, well, how do I know that God won't reveal more that will seriously modify or even change what he says here? Which is, of course, what our Muslim and Mormon friends think he did do, right?

I mean, the Quran has been given to us in order to correct the mess of things that Christians have made with their tangled scripture that they call the Bible. And the Mormons believe that we need another testament of Jesus Christ, the Book of Mormon.

And then once you've read through that big thing, then you have to read the Pearl of Great Price and Doctrines and Covenants. Yet there's still more revelation from God through Joseph Smith that you need to understand and believe.

So, I guess a couple things we can say. First, given what we understand about God, it's unlikely that God's going to contradict himself. So, that seems to be a remote possibility.

Why would he? And what good would that do? So, likely he's not going to contradict himself. He may extend things. In fact, the Bible is an account of God continuing to extend revelation and deepen it and broaden it.

[55 : 44] But he doesn't contradict anything that comes before. So much so, in fact, there's so much integrity in the Bible's revelation that by the time you get to the end of the New Testament, Abraham is still the example of faith from Genesis.

So, there's that much familial continuity that even if you only understood what Abraham understands, you're okay, let alone all the good stuff that comes. So, take advantage of that. Secondly, maybe God will do something like that tomorrow.

But today is today. And the only intelligent thing to do is to decide on the data that you do have, not on data that might emerge tomorrow. If something changes tomorrow, well then, handle that tomorrow.

If Christianity turns out to be true or false or different, well then you'll just have to adjust, as we all will. But until that day comes, you've got to decide on the basis that you do have.

Because not to decide is still to decide. To put up deciding to become a Christian is to decide not to be a Christian some more. And that's a perfectly plausible decision.

[56 : 52] But it's a decision. You can't infinitely defer a decision about religion, because religion is about life. It's what you're doing now. So, why not take on Christianity and try it for a while, and then if you find something better, switch to something else.

And if it really is better, I'll switch too. Right? Why not? I mean, if Christianity is pretty good and something is even better, I'd switch, wouldn't you? But I just don't think it's going to happen, so I'm stuck with this, and happily so.

Isn't that the way your pastors usually talk about the faith? See, that's why nobody will ordain me, so I just stay after that. The lay person. Somebody back here?

You said before that Christians ground their faith in reasons, like can't believe or believe, or at least that in deciding what you believe, there's some reason it goes to, there's some background reason.

I'm wondering if that's too broad of a generalization, and that a lot of the reasons why Christianity appears stupid sometimes is because a lot of Christians don't do that.

[58 : 07] And a lot of Christians ground their faith in assumptions that they're either unaware of or are going to address. Yes, so the question, going back to the reason-faith relationship, and wondering whether Christianity can appear stupid, and Christians can appear stupid, because their faith isn't particularly well-grounded, or impressively grounded in reasons, but may be grounded in, well, in what?

Right? Is that the gist of what you're asking? And I think that that's why it's crucial to understand that what's here on the basis, what I'm calling reasons, does not have to be formal reasoning.

It does not have to be publicly impressive reasoning, but can, in fact, be epistemologically defensible reasoning. Some of my heroes, philosophically, are a couple of Dutch Calvinists, Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff.

Plantinga is still at Notre Dame, Yale, just retired Nick Wolterstorff after his 70th birthday. Some people have, you know, Wayne Gretzky posters on their wall. I have Nick Wolterstorff and Alvin Plantinga on my wall.

These are pretty impressive contemporary heroes. And one of the points they make is to say that a 12-year-old girl who grows up in a Dutch Calvinist community in northwest Iowa is as rationally entitled to her faith as any philosopher could ever criticize her for.

[59 : 35] Because she's grown up in a family that believes and practices Christianity. It makes sense to her, too. Her friends believe it and practice it.

And so, why wouldn't she? And why is she at fault for a 12-years-old not questioning her faith? Why should she question it? She's entirely rationally justified in believing on those grounds.

And I think that's very helpful to point that out. But just because I don't have articulate reasons doesn't mean I don't have any reasons. See, nobody has blind faith. There's no such thing as blind faith.

Everybody believes whatever they believe for some reason. It might be because some authority told them so. It might be because they tried it and it worked. It might be because that just is the way the world seems to them.

But there are always reasons in the background. They may not be articulate. And secondly, they may not be very good. See, the 12-year-old might have what we call *prima facie* reasons.

[60 : 32] On the face of it, she's got good reasons. But as soon as she runs into countervailing reasons, real challenges, she's now obliged to encounter those and do the best she can.

And if she just says, no, I won't look, I won't look, I won't look, you know, I won't listen, that's not impressive faith now. That is, in a sense, willful blind faith or willful deaf faith.

And that's not rationally impressive or justifiable. And so I think for our purposes here, people do have reasons upon which they believe what they believe.

They may be inarticulate, they may be implicit. And they're open to challenge. And I think that Christians need to continue to be open to challenge. That our reasons may not be very good and we need to face up to that.

We either better find good reasons, better reasons, or switch faiths. Because I don't see how else we can move with that. Do you want to come back on that? Does that make sense? Okay. Please.

[61 : 33] Do we, is reason also not only one form of knowledge? And can we point to other ways of acquiring or holding knowledge? Yes.

Is reason the only form of knowledge? Or aren't there other forms of knowledge that we can have access to as well? Very much so. And that's why when I talk about the faith-reason connection, I really fudge the word reason out to be reasons or even better warrants, the grounds for which you believe, which may well lie outside formal reason itself.

It may well be intuition. It may well be the Holy Spirit told you so. It may be that your mom and dad explain this to you and mom and dad never tell me a lie.

And so I believe them. So there's actually a whole raft of avenues of knowledge that I think are all plausible in their own ways. And I would never want to contract it to simply formal reason per se.

So I appreciate you giving me a chance to make that more clear. That's what I mean. The 12-year-old in Iowa has probably never formally reasoned about the Christian faith. But she's got lots of reasons, so to speak, in the broad sense of the term, to believe what she believes.

[62 : 38] Yes, please. Over here. I'm just wondering how we can honor the person of the Holy Spirit in light of all this sort of reasoning.

And so it seems like an intellectual, a bit of an intellectual exercise sometimes when you're speaking to someone about your faith. How do we honor the person of the Holy Spirit in all this? So how do we honor the person of the Holy Spirit in our explaining the faith?

It sometimes seems like a kind of intellectual exercise. I think that to characterize it that way sometimes gives a little bit of way about who we may be ourselves.

When I talk about the Christian faith, guess what? It often sounds like an intellectual exercise. That's an occupational hazard and a personality limitation. If I were a warm, likable person, I'd take a different approach.

But if I don't have that tool in the box, I'd have to be rational. And then bring my likable friends along to fill in that part of the missing approach. So I think that instead, the Holy Spirit works through us as we try to love our neighbors.

[63 : 52] And I try to love my literal neighbor by talking to him about how to look after skis, because he's a skiing maniac and he looks after my skis for me a little bit.

And so I bring him over, you know, tracks. No. That was a joke. I don't bring him over tracks. I bring him over wine, because that's what he also likes when we talk about wine.

So when he looks after my skis, I'll bring him a bottle of wine and we'll talk about that and where you can buy it. And so we love each other that way. He knows what I do for a living. And again, you know, if Leo ever wants to know about Christianity, we have him over Christmas time and we'll have a Christian reading, you know, from the Bible and everything.

And then if he wants to know more, we're there. And if we ever get into a conversation that goes beyond, you know, skiing and wine and it gets a little deeper, then I'll be glad to provoke things a little bit.

But what's going to win Leo for the kingdom of God is the Holy Spirit talking to him in language he understands and wants and says, here's life. And Leo takes it. It's not going to be because I win an argument.

[64 : 59] That's for sure. And in fact, I've won lots of arguments and I can't remember a single person at the end saying, boy, I'm convinced. What must I do to be saved? Not once.

You know, that could also be that problem of being warm and friendly. You don't have to work on a little more. Does that make sense? I think we just have to pray about that all the time because the conversation that really matters is not the one between me and my friend.

It's between the Holy Spirit and my friend. Yeah, please. There's two back-to-back there. Yeah. So you said earlier that you identified reasons in identifying meetings why people potentially, potentially, and then you moved off on to a lot of others.

Yes. What about others? Well, I take a whole chapter. In fact, there's four chapters that set this up. That's why I moved off it is that I'd love to quote the book from memory now, but it would take a little more time than we have.

So there are lots of reasons, actually, why. Some of them are intellectual. Some of them are sociological. Some of them are spiritual. And I appreciate you asking me to simply say that there's lots of reasons of different sorts and that one of the most important mistakes we can make is to think that there's only one kind of obstacle.

[66 : 13] Maybe it's just intellectual. So if I marshal the right amount and kind of intellectual arguments, everyone will be converted. Or maybe it's just spiritual. So maybe I should just pray a lot. And then I don't have to read and think.

I'll just pray. And the people who have intellectual problems will now not be ministered to. Or maybe I'll have shiny arguments and I'll pray a lot. But because I'm not warm and friendly, I won't actually be a friend to anybody.

And yet some people are lonely. That's their main problem. And so I try to sort that out, not only in those sort of generic categories, but literally in terms of cultural analysis to look at some of the problems we face in North America at this moment.

Does that help a little bit to get back to your question? Sorry. It's the one called Humble Apologetics. Yes, please.

You mentioned that churches are stuck in the 50s. And I wonder if it's out of the wrong map. I don't know whether we're stuck in the 50s or maybe even much earlier than that, but maybe we're very much in the present.

[67 : 17] Yes, well, someone's picking up on one of my throwaway lines that should have been thrown away before I mentioned it. Fair enough. I'm responsible for what I say.

Doggone it. I said that churches are stuck in the 50s. And I think lots of churches are. I think that the pattern of service is in fact not an 18th century pattern or a 19th century pattern.

It's actually sort of mid-20th century that includes elements of the past. But there have been changes between, say, 1650 or 1850 to 1950, and there haven't been much since then.

Even if there is, in the Anglican context, for instance, the introduction of the Book of Alternative Services, that's more recent than the 1950s. What's that, the 70s? Help me out here.

BAS, the 80s? But of course, by the time it's officially worked its way through the church courts and is published and so on, it's not probably the 80s, right? It's probably actually late 70s in terms of its outlook.

[68 : 16] So there's lots of ways in which various artifacts in church life or the whole feel is from another cultural era. It may be in terms of deference to the pastor, which would be much more typical of Canada in the 1950s than it would be in the first decade of the 21st century.

So different churches are going to be stuck different places, to be sure. I agree with you. I think some of them are stuck further back. Not a lot, though. Not very many in Canada that seem to be stuck much further back than the 1950s.

Even those that congratulate themselves that were just like the New Testament aren't, and historically demonstrably so. Other churches, of course, are trying very hard to catch up.

And when we try to play cultural catch-up, we usually are behind. So that what we call contemporary is probably about 10 or 15 years old. Some of you who work with music will know this in particular, that when we talk about Christian contemporary music, a lot of it's not very contemporary, especially by the time it gets to the congregation.

It's probably the soft pop of about 12 to 15 years ago. It's probably not, in fact, cutting edge. I don't know if that's necessarily bad. It's just that we need to be honest about that.

[69 : 32] What I find in particular the case, though, is decision-making structures in churches strike me as being very much 1950s bourgeois. The people who make the decisions in the church still tend to be male or married to powerful males.

And they are empowered, not because the church has done a spiritual gift inventory, but because of the success they've had in the secular workforce. And they tend to be older, middle-aged guys, and for reasons that aren't entirely clear.

So they still look like a 1950s club, church, in the way decisions actually get made. And since I know Cheryl Chang, I know that that's not entirely true of St. John Shaughnessy, I'm glad to say, among others.

But that's the kind of thing I've looked at as I've looked at churches across the country. Yeah, please. That's a related question. You mentioned that a lot of churches lack what you call the adult intellectual culture.

I was just wondering if you could expand on that a little bit and how you would see that being and maybe some of the things that you feel present. Well, here I'd like to sell another book.

[70 : 45] This book. Just walk away here. If you're interested in this kind of thing, this book, *Evangelical Landscapes, Facing Critical Issues of the Day*, is a book of essays that Baker brought out this fall.

And since I can't remember the first chapter title of my own book, *Are Christians Stupid? Yes, some are. Perpetual Adolescence, The Current Culture of North American Evangelicalism*.

This is a concern of mine that in a lot of ways childish isn't quite the right term. It's actually more adolescent, which is where a lot of us are intellectually and other ways in our churches.

To give you an example of that would be, again, the decision-making processes in church. There are a group of people that function as adults in the church and everybody else is just supposed to take what mom and dad say.

So when it comes to, for instance, hiring a new pastor, who really gets a say in that? Or when it comes to the question of how will the Christian education, the curriculum for the whole church be decided, who gets to say about that?

[71 : 46] What are the structures? In fact, whatever the church says is one thing, but what do they do? How is the church structured to have this be a community of adults? And I would have to say also that a new convert, a relatively new convert that I know who has a lot of higher education came to St. John's, Shaughnessy, and participated in one or two groups and nearly left because of what this person felt to be an almost anti-intellectual culture.

The report to me was, as soon as I raised an unusual question, people weren't hostile. They were always friendly, but nobody responded.

There was no resonance. And it was like I just burped and everyone's discreetly looking away. It's not like I'm expected to do this. And I noticed after a couple of these that no one else ever asked the kinds of questions I was asking.

And fortunately, in the grace of God, this person hooked up with some other people and is happy and we can leave it just that big. But that was a real problem, even in a church as well-educated and as lively as yours.

So I just encourage us to keep thinking about that. What are ways in which we are getting a little too relaxed and maybe a little too complacent about that and need to put some ants in the pants here? Thanks. Yeah, over here and then over here.

[73 : 04] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. On the micro level, we're talking about building a relationship and a community and having the Holy Spirit and that sort of thing. What kind of positive kinds of things do I have for the macro level institutional seeker-sensitive churches and this sort of thing?

Do you see there to be some dissonance there? Well, I think that the question that has to do with being truly seeker-sensitive in helping people find social structures in the church that can enfold them and can present to them the Christian faith in a plausible way, right?

And what happens if you've got a great big church? Is that part of it? Is the size? And that's what I think most church theorists that have some sociological savvy realize we're going right back to John Wesley is that you can't just have a really big successful church.

You've got to have smaller groups in which people can be recognized by face and name and form continuing relationships and that they can keep checking out other Christians and see them week to week and see how real they are.

It's relatively easy for Willow Creek to put on a pretty impressive show. I've enjoyed going to Willow Creek several times and they put on a really good show. And high churches can put on really good shows too because you get a few well-trained professionals and off they go.

[74 : 24] So it looks good. And I'm glad for that kind of quality. Much better than that than going on to some badly trained amateurs who put on a terrible time. I mean, give them the choice. I'd rather go to the people to know what they're doing.

But that's, of course, not the whole Christian life. That's just the front door. That's, in fact, just the windows. And we want to invite people in to be part of the congregation. And that's where I think churches need to look structurally.

How are we organized to help people move from here to here? A lot of churches actually are organized to have a front door of evangelism for those who aren't Christians.

But then, once they are, they have to suddenly shoot up to speed and be just like everybody else who've been there for 20 years. And I would encourage churches to plan for success, to plan for people regularly to be converted and come into the faith and then who will need discipling in an appropriately adult and mediated way.

Our Sunday school has stepped, but often our adult programs aren't. you get in and then, shoom, you're up with everybody else. And Anglican churches particularly suffer from that because, in my experience, Anglican churches are not thoroughly committed to adult Christian education the way some other churches are.

[75 : 37] So that they don't step people along and move them along. That's intellectually, but also in terms of social relationships as well, that you move into groups in which you can be congenially welcomed given where you are in the faith.

Now, come back to me on that because I'm not sure I'm answering your question straight on. Is that okay? Please. Yes, I have a how-to question for you. You spoke about paradox and trust earlier.

My paradox is that to see God and to try to commit to God is a personal decision, the one that only I can make. On the other hand, before I can do that and learn enough about those reasons why, I have to find other people to associate with together, that social thing. and a learning thing. Do you have any tips on how to do that? On how to? On how to choose where you go to find your way to find a decision.

So the question is, the paradox for a lot of us, for all of us, is that I have to make an individual decision for faith, but normally I have to find a community in which to make that kind of decision to sort that through.

[76 : 44] And are there some tips I could offer about how to find that kind of community? There is a kind of cliché in church circles about church shopping and as if to go from church to church is a bad thing.

And I think, well, what's the alternative that people who don't like church shopping are suggesting? Like, mindlessly go to the nearest church or to the one from your denomination?

I mean, what's the alternative? So I think we just need to get away from that locution and talk about the church search. That's appropriate. Let me, with the Holy Spirit, try to figure out what community of people I can serve and be served by.

Where's the kind of appropriate connection for me? Now, maybe in a village there is the only church in town and you've got to make the best of it and everybody does and there's some wonderful learning, terrible learning, that goes on in that kind of situation where you have to get along.

But in Vancouver there are a number of options. And I think that people should take church searching at least as seriously as searching for a new car. A lot of people don't.

[77 : 55] You know, they go to the first dealer, they're not happy, they go home. Really? You still need that car, but they go to the first church, they have a bad time, they go home. Oh, well, I tried that. No, I think that you should, since it's kind of important, at least it's important as a car, you might decide to visit two or three or four places and do some reading and ask people who know the church business like you would ask people in the car business.

I really do think that you can research it the way you'd research any other major decision in your life, like a house or a car or a spouse. You know, there are various kinds of researches you can do to get the goods on this person that you're in love with and sort through.

So I think part of it is the way in which some of us are too easily discouraged in going to church, probably because the pain's pretty deep or the boredom quotient's pretty low, whatever it might be.

I say, no, when you search for religion, at least search for it as seriously as you search for a refrigerator. And I think that there are ways in which you can sort that out. So if you have connections with churches, ask people.

If you hear a speaker who pops off like I do, send them an email and say, okay, I'm going to call you on this. Give me a list of four churches of different sorts that you think are worth visiting in Vancouver.

[79 : 10] I'll be happy to do it and I should be able to do it. And frankly, the pastors of St. John's Shaughnessy I know are prepared to do that too. They would say, this isn't your thing. If you want to look at a Baptist-type church or a Mennonite-type church or a Pentecostal-type church, let me tell you what they are and let me give you some suggestions as to where to find them.

I think you'll find them hospitable that way. If they aren't, tell me. I'll put it on the web. Okay. I'm sure they will. Okay, we've got to have the last one here. Thanks. What about the issue of the commitment in the church?

I find often in St. John's and other places which I've been involved with, you know, it's not something else and a hundred people phone and thirty people show up.

It's a bit frustrating. You expect it to five hundred today? Yes, that's right. The question is, what about commitment? You know, a hundred people tell you they're going to come, thirty show up.

Five hundred people say they're coming to this breakfast, you know, a hundred show up. In the second case, they made a rational choice though. Just, oh, you didn't get that email that was sent around, I guess.

[80 : 15] Don't come. Part of that is very much a cultural thing. I'm excited. I just heard a couple people murmur West Coast, you know. That's a West Coast thing. Maybe that is.

I'm not from the West Coast. I enjoy being here and it would be ungrateful to me to tar the entire West Coast with that brush. People do move here though because they want to do what they want to do.

Right? And that's what the West Coast lifestyle means is that you aren't constrained by family or tradition or community. You get to come here and do what you want to do. That certainly seems to be the governing ethos out here.

I think partly though that with, this is where the adolescent side of us continues to show up. You know, I've committed to teaching a Sunday school class but I don't feel like it because I was out late Saturday night so I'll call the pastor, I'll call the Sunday school director, I just can't come so tough.

Well, I'm kind of used to that with 15 year olds. I don't abide it in 25 year olds let alone 45 year olds. So, let me just say that churches need to exercise discipline.

[81 : 19] They need to exercise discipline like any organization that has integrity. I mean, you can't do that on the job for very long without there being some consequences. Right?

You can't do that at the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club without there being some consequences for your membership. But in the church, oh, we're so afraid of anybody leaving that we just put up with all this nonsense.

I don't think we should. I think we should say here are some of the consequences and think it through so that people will think at the front end about whether to sign up or not and whether to show up or not, whether to take on that kind of responsibility because we are going to hold them to that.

Now, what does that mean? I mean, do we have the church police go to people's homes? You know, you said you're teaching Sunday school, you're not very sick, out of bed, you know. Well, that'd be cool actually, but I might give a whole new face.

St. John Shaughnessy, the serious church. I'm not necessarily recommending that though. But I think part of it has to do again with this kind of adolescent culture we set up in the church that it's okay, it's okay, it's like nervous parents with an adolescent who just at any moment might break for the door and say that's it, screw you, I'm out of here.

[82 : 32] And churches can be like that, they can be so nervous about it. don't even let's think out of■■■■brother cannot be going to the little hole in the world over and say