

A Secular Age – book review

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[0 : 00] These are famous words. Sometimes, in the past, we've sang these words, usually during communion services.

I just love these words, love to sing them, love to say them. And by Herbert, Come my way, my truth, my life.

Such a way as gives us breath, such a truth as ends all strife, such a life as killeth death.

Poets do wondrous things with words, don't they? Those are great words, simple and rich and beautiful. I am the way, the truth, and the life, says Jesus of Nazareth, pointing out the obvious here.

And so Herbert begins with those words and asks this one to approach him. Come. Maybe an act will be apocalypse. Come, Lord Jesus, I don't know.

[1 : 05] A poem, a work of art, founded in, better founded, on belief. If you will, sourced by belief.

It is also, obviously, an act of faith. That's just not a casual compliment or something religious to say about this particular poem.

It's not an argument, for instance. It's an act of faith. Obviously, there's a yearning in it. A yearning for the presence of someone. Perhaps a desire for, I think, an inward freedom, what the mystics sometimes call an interior freedom.

Or a kind of flourishing in that mode. Come, Lord Jesus, give to me an interior freedom in knowing what you've done for me.

A freedom which has decisively, apparently, overcome strife and death. Such a truth as ends all strife. Which kills death, such a life.

[2 : 12] Or lives in a certain expectation that it will be so. Or wants to live so more and more. So a Christian believer prays.

Notice this poem is without, it is without hesitancy. Hesitancy. It is without any kind of, I can't see it, any kind of doubt. There's no doubt there.

This is, again, an act of faith. Not an act which expresses anything lesser. Nothing, apparently, separates, if you will, or buffers Herbert from his Lord.

Only there is, indeed, a waking. A kind of porous, open, believing, waking. Come, my way, my truth, my life.

Not so many modern poets, and you can discuss how modern, maybe back 150 years or so, who live often without any kind of certain expectation.

[3 : 26] Sometimes they are proud of their uncertainty. Some lament not possessing any certainty or any certain expectation.

And again, others rejoice in having been free from such what they might call shackles of certainty. They found that certainty oppressive. And yet, these modern poets, again, in contrast to Herbert, I would think, they want to write something, write something beautiful, perhaps beautiful, poets usually do, and they wish to, usually poets do, they want to instruct us.

In fact, these poets, if I may say, and here I begin to reflect, I begin to approach a Charles Taylor argument.

These poets, these modern poets, live off of the believers, and they form their identity largely in describing what they are not.

Strange. You give examples from all over the literary tradition. Our childhood used to know, says Hardy, hoping it might be so, talking about a life of faith, the sea of faith, more famously from Arnold over the beach, the sea of faith was once, was once, over now, applied, strongly applied, so he goes on to say, again, these poets live off the believers and form their identity largely, sometimes totally maybe, in describing what they are not.

[5 : 12] but, we begin today, at least when we pray, putting aside ambiguous commitments, which is really a form of unbelief, and we join with our brother in Christ, George Herbert, in an act of faith.

Because the literature in the Hebrew says, you'll recall, that those who come to God must believe that he exists, put aside ambiguous commitments, if they're there at all.

Those who come to God must believe that he exists, and he rewards them that earnestly seek him.

So we're going to pray with a believer. Who else would you pray with before we begin?

So let's close our eyes and concentrate our minds on the invisible presence, the transcendent mind, who is with us this morning, and pray in these words.

Come, my way, our way, my truth, my life, such a way as gives us breath, such a truth as ends all strike, such a life as kills death.

[6 : 27] Amen. So let me preface, preface, your end of it. I mean, it just, I don't know if you all will be able to see this, but it's some, some sense, we'll move that as we go along, some sense.

Oh, good. Someone here knows how machines work. This, by the way, is the book. In case I thought I was just, it's a big book, rather heavy.

Here it is. Again, the letter to the Hebrews, as we mentioned a moment ago, we're now in an introduction. The letter to the Hebrews speaks, I think, rather strangely, doesn't it?

I think it's Hebrews 11, of seeing him who is invisible. There's a statement of, in a sense, common sense language, how transcendence works.

You see him who is invisible. Faith possesses this attribute, apparently, this power. Faith claims to see, if you will, the real framework in which we live.

[7 : 52] A framework, which at least implicitly claims authority, more than implicitly, even a demanding authority, a framework is generally a form which houses something, it makes a house possible, it's a condition that makes a house possible.

The form, we'll call it, may be, or may not be, a subject of our intention. When it is a subject of our intention, it is for a while, perhaps in a sense, not our framework in some sense.

It's sort of suspended for a moment. Or some other framework, perhaps very briefly intrudes, or again, perhaps we then, when looking again at our framework, occupy, and choose to occupy, a kind of nowhere.

The place without framework, or without a foundation. It might be that. Charles Taylor, and I hope I'm not misrepresenting here, or misusing him here, because he uses this language in a slightly another context.

But he might call this last possibility the stance of the buffered self. This is a language that Dr. Taylor uses much in this book.

[9 : 08] The stance of the buffered self, even a hyper-buffered self in this context. Or the stance of a self not porous, not open to any claim of living in a framework at all.

A mind, and I say this without prejudice to such a stance, a mind which is in a kind of void. There may be such a stance. It may be a real possibility.

A place without framework. A place which almost claims to see through everything. It doesn't see. It sees through everything. And it's a kind of place without any kind of permanent housing.

Anything just occupies different temporary housings. It's without a framework. It might claim this stance a kind of bravery, a heroic self-regard.

That is to say, it might, one of Dr. Taylor's words, it might valorize itself with such commendation. He doesn't quote each of Dr. Taylor in this regard, but I think he could have.

[10 : 15] We knowers is Nietzsche's. I think that's a powerful rhetorical thing to say. We knowers. That's who moderns are.

Unconnected to any commanding transcendence. Any commanding framework. As the writer of the Hebrews tells us, we do live in a context, an invisible framework, context of God.

It is, if it is to be understood with maturity, it is in fact more than just the seven beliefs of this stance, it is a crucial sensibility, which I think we can safely say dominates our whole culture.

It is at the dynamic center, if you will, of the reigning sensibility of our time. and as such, perhaps ironically, it has become a framework in which we live.

However, this goes to Dr. Taylor's conclusion, which introductions often contain where the author is going and a touch of, a look at, a conclusion, if the book is an argument, so to speak.

[11 : 27] Rarely, this, this modern sensibility, rarely is it attended to, strangely enough, Dr. Taylor claims, rarely is it attended to critically.

Charles Taylor attends to it with rare critical power, this view of the world, and finds it most wanting. the closed world structures, he formally calls them.

Don't let that put you off. It's everywhere around us. Closed world structures, or humanism, as it's usually called, is a world of, and I'm quoting Dr. Taylor here, it's a world of, quote, unchallenged axioms, rather than unshakable arguments.

He continues relying on, in fact, shaky assumptions. And then he says, astonishingly, surviving generally because they escape examination in a climate in which they are taken as the undeniable framework for any argument.

It's one of his major conclusions in this book. It's a book of about 800 pages. He says that on page 591. I remember when I read that, I remember where I was sitting, and I shook my head.

[12:55] I went back and started a few paragraphs earlier, which I know I missed something. Dr. Taylor looks at the reigning sensibility, the reigning argument, for all the understood, the unchallenged worldview for many of our time, certainly amongst the least.

And again, I'm going to say those words one more time. The closed world structures of humanism is a world of unchallenged axioms, rather than unshakable arguments, relying on shaky assumptions, surviving generally because they escape examination in a climate in which they are taken as the undeniable framework for any argument.

Or, what can you say about that? The emperor of late modernity has no clothes. It thinks it does, but it has none.

Or better, it was C.S. Lewis, I thought of him when I pondered that quote, still do, it was C.S. Lewis who said that among the flippant, the joke is always assumed from the made.

In our culture, says Charles Taylor, he doesn't quote Lewis here, he never quotes Lewis, he says the argument is assumed from the made, but it hasn't. Or if it has, it has failed.

[14:16] Taylor sees, if you will, an invisible idol and seeks, in so many words here, in this massive book, to tear it down. There, again, is, there's an introduction to a book review, and there is Dr. Taylor's, his major central conclusion in this book.

So now, a brief, I'll just start off now by a brief little biography of Dr. Taylor, for those of you who don't know him, and then we'll have a look at some of the themes of this book, *A Secular Age*, its title.

Charles Taylor, has everyone heard of Dr. Charles Taylor, or not heard of him? He's sort of known, sort of not known. Charles Taylor is a Canadian, he's a Quebecois, a Montrealer, he is a professional philosopher, that's how he earns his living.

He has taught at McGill and Oxford, and he is, safe to say, highly regarded in philosophical circles, and those who disagree with his worldview, highly regard him.

He's a first-rate mind. When he speaks, he is listened to. His best-known book is, or may be, *Sources of the Self*, perhaps you've seen that on people's shelves or libraries, and is published by Harvard, as is *A Secular Age* by Harvard.

[15:42] He is also what is often called these days, he's a public intellectual. He is, or he has been, I'm not sure if it's a growing concern, a member of the two-person commission, inquiring into reasonable accommodation issues in Quebec.

In that regard, you may have seen him, or heard of him in the media play. His career, I'm sure he would agree, peaked as Regent College's language for a few years back.

The CBC, our public broadcaster, when it goes a bit highbrow, often enough will turn to Professor Teatter on occasion on these for comment.

Something should be said in this regard. Labels are a bit treacherous and one hesitates to throw them around, but we need perhaps some sort of orientation here.

I would think Mr. Taylor is of the high liberal Catholic tradition in the faith. He's a liberal Roman Catholic. I think he practices Benedictine spiritual well.

[16:49] They are vaguely remembered here in that point. he is the most recent recipient of the Templeton Prize, a prestigious award for work in the area of science and religion.

Much of a secular age apparently is based upon his Gifford lectures for 1999. And I think, again, I can say with some confidence he is a real gentleman, a scholarly gentleman.

If you heard him deliver the Lang lectures, or some of them, or perhaps you've heard them elsewhere, he seems to me to just exemplify intellectual integrity and fairness.

It's a delight to hear him speak. Perhaps those are sadly rare virtues. He has written a book worth attention, I would think, and even I would think much attention.

I won't say this again, I just think this is an astonishing book. This might be a book that's famous 500 years from now, or maybe it'll be forgotten.

[17 : 51] I think this is a world-changing book. Maybe I'm overreacting. This book struck me as astonishing. I'll leave it at that.

I hate it going on and on. The business of this book speaks, it is a big book, if you saw it there, the business of this book speaks to the conviction of our author that our modern western world, we, the inheritors of what he calls western Latin Christendom, live in an immensely involved, complicated historical narrative.

Well, so what? Is that not a kind of banal cliché, you might think? And some might ask that question. Mr. Taylor answers and seeks to demonstrate that we in fact, even including especially western elites, in fact, believe no such thing.

He claims that we live under a simplistic, naive, even incredible narrative, which upon investigation simply evaporates.

or perhaps better, we live under a crude polemic, a crude polemic posing as history. That's what he thinks. We are under the domination of a crude polemic.

[19 : 16] It dominates sophisticated elite circles and is filtered through our entire culture. He argues in this book that it's nonsense. A step back here, in the year 1500 AD, and this is right from Dr. Taylor's book, in the year 1500 AD, most people, nearly all people, with rare exceptions, some amongst elites, with rare exceptions, believed in God.

This reception of transcendence was total. The cosmos, as created order, spoke of God the creator. The state, whatever form it took, was God, or transcendence authorized.

The world around us was enchanted, more or less, different forms of enchantment. Perhaps spirits or presences, good or evil, were believed more or less to be about us.

One thinks of Luther's throwing his knee well at the devil. Now, in the year 2000 CE, the Common Era, this is all simply transformed.

It has been transformed. The cosmos is now a universe subject to scientific investigation. States find authorization, perhaps in violence or motors or something decidedly un-supernatural.

[20 : 38] The world is awash, not in spirits. I'm generalizing, trying to be in short form here. The world is awash, not in spirits, deny, nasty, or otherwise, but in, with apologies, give them, psychologists, scientists, psychiatrists, and other explainers, but not other folks.

We have explainers in the world who tell us why the world around us is the way it is. We are indeed, again to quote B.J., we are knowers. We knowers.

Certainly, this is a major theme in Dr. Taylor's book, but sort of holds it all together. I'll just mention it briefly, really. There is one thing, perhaps a bit hidden, not often noticed, that unites these two worlds, the world of 1500 and the world of 2000 in Latin and Christendom.

Both wanted, both of these worlds, both desired, both were challenged by the desire for human flourishing. That's what we can safely say was true of both worlds, Dr. Taylor argues.

The humanist story, the closed world structure story of the world here, so described, which Mr. Taylor finds incredible, is what he calls, and this turns to his argument as to why he finds it incredible, he calls it a narrative of subtraction.

[22 : 05] A narrative of subtraction. On this view, a review here simply cannot do justice to the texture, the detail, and the depth of the argument, but I'll just press on with it in overview.

On this humanist view, a power called science removed the need for creator by displaying a self-sufficient universe or a system, explaining and removing any need for a creator.

Over time, he began to disappear. Deism is especially important here in historical terms. Dr. Taylor talks a lot about deism and its impact on our culture.

Hardly is it a caricature to say that when deism excluded God from action in the world, it was found easy, not much later, to dismiss him altogether.

Like an old servant in the mansion, no longer useful anywhere. So they brought some foot aside.

Just an aside here, mechanism became so popular that the economic life of the world was seen as mechanism, Adam Smith and others.

[23 : 16] And we soon submitted as a culture to a marketplace where justice and perhaps a kind of personalism are always found problematic, relegated to at best family and extended family.

There are consequences to excluding God from the world. Mainly socialism at its best is a desire for a return to some sort of personalism in the marketplace, us.

We're tired of mechanism that's too scary. Nevertheless, the revolution in the state revealed that man was the legitimator of the state. Man legitimates the state, not God.

God again became obsolete here. And his retreat became a route, if you will, as people looked at imminent explanations for all that transpires around us on a daily basis.

So cosmos, the big picture of where we are, the state, the thing that governs our lives, and these imminent powers around us have all been secularized. God just, he's there, he's there as an ornament, but we don't take it seriously when he's mentioned.

[24 : 24] The politician ends his speech with some deity that he believes or she believes in, bless you, and you're sure to think what deity they think of.

This story has been told so often, this telescope narrative of 500 years of history, that it has become natural, easy, even second nature to nod in agreement.

I must say every time I think through it that way, I think that's kind of what I believe. I've heard that so often. It's in the air we breathe. We grow up with it. This is Western hands, or the North Atlantic world, as Dr.

Taylor calls it. It's the prime narrative of this world. It is a very pleasing story. There are varieties of it all over the place.

Even there are varieties of it told by Protestants about Catholics, but again, let that pass. But it essentially belongs, this narrative, to the humanists, to those who believe in the closed world system.

[25 : 27] It is their big weapon, if you will, against any and all transcendent centered views of what life is all about. the real story of the world, which just makes all that other stuff incredible.

There he is. Well, at the street level, it comes down to us in phrases like, well, we're past all that that you religious people do. All meaning and purpose is generated by transcendence, as generated by transcendence, is simply God.

Simply gone. Again, this is the subtraction theory. There it is. There are variations, again, on the subtraction theory, indeed.

And this is most crucial. All see the, quote, fading of God, the fading of God, causing us to look afresh for alternative possible reference points for fullness.

fullness. The fullness that moderns want, as the people in the year 1500, has not gone away.

People still want a life of fullness. And again, there's a crucial quote from Dr.

[26 : 43] Taylor. All of these subtraction theories, how God disappeared from our culture, they see the fading. It almost reminds me, Martin Duber talked about the eclipse of God.

The fading of God causes us to look afresh for alternative possible reference points for fullness.

And this is the only place in the book, I think, where our author, our gentlemanly scholarly author, comes near to sarcasm.

He says, quote, as though these, these possible reference points for meaning, for fullness, quote again, as though they were already there, just waiting to be invited in.

They're just there. After you subtract away all those bad things, you can invite in other sources of other places where one might find fullness.

This is perhaps the very heart of, borrowing words from Mr. Dawkins, I do, not Dr. Taylor, this is perhaps the heart of the humanist delusion.

[27 : 58] Deep, sustaining, viable, over-time sources of meaning are not found easily. Where do they come from, Dr. Taylor wonders throughout this whole book.

This narrative, to go back to the narrative, this narrative of subtraction, as Dr. Taylor calls it, is a scandal and is due for deconstruction. It's a modern world.

The mechanistic science of the 17th century was not seen as threatening to God at all, really. It was to the enchanted universe and magic a threat.

And aside here, remember that C.S. Lewis always suspected a strong family resemblance between science and magic. I don't know who has ever worked out that theory in thoroughness.

Some of you in discussion time can fill in some gaps there. Dr. Taylor says, quote, there were Christian motives for going the route of disenchantment.

[28 : 57] Darwin, he says, was not even on the horizon in the 18th century, and there was much disenchanting of the world going on then for sure. And Mr.

Taylor notes, my language, not his, for purposes of incisiveness in time, he notes that Puritans, around, and not around, at 1640, removed a king's head from his shoulders.

Before, we know, French secular revolutionaries did the same to another king. Rebellion may involve rebellion against churches, indeed, but it may be affected, quote, by other church structures, Dr. Taylor says.

A desire for human flourishing, which is perhaps modernity's most admirable feature, was generated, says Dr. Taylor, with great argument to back it up.

Was generated, could only be generated, in fact, by Christian sources. That's where they came from. Where does the desire for flourishing come from?

[30 : 02] I would say even more strongly, why is it even regarded by humans as a possibility that we might flourish? Here is Dr. Taylor's answer, again, with much detailed, textured, brilliant argument.

Here is his conclusion. The desire to internalize Christian discipline, seen in Catholic mysticism, in different forms of Catholic reform, in puritan spirituality, and what Dr.

Taylor calls a bit mischievously, I'm sure, on purpose, he calls the policing desires of Geneva, let us make saints, that is, to the glory of God, Dr. Taylor contends, has been immensely successful, and the success has been lost sight of, in fact.

The great achievements of modernity, Dr. Taylor likes modernity in many ways, he thinks the great achievements that we could detail have been, in fact, caused by elements of Christian reform, Christian spirit equality.

Better, its genealogy has been forgotten and replaced by, perhaps hijacked, by a self-congratulatory humanism, which rests, again, in a subtraction theory, which simply is without intellectual substance, is without historical substance, it stands upon nothing.

[31 : 32] Mr. Taylor, again, I've hasten to add, is no mere reactionary, he likes much that's in modernity. It is this story from his days, 1500 to 2000, deeply complex, cross-pressured, is one of his favorite terms, which I find very helpful.

History is very complicated. It is complex, cross-pressured, competing good impulses clashing, experiments and counter-experiments are there all the time, and they bewilder the inquirer into this rich period.

The unexamined narrative of we're past religion, is what he talks about here. But the narrative of humanist triumph, again, simply won't do.

And our author contends, and I find this remarkable, our remarkable term in his argument, that the recent history of these closed world systems, is revealing, or is, if you will, a revelation, of deep contradictions within humanism.

Or as Dr. Taylor puts it, humanism has gone supernova. We are now living, he says, quote, we are now living in a spiritual supernova, a kind of galloping pluralism on the spiritual plane, quote, quote.

[33 : 02] Mr. Taylor would not be surprised, he would tell us not to be surprised, if a bishop, for instance, wrote a book called Many Mansions. Many, many places to go to find one's transcendence satisfied.

Remember the drunk horseman who leapt on his horse and rode off in all directions, so we're doing now. So goes it in our culture. Sometimes it even happens in churches, often in your neighbor's life, life, this supernova of humanism.

A step back again, this is the first book I've read by a Christian which asks its reader, if the reader self-designates, not as a Christian, but as an unbeliever, ask the unbeliever to mature, to mature in their unbelief.

Dr. Taylor is a very thoughtful man, he goes slow. Okay, you're an unbeliever, please mature in your unbelief, he says. This may be, I don't know, the ultimate step in pre-evangelism.

Become a smart unbeliever before anything happens. If there ever was one critique, Dr. Taylor continues this argument of the supernovae, if there's such a word, of humanism.

[34 : 17] If there ever was one critique of Christianity offered by humanism, there is no longer. One form of humanism, I would call it, not Dr. Taylor, soft humanism, sees Christianity in every causing conflict, don't we know that it has in the past, because of its absolutist claim.

There's an old charge made against us. You've met this at street level talk, you know, what about the crusades, the Thirty Years' War, the wars of religion, or whatever. What elites fought over, say, in the 18th century is now street wisdom in our time.

And Dr. Taylor's capacity for articulating these shifts in a culture seems to be remarkable. This form of closed world system is, you might be, I would associate it, say, with Voltaire, maybe with Edward Gibbon, a great historian of the 18th century.

Just an aside, he deconstructs and it seems to me devastates the work of Edward Gibbon on the Christians. He shows that there is zero substance to anything that Gibbon ever says about the Christians.

Never gets within hailing distance of discussing what they believe. He sneers and he sneers and he sneers and the sneering wins the day. There is no argument in Gibbon.

[35 : 36] This is what Taylor argues, I think, brilliantly and convincingly. There is no argument there. Nietzsche, of course, accuses the Christian ethos, on the other hand, of attempting to repress humanity's natural need, certainly the natural need of some elites within humanity, of repressing our natural need for violence.

A totally contradictory argument from the humanist camp aimed at the Christians. For real human flourishing, according to Nietzsche, it must include the iron man of Nietzsche's vision, a man of steel, not afraid of violence.

The humanist critique of Christianity is various and frequently it is totally contradictory, another way in which it has gone supernova. It's all over the map.

Simply put, the humanist tradition must ask itself from whence comes our meaning in life, our desire for flourishing, our values.

Are they convincingly seen as, are they convincingly seen as appearing from simply nowhere? there? Are imminent sources proving to be satisfying, convincing, powerful?

[36 : 57] Imminent. Dr. Taylor spends a lot of time thinking about how it might be possible for there to be imminent sources of meaning. Are there sources of meaning which are imminent?

This is now everywhere assumed in our time. Some people tell us, this is a Taylor aside, I like it very much, that they are not religious. You've heard that. In the same way Dr. Taylor says as they tell us that they don't like elements.

But that usually means they don't like organized religion. The modern does seek types of transcendence. This is so obvious, but it needs to be hammered home and made clear to our consciousness about where we are at our time in history.

We seek transcendence, modern seek transcendence in nature, music, the arts generally, and our modicism. Sometimes with Nietzsche they seek it in violence. Violence for its own sake.

Indeed, Dr. Taylor is surely right. Humanism has gone supernova. It seeks God's substitutes everywhere. Humanists must accept this and converse about this openly and freely.

[38 : 10] Remember Dr. Taylor saying in his Lang lectures that of all the people in our culture, the worst conversationalists are people who call themselves humanists. They usually just sneer and keep on sneering.

We're back religion. Get over it. That's what all they have to say to us frequently. It is interesting, perhaps instructive, that the reflective, clear, heavy humanists and the Christian have much to talk about.

This is one of the urgent messages of this brilliant book it seems to me. Quote, we both emerge from the same long process of reform in Latin Christendom.

Again, we emerge not from mere getting rid of former errors. The subtraction theory is nonsense. This leads to another theme in the book which I would think is very insightful.

Taylor's theme of fragility more briefly here. Modern people, Christians, some humanists, usually more humanists, celebrate pluralism.

[39 : 18] They celebrate many present everywhere. So does our author. But he registers doubts, complications, he notes. Again, he likes to note cross pressures.

First, he notes, and I find this very helpful, we do look back condescendingly, he says, on the intolerance of earlier ages, Mr. Taylor says, as long, quote, as long as the common good, the common real, he calls it, was bound up in collective rights, devotions, allegiances, it couldn't be seen just as the individual's own business that he bred rank, even less that he blasphemed or tried to desecrate the right.

There was an immense common motivation to bring him back into line. some of the reasons, Dr. Taylor tries to get out, why our Christian ancestors used to persecute people, we don't hide from that anymore, we Christians, we did, our tradition did.

It's because of the deep unity and one-textured nature of the kind of culture they wanted to live in. Dr. Taylor says, don't be condescending about it. We want many of those virtues ourselves. Some see such virtue in unity and surely that is a real good that some moderns, again, have attempted its restoration. You think the Russian revolution wanted, you know, the peasant farmer who had two cows who was called a capitalist heretic and sent off to a socialist camp where he couldn't death usually.

[40 : 51] They wanted a unified society. There was some good in the madness that drove them. And there are projects in modernity which keep repeating this air.

Dr. Taylor wants us to note them intelligently. And yet we don't really see doing any real alternative to liberalism, to pluralism that is, and we probably should not seek one.

I'm sure that he's right about this. And yet belief, when over against others who believe differently feels ill-secured, as it often does, we experience this as fragility in our own communities.

There are others there, not easily despised, near, at work, at play, at school, others we know who believe otherwise than ourselves. Every day we Christians live at that time.

Perhaps, Dr. Taylor largely says this, I'm saying this from memory, but this is the kind of thing that he's brilliant at seeing. Perhaps evangelical Protestantism, for instance, has internalized modernity's ethos of choosing and benefits thereby.

[42 : 01] We're good at it, we evangelicals. Or perhaps this author would say, in part, we should see ourselves as authors of much that's in modernity. There are cross currents at work in this history, and he sees them, it seems to me, with an eagle eye.

We're both victims of modernity, but we, especially in our tradition, we've probably done much to create it. What do you choose to believe? That's high in our tradition, isn't it? It would have been a bit foreign to Christians two centuries ago.

You choose to believe? Who are you? Some sort of God? You stand outside all frameworks, and choose which one you're going to stand inside of? There you go.

But we might ask ourselves as Christians how well we are doing within pluralism. Dr. Taylor is not merely attacking the humanist tradition. He has nasty creative intelligence to say about creative critique, intelligently stated about the Christian faith.

This book exemplifies for me one of the reasons I loved it as I first read it through patient, thoughtful conversation with unbelief.

[43 : 13] Are we good at that as Christians? Patient, thoughtful conversation with unbelief. This book is at one level an attempt to coax the humanist tradition back into reasonable conversation with its own roots, with its own sources.

It's brilliant. Brilliant job he does on this. The case, the argument, the deep envision of a complex story builds convincingly here.

Lewis would call this book architectonic, one of those words that he loved. This book has a cumulative effect on you. It shows you the depth of our recent 500 years of history.

Again, headed towards a conclusion here, again the story, the enchanted magic world and then a world of religious passion, sometimes fierce and threatening, creates in reaction, the disengaged, buffered self, no longer torus to transcendence.

On one view, emphasized again, emphasized again here, we see, again on one view of this drama, our common roots with humanism.

[44 : 27] The person's, then, person's retreat. The humanist retreats, Dr. Taylor sees this so clearly, into the isolated self.

Humanists retreat into a kind of reason interiority. And religionists, is it at our best or at our worst, we retreat into a kind of interiority of piety, where we live alone.

Humanists live alone someplace else. There's no cosmos out there that has transcendence in it, no state with transcendence. It's largely disappeared from everywhere around us.

We're alone inside the interiority of piety. The Evangelical tradition, sometimes, at its most problematic, seems like that to a lot of people.

this drama, to a central conclusion, this drama does simply continue. This is the history we are in. We are in this unfolding drama, not another.

[45 : 30] Is history God's pedagogy? Does God teach us through history? I think Mr. Taylor believes so. It's implicit in this book.

Look at the texture of what God is saying in history. And we are poor students if our stories of the past, whether Christian or humanist, fall short in humility, in thoroughness, indeed, in charity. Thoroughness is an aspect of charity, isn't it? It's a very challenging book. I found myself just humbled on occasion, thinking how easily I caricatured the other guy. not seeing the drama that the other guy's life may be dealing with. How easily we do that. This book disenchanting foolish caricatures of the other.

And for that, I bless it. It's a brilliant book. Oh, to be a good conversation partner. Again, that's how I found this book. A brilliant piece of conversation with unbelief from a brilliant Christian.

[46 : 41] It is a form of love, isn't it? Important. So very much important, especially in pluralism. The Christian ancestors that I love live in the 17th century rarely have ever met a real unbeliever.

I meet them every day. I meet them sometimes at civic. I wish that was all a joke. Is there a truth? They're now in front of us. Is there indeed, as Herbert says, a truth which ends all strife? We believe so as Christians. And we are called to witness to that truth in the deepest humility.

Without apology. Without apology. But consistent with the beauty of our Lord. There is so much in this book that some I've just touched down on briefly.

When you get the time, sometime, make this book, maybe make room in it in your life, somewhat to this book. It's a great book. Mr. Taylor, a postscript.

[47 : 51] Mr. An Afterword, he called that book, wouldn't he? That's getting on too long. Just an Afterword, another 40 pages. Mr. Taylor challenges the Christian tradition to think through perhaps one of its own paradoxes, which always needs a tension.

The tension between an approval, the deed of human flourishing under the sun, as the Old Testament calls it, and the more severe vision of heaven to seek and hell to shun, which our author labels, perhaps helpfully or unhelpfully, I don't know, he calls it hyper- Augustinianism.

In two weeks' time, your humble servant again is going to respond indirectly to Dr. Taylor's challenge there by looking at Psalm 90.

If you recall, a psalm both about God's wrath and about human desire for flourishing, even a human desire for flourishing in this world, Psalm 90 asks for.

Restore us, give us as many days of blessing as we have had of a foot ship. There it is. I'll do it one more time.

[49 : 05] This book is astonishing. It's not easy reading, it's difficult reading, but it has a great, almost a therapeutic power to cleanse us, it cleansed me, of the temptation, again, to carry caricature the other guy.

The other guy might be involved in the complex story in the world that we're involved in as well. And we can witness the Jesus who ends all strife in the deepest humility, listening to our neighbor, loving our neighbor, understanding our neighbor, some attempt at thoroughness.

Love your neighbor. There it is, a section of outreach by Charles Taylor. Lord, I wanted to share that with you today.

I'll say a word of prayer and then we have some time for conversation. Lord, we thank you for the Christian faith and we thank you for reminders of its abounding power to change, to challenge the world in which we live.

May it always go on doing so and may we be humble servants of the gospel in the midst of this wondrous story that we live in. Thank you, Lord, for your presence and help us to know more of these things as you would have us know more of these things.

[50 : 31] We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Please don't be shy. Bill's not shy. He uses the word transcendence throughout the book. It annoys me, actually. Does he use the word God? Does he relate anything to the Trinity? Does he get on that subject at all? No, no, no. No, it's a good question. I think you agree. An author, you get an idea when you read someone, who they regard their audience to be.

He doesn't want to talk to us. He wants, he knows what we believe. He's talking to mainstream, generally speaking, unbelief out there. And in charity, chastising him for living in a caricature of our past 500 years of history.

[52 : 06] So I would agree. I think he's probably wise to use a soft language to keep them turning the pages.

If he jumps in with too much theological talk, he's going to lose them, I think. They're going to say, that's the story of our past. So he uses them.

You're right. He does use what I would call a soft language. But thank you. That's good. Yeah. He's not doing... He's asking them again to mature in their unbelief.

If you're going to be an unbeliever, he says, please be intelligent. Please get rid of your caricatures of the Christians. Because it's an incredible story you tell yourself. He does use... He's never going to get...

He's not thinking of Dawkins and company. At least he doesn't mention him since company. But he will talk about what he calls Philistine atheism. And that's the closest he gets to being...

[53 : 03] You're stupid. Dawkins is a Philistine atheist. He's just culturally dumb. That's why reading him is just a frustrating experience.

But your question's good. No. Maybe in later books, he'll unleash you more directly. When he does get theological, he says, this is not a theological argument. This is historical and philosophical.

And he makes a reference at the end of the book to currents of theological meditation about where modernity came from, which he's very sympathetic with. There's a great theory about late modernity.

There's the battle between philosophical realists and anomalists. Luther was anomalous. He thinks modernity's great urge towards the triumph of the will comes from that metaphysical debate.

By the way, he gestures at that and says, I'm interested in that, but that's not what I'm doing here.

He doesn't become theological. Do you think he... Sorry, go ahead. Does he succeed in tying the fox's tails together and setting them amongst the wheat fields?

[54 : 08] Do you think he does that? Do you know the story? Yes, yes, yes. Is it a Bible knowledge test for you?

Yes, I think he's trying to... I said... Maybe I made a two-punchy comment. I think he wants to tear down a massive modern idolatry. He doesn't want to use that language. He'll lose them.

And he can be very critical of the Catholic tradition, critical of evangelicals who he wants to be, critical... He can be very critical of the church. He doesn't think we're innocent in this... We're not innocent in this story.

It's very complex. We've driven people into humanism sometimes, you think, so we've got it better.

But thanks for your question. I'll email and tell them to firm up this theological language.

We're saying 800-880. Dr. Barlow. So I've got two questions. I'll ask the more serious one first.

Some people might say... I sort of challenge...

[55 : 08] I tell you, say, where do you get your... You know, from people who are humanists, where do you get your values from? To say, well, they come from our genetic makeup. Now, doesn't he agree with that argument at all?

I don't believe he. No. No. But what he does... No. Because, I mean, I think it's an incoherent argument, philosophically. Yeah. But it needs a philosopher to point out the problems with it.

He would say, I think, very beautifully, even... I find this... I found this very moving in his book, how the serious humanists should be aware that even when they think of their materialist origins, which is an overlap with what you've said, as I understand it, that they're in a state of wonderment about the strangeness of our origins from such a strange place.

And he asks them, is that not... Are you not looking for a strange kind of transcendence in that? I think there is a kind of strange transcendence in the apparent mystery of consciousness coming out of what?

So he asks them, are you not looking for transcendence even in your worldview? Isn't there? He does think... He does believe in passing that elites... Elites in the 17th or 18th century might have looked to some humanist sources in ancient Greece.

[56 : 32] But they have little power on our culture generally. And little power, really, even on those who knew about them. There isn't really a source of transcendence in ancient Greece.

So... Anyway, that... Thank you. Was there... The second question... Yes, yes. You said... You said... You said... You said... No, I don't think so.

Not as well. I'd say... I mean, some of the things that Taylor is saying are... In some sense... You might...

In some of the groups are coming in Lewis. For example, early on in your talk, Lewis said...

To see through all things is the same thing as not to see. Yes, yes. And Taylor was, in some sense, amplified... I think so, yeah. So... Is it because he doesn't like Lewis? I don't even know if he's read Lewis, but if he has...

I think he's got an agenda here. He wants... If I may repeat myself... He wants the humanist person to keep turning the pages. Right. There's lightning rods in here. Okay, I'll show you that Christians are bad actors.

[57 : 29] Do it. Please stay with my argument. He wants them again to mature in their unbeliefs. He does... And you do know... When you read a book, don't you?

What... What breadth of sources are at work here? He does quote... In the end notes, there's a passing reference to Alistair MacGraph.

Whereas I think he quotes someone that MacGraph quotes. So he must read some MacGraph, for instance. In Oxford or something. But I think he stays... Again, it's not a theological...

If I could build a book, it's not a theological book. It's philosophical, conceptual, therefore philosophical, and historical inquiry to 1500 to 2000. And it is within Latin, Western Christa. I didn't emphasize that enough. He doesn't leave that culture. He doesn't pretend to tell you everything that's going on in other places in the world. He thinks, this is our particular story, the North Atlantic democracy, such as the North Atlantic world is which you're really close to.

[58 : 30] Doctor, doctor. What does he do with Nietzsche? Well, he's Nietzsche, he uses Nietzsche as a counterfoil to what I call the softer humanist.

He said, we Christians are accused of spawning a lot of violence in the world. Maybe there's some truth to that. But here's this other humanist who's telling us that we try to get rid of violence. Now, you humanists have to clean up, see that you've gone supernova.

He would find Nietzsche just unsupportable in the end. He's just a, Nietzsche was looking for a kind of wild transcendence in his will to power.

And Dr. Jefferson said, is that not the case? What else is he looking for? Is that, is that satisfying? I think maybe, this is a complicated quote, maybe he makes more of Nietzsche than I recall or saw when I read it.

But that's, he sees Nietzsche as one interesting element in the broad, the humanist tradition and says, he's an example of the supernova thing that's happened amongst humans.

[59 : 36] Their original narrative was so weak that it had to explode and go out in all sorts of directions. And Nietzsche's one of those directions. Is that, we know, it's all doctors here.

you're doing me precedence, I think you're really good. No, no, no, I was pointing at the, the job. Not me at all. I love it.

No, I did. No, no, no, no, no. It's next book, theology, yeah. That wouldn't, no, no. Well, on the basis of that, I must say, brilliant talk. Oh, the book is brilliant.

I couldn't watch it. But let me ask you about the theme of patient conversation with unbelief.

We seem to have arrived at a circumstance in our church life where we claim that we have run out of possibilities of conversation. This, Taylor, addressed the thought that there might be a limit to the conversation with unbelief.

[60 : 40] And it seems to me to be a challenging theme and one that we need to consider very carefully prior to this week's activity. He doesn't make much of it, but he does grant, and I think he's thinking of the Catholic tradition here, he does grant a real value to living under an authority, he says so far.

But he doesn't, he doesn't expand on that. So, there are tensions within, Dr. Taylor's not an angel, I'm not starting a Dr. Charles Taylor cult.

There are tensions within his own worldview. He has gone far in the direction of the humanists and appealed to them for conversation, intelligent conversation. So in one sense, I don't know how to answer your question.

That would be a good question to post him. When do you say this has been aired and we now decide something? That's a good question. I'm sorry, I'm letting you down.

Well, I think the thesis that I might explore is that there should be no conversation that we've been having hasn't been explored to the extent that might be unhandled.

[61 : 54] conversations are within a framework, I guess, to go back to this metaphor that he invokes at least early on. What if within a faith community you think your conversation partner is no longer within your framework?

That's where you have the... There's going to be, maybe we're going to do a supernova in Anglicanism. Our narrative has become so diverse that it was bound to fly apart at some point.

So maybe we can't, maybe we shouldn't pull it together. That's another perspective. Patient conversation does have a... A course has its corruption, I think Dr. Shetter would say. It can become an end in itself. The kind of person who listens and said knows everything but understands doesn't commit something.

Dr. Packer. Well, I think I've got an order. Sorry, man, but I wanted to ask you for... Well, shall I now...

[63 : 08] Shut up. No. We have time for... Yes. Okay, with a cute embarrassment, I continue to speak. I call myself an Augustinian for all sorts of reasons and so I was interested that Dr. Taylor should make a big issue of hyper-Augustinianism, which obviously from the form of the word is something he wants to warn us against.

I'd like to ask you what he means by hyper-Augustinianism, what it is that he's warning us against by quaking the term for self-examination.

Yes. Yes. Well, framework, again, he's in the Jacques-Maritain tradition, that's my turn. that high liberal Catholic tradition, as I said, 19th and 20th century that was pushing for the kind of thing like Vatican II to happen and to see the Catholic Church become less authoritarian and perhaps be a more open place of human flourishing and he would, I guess he'd say, less emphasis upon a severity which perhaps has become oppressive for many people.

So, this is Jim at the end of his book and it's sort of a, it's sort of a, I found it maybe the weakest part of his book when he touched on this.

But he sees, like, I don't know, he calls it hyper, hyper, obviously there's too much emphasis upon that religion which threatens hell on a regular basis, that kind of thing.

[64 : 57] Maybe he, he sees humanists run from the church when they hear too much of that thing. But again, he doesn't make much of this argument in the book. He asks Christians to think that through again.

It's a very hideous, syncretic well, yeah, there's a label. Yeah. Okay, I'm sorry. Well, that's, that part of the book, I wanted to interact with him at that point.

I wanted to say, no, this stuff. The Christians have to maintain their identity and you're criticizing something that's very important to us. Now listen to this. Um, Hope?

Thanks, Harvey. Wonderful. Oh, fascinating, fascinating book. Very great stuff. Um, I was at Mission Fest a couple of weeks ago. Prince has a wonderful seminar stand.

One of the speakers spoke about the challenges of being nigelocin in the new age and said something that sort of fits in the discussion about the hyperhumanism that you put forward today from Charles.

[66 : 04] Um, he said that because of hyperhumanism we are now actually in a new era of paganism. We have gone full circle to pull out the paganism and we're post-humanist at this point.

I've never heard this idea before but he gave some very compelling examples from world culture or, um, it was very interesting. I went more than the whole thing here but, um, and said that because of that the New Testament is ever more, uh, clangent.

It's really right on right now because we are facing the exact same challenges that Paul made and prospered in their time. Um, and I, and I've never heard this mention before and I, I just, in, in focus of what you're talking about this morning I, I went to hear what you think about that.

I mean, the supernova of that. Yes, yes, yes. Well, I just think it's right. I, I just think that's, you know, largely true that, that humanism does not seriously address the innate desire for transcendence for that authority over man that threatens freedom and meaning, freedom and meaning, which, if you try to generate out of your own resources, collapses into nihilism, something horrifying.

Maybe more likely to nihilism when I say rather than the paganism. T.S. Liz used to say that when he heard people say, oh, we're becoming English, we're becoming a pagan society, he used to say, perhaps somewhat ironically, maybe, oh, wouldn't they work?

[67 : 49] Because they have at least a family resemblance to the Christian, you can have a basis of conversation. It's hard, a nihilist as another terrible fiction.

But you're right, if we're going supernova and we don't know where it's going, maybe, was there one other... Go ahead.

You mentioned that he's a philosopher who's also involved quite politically, and so beyond like individual conversations that we might have, what does he bring up in the book, or what do you

know of his work in the that he's offering constructively for our society at large, and maybe as well for the society who's the church?

I know he's obviously, he's very cool to the hard, to the hardening of our French culture must be protected at all costs.

He says he's very eloquent and I find convincing on that the other is given to you for your betterment, and you should assume the other is good.

[69 : 09] He would just look at the Good Samaritan. Regardless of who the other is, the Christian receives them, and receives them without care of each of them.

So that's all I know. That report hasn't been written yet. It would be interesting to see what he and his colleague, another academic, right after all these hearings. Good question.

I don't know. Maybe he's using one of his own terms. Maybe he's theologically uncommitted himself. He's a liberal Roman Catholic.

Maybe he sees the alien understanding of the unfolding of the faith or something which I wouldn't be at all sympathetic with. But he exemplifies how to deal with the conversation partner.

That's why I remember both. Sorry, I'm not praying. I'm glad to see that Jesus gets quite a nice block of mentions in the year.

[70 : 08] Well, thank you, Bill. That's me reading this first book. one of the marvels I found when I came into the faith was the absolutes that were there.

God seemed to be painting in black and white with no grove. That was the impression I had as a new Christian. so I mistreat ambiguity quite a bit.

Thanks, Marvin.