

Child Theology

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[0 : 00] I don't have any time to waste, I seem to say, that I've had the privilege of many outstanding teachers in my life, some secular, some Christian.

In the case of Dr. Houston, he's unique in the fact that he's been outstanding both in the academic world and in the spiritual world.

And for me, he's been a model ever since my teenage years. And he was known as a radical person in the Brethren tradition, and that he thought that continuing education for Christians might be a good idea.

When I was a student, I had to read his book in order to pass some exams. And I was glad that he wasn't going to give me a test today on the content of his book.

But ever since coming to Vancouver, we have been close friends. He's been a model for me in every aspect of life. And I just want to say, thank you for being here.

[1 : 12] Thank you very much. Well, thank you so much, Ola, for your warm welcome and for all of you being with us today.

If you don't mind, I'll just sit down and relax so it's like a fireside chat. So, of course, Ola and I both started life in our careers as geographers.

So we always were looking at the big landscapes. And he was looking at the physical landscapes. And I was looking at the cultural and historical landscapes.

And so we complemented in that regard. And I suppose one of the advantages of being in this class, you are the explorer's class, which is a wonderful name to give yourselves, especially when many of you are getting into the three score years and ten category, that you're still exploring.

And so this morning, I want to make this our theme of exploring. And as I do so, I think of what Churchill, who was a remarkably wise man, we're appreciating him through some of these new films.

[2 : 46] Churchill was remarkably wise and prescient for his time. And one of his statements was this. And this is the theme of my discussion with you this morning.

The further back we explore, the further forward we shall see more. And that theme of exploring deeply into the back of our lives or into the purposes of God, in contrast to the need for us to see how big is the kingdom of God and the purposes that God has for us, is never more necessary than it is today.

Just this week, two old friends of mine have sent me manuscripts that they want to develop further. And what these Christian evangelical writers are in America concerned about is, will America collapse?

Will it disintegrate? There's a group of Christian brothers who are both moderate, Republican, and Democrat.

[4 : 24] And they have what they call a commission for the integration of America. In other words, how do we prevent disintegration?

When you get a Republican, Texas, saying, our policy is to do everything different from California. Whatever California does, we don't do. And there's a very real threat, as I had dinner with this group when I was there just two weeks ago, that they see the disintegration of America.

Now, in that disintegration, there's also the awareness, and this is why writers like Oz Ganesh and Tom Tannins are writing, is that, is this a decline of Western civilization?

Are we coming to the end of Western civilization? Well, that question has been asked many times in the last century.

[5 : 38] Certainly, we were afraid in England that if America didn't ally and help us in the Second World War, that civilization could very easily have collapsed then.

And the prayer breakfast movement in America started in 1942 when a group of senators and Democrats said, we must get together and pray. On a national level, do we go into the war or do we as isolationists keep out? Because in our hands could well be the fall of our Western way of life. And by God's mercy, as we know, they had the courage to say we must save our Western world. Well, that prescience is something that is as vital today as it was then. And so when you think of all the brilliant minds that have said, are we seeing the rise and fall of yet another empire?

[6 : 55] So Toynbee, the historian who was a devout Christian, so he gives us a Christian perspective on the rise and fall of civilizations. And then there was, of course, non-Christians like Spengler or others more recently who have also all prognosticated, this could be the end.

They're asking the same question. But I think, as I've been asked by Tom Tarrant to critique his manuscript, I'm going to say to him this next week, you know, I think the person who was most prescient about the rise and fall of a civilization was actually George Orwell. For George Orwell wrote a book called Animal Farm in which he saw that the collapse of civilization could be when we have the emotions of an animal.

And he saw that the beastliness of Stalinism and the whole Russian threat as being that kind of Orwellian nightmare that we were facing.

I think more than others have appreciated, what I want to share this morning is if we don't have deep enough emotions, we don't see very far.

[8 : 34] We don't see very far about our own life, about our own backgrounds, personally, as well as collectively.

So where do we start? Well, of course, biblically we start with Adam and Eve. And often we think of Adam and Eve, and this has been taught for generations, centuries, we talk of Adam and Eve as the fall of man.

A very wise man at the beginning of the second century, Aredeus of Leon, said there was no fall of man.

The fall of man is platonic. The philosopher Plotinus, he speaks of the fall of man being the fall into embodiment from being pure spirit.

That's the fall. And the young Augustine, who was influenced by Plotinian thinking to begin with in the early stages of his life, he perpetuated, although later he rescinded, but people forget that he rescinded, that the fall is a Plotinian way of looking at the origin of man.

[10 : 08] It's not Christian, it's not biblical. So what's the biblical message? The biblical message, says Aredeus of Leon, is that Adam and Eve failed to grow up.

They were in the kindergarten, which was the garden, and it was a very special kindergarten, because in that environment, it was a special environment for man to be distinguished from the animals.

And in being distinguished from the animals, it meant that they therefore had to grow to the maturity that they should have reached.

well, they were expelled because they failed to act more than like kids. It's as simple as that. Because God's purpose was that they should fulfill his vision that we're all made as human beings in the image and likeness of God.

it's the Mago Dei that is our goal to fulfill. Adam and Eve failed.

[11 : 32] It's on the cross that it was fulfilled. That when Christ died and said, it is finished, what was finished?

What was finished was the perfection of God's purpose that man should be made in his image and likeness. And so, it's by the cross and not through the garden that the Mago Dei has been now fulfilled in Christ.

Just two weeks ago, I was at Green College for a very interesting colloquium. And this is where, of course, Olive was president for some years of Green College.

So, it's a very special environment. And these scholars were gathered together and they were doing something that you might think would be totally irrelevant to your way of life.

What they were discussing was, was the evolution of man in the context of the evolution of his emotions. and, uh, it's just been announced this spring, I think it was in March, that in the Transvaal, some archaeologists of, uh, uh, of the Paralthic origins of man had discovered in a new cave called

Bright Star, in that cave, they discovered a new species of early man, Homo Eno.

[13 : 21] And the significance about Homo Homo Eno was that these Christian scholars who were there had been in discussion with secular archaeologists who thought that Christians were really quite wacky.

and they were pointing out something that they themselves had never studied. Uh, prehistoric archaeologists have never studied the evolution of emotions.

They've studied the evolution of the brain, the evolution of the, uh, of the framework of, uh, the bone structure of man, but they've never studied his emotions.

And here was this group of Christians who were now saying, we want to explore the beginning of the, the emotions. And what were they finding? They were finding that in this most primitive, and we don't know whether, uh, he was contemporary with Homo sapiens further up in the Rift Valley of East Africa, say, 40, 60,000 BC, the, the, the age doesn't matter, it's just, where did it start? that man evolved from the animals. And, uh, what they discovered with Homo Eno was that he dug deep pits in order to preserve their ancestry.

[14 : 52] Why did they do that? With the most primitive of tools, of digging down in the clay of these, of this cave, to bury their ancestors?

Gratitude. That was probably the first human emotion. Gratitude. And we can see how, in, for example, much more sophisticated later cultures, like, uh, the Chinese and the Japanese, it's the reverence of the ancestry that's very important.

So deep-rooted is this primary emotion of gratitude. Well, it so happens that I'm working on a book with a, uh, uh, uh, a neuroscientist in, uh, Washington, uh, Ted George, and it's called, uh, Freedom from Fear to Love.

And so he asked me, as we dialogue together through the book, Jim, what's the origin of fear? Oh, I said, well, I've done a bit of homework on this, and I think the origin of fear is what happened with Homo sapiens further north in the Rift Valley of East Africa.

And, uh, what was that? Well, the origin of fear is when you're competitive and not collaborative.

And so, in the lost savannah of the Rift Valley of East Africa, uh, where there's plenty of small gain, uh, and the waterholes where they congregated, it's very easy to be a single hunter.

[16 : 44] But if you're a single hunter and you're therefore competitive, then you're originate fear with each other. It's the story of the Lord of the Flies in, uh, in William Golding's novel that every schoolboy reads.

Um, we're afraid of us. and, uh, uh, uh, with that competitive spirit that Homo sapiens had, I suspect that they were also the origin of language, of speech.

Because speech is, again, um, articulation of the self to the other. Now, further north, on the edge of the great ice sheets between, uh, Eastern Europe right through to Siberia, on the edge of the ice sheets were huge animals.

And no single hunter could ever kill them. It had to be collaboration. and so Neanderthal man is the other origin of man and there the Neanderthals were collaborative.

They had to be. And, uh, we have, an archaeologist, again, have discovered the bones of a dozen or more of these hunters and they had, uh, bone damage in their legs either by falling into a crevasse or by, uh, being injured by the goring of a, one of these, uh, big beasts with their horns and there they are helpless and yet they survive for nine, ten years.

[18 : 36] Who fed them? Tend to love and care. There was the evolution of love. There was the awareness that I'm for the other as the neighbor should be, I should be to my neighbor.

othering is what forces community. Now, it's also very interesting that the origin of music is probably with Neanderthal man.

And so, in the small, uh, wing of, uh, of a bird, there is the primitive flute that is at least 40,000 years B.C.

and this may well be the origin of music. And of course, music produces harmony. Harmony is appreciated by community.

So, there is perhaps the origin of another form of communication, not language, but music. see how you put the little bits of the jigsaw together and you get this.

[19 : 45] Well, now what happened was that the east-west axis across Euroasia and the north-south axis through Africa from the Rift Valley create an intersection in the Middle East.

And there you get the crossbreeding of Neanderthals and Homo sapiens. And in that crossbreeding, there's a new development that we begin to see in the primitive caves of the south of France, like Lascaux, but also in the Cantabrian mountains in Spain, at Altamira. And I was privileged, had no idea how relevant it might be for later in my life. I was invited to the first Quaternary Congress to explore the painted caves of Altamira in 1945.

So that now fits together at the end of my life with things that I was not, I was just curious about these caves at that time.

But what are they pointing out? And it's a French, he's internationally renowned, he's the top scholar, I've forgotten his name now, but he's the top French scholar, and he said with the heemans, primitive caveman that painted these drawings had a strong sense of transcendence, a strong sense of the presence of God, or the gods.

[21 : 26] so here's a new dimension, transcendence. And so you have this other component that is now developing, and of course it's in this intersection of these two breeds, races of man, that in the Middle East we have the growth of transcendence.

We think of, for example, how profoundly significant, the afterlife becomes an Egyptian civilization. Or we think of the significance of the afterlife as it developed with the Canaanites and also the Babylonians, but before that with the ancient civilization of the Euphrates Delta.

As a result of these developments then, there's now a deeper sense of worship, of the importance of praise and worship as a primitive emotion.

So you have gratitude, you have love, you have worship. These are primary emotions for Homo Sepiates.

And so what I want to conclude with before we have discussion on all of this is what I'm now exploring and saying, yes, but our human emotions are not the same as Christian emotions.

[23 : 14] So what are Christian emotions that are different from natural human emotions? I suggest that there's a tapestry of seven distinctive Christian emotions.

The first one is praise. The whole purpose of the cosmos was the praise of God. All creatures were there to be expressive of praise.

And so in Psalms 94 through to 100 to 103, 104, these praise psalms are saying that the mountains and the seas and the trees that clap their hands, they're all praising God.

All creatures, great and small, we sometimes think, are in the act of praise. and certainly Homo Sapiens is dignified to be the unique praiser of God.

So praise is number one. What is God's emotion that he shares with us that is primary?

[24 : 39] Well, we think of love as being a primary thing that God love is of God, yes, but human love has 100 faces. So what is there about God's love that is particularly divine?

And I think we have to say it's compassionate love. love. It's the John 3, 16 theme that for God so was compassionate for the world that he gave his only begotten son.

And so the compassionate love of God is number seven. That's the first and that's the last. Now, weaving together between God's love, between God's emotion of compassion and our response of praise, how do we weave the tapestry together?

Well, what is absolutely essential in the evolution of the child is basic trust. A small child, when his brain is being shaped at three and a half, until then it's the brain that's the only organ of the body that is unprepared for life.

All the rest of the body is ready to live and grow, but it's only when a child begins to have trust to the mother and the father figures, that basic trust then is nurtured.

[26 : 20] And our whole personality, for the rest of our life, is either distorted by the wounds of basic trust, or enriched and fearless because of basic trust.

Think of it. As I'm writing my memoirs now, I trace back and I realize I was blessed to have basic trust in my parents.

When you have basic trust as a child, you can be creative, you can be venturesome, you can have a lot of humor in your life because there's no fear.

But if you're wounded with basic trust, your life is crippled by fear. And you try and compensate for it, do all sorts of things, but your whole personality is distorted by it, by that compensatory wound that you had.

So, that's why hope is the offspring of basic trust. So, the second emotion for the Christian is, seeing then we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech, says the apostle.

[27 : 47] And so, it's that basic trust that God gives to us, that gives us hope, we trust him. And without that faith, it is impossible to please God.

You might say, it's without basic trust, a child cannot relate appropriately to their parents. It's the same thing. Hope. What's the third?

Gratitude. Now we come back to Homo Eno that had gratitude for the ancestry. But we have gratitude to God.

And so, what gives us longevity is gratitude. I mean, when people say, how are you living now in your 96th year? Well, I wake up every morning and say, thank you, Lord.

you give me another day. It's full of gratitude that enables you to continue going on living. If I have no gratitude, I wilt and I just want to just disappear.

[28 : 58] So gratitude is very important for all of this. grace. And then, of course, we live graceful lives.

we're gifted to have the grace of God. And the grace of God is what removes all our bad conscience.

That, as Bernard of Clairvaux said, that John, the disciple, was leading on the breasts of Jesus, which is a place of intimacy with the Son through the Father.

and the spirit in the upper room in the Lord's prayer. The breast of grace is the embrace of the beloved.

He embraces us as he embraced the prodigal. It's all grace. And, of course, mercy is simply daily grace.

[30 : 04] Grace is comprehensive for all of life. Mercy is daily forgiveness, daily acceptance, daily intimacy with our beloved.

And then, of course, the result that we have of that is love. Love. Of course, we want to love him. And, of course, we love him because of his initiative that he first loved us.

So, we love him. and so, then, we conclude and realize that what is the result of the sixth emotion of his abundant mercy, his loving kindness, his compassionate love.

Then, the seventh, what's the seventh emotion? It's joy. If this morning, we don't go from here with joy, I fail to communicate.

Joy is who for the joy that was set before him during the cross. So, joy bears the scar of the cross.

[31 : 33] And, of course, all our joy in life is the result of the redemption of suffering. A mother has acute pain before she gives birth, but the joy of a child transcends the suffering of the birthing process.

what is true of a mother is true of each of us throughout our life. That it's joy, joy, joy.

That's the end of the road. Well, as we think of these things, how do we conclude?

I haven't given you a scripture this morning, but go home and meditate on Psalm 139. that the God who purposed for you and I and our unique selves to be who I am and you are determined this before we were ever conceived by our mother's womb.

God and so we have this remarkable comprehension of the beginning and the end all embraced and the fatherhood of God and the motherhood of God that embraces us in that eternal embrace.

[33 : 20] Now, the last few verses of this Psalm troubled people to say, but all this intrusion about hating one's enemies, about destruction of the enemy, why does that come into the picture?

And the story is the enemy is the one who would take us from the arms of our beloved Lord and Savior. and so we have to hate that which would destroy our intimacy with God.

And so perhaps it's a new way of thinking for us that the wicked around us are those who would hinder our intimacy with the lover of our souls.

That's who the enemy is. so Lord, keep me safe. Keep me close to you. Thank you very much.

Thank you. Thank you.