

"Divinity of Jesus" A review of the new book by Dean L. Overman

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Date: 28 March 2010

Preacher: Dr. Phil Hill

[0 : 00] I'd like to begin with a question. In the entire history of humanity, can we think of any single question or topic that's more important than the divinity of Jesus?

I don't think we can. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come before you now acknowledging the frailty of our faith and the shallowness of our deepest thoughts.

And we ask that the Holy Spirit may guide each of us, perhaps in different ways and at different times, but may guide us into a truer, clearer understanding of the divinity of Jesus.

We ask this in his name. Amen. By way of background, two people with whom I'm in conversation from time to time had recently seen the television documentary called From Jesus to Christ.

And they were so taken with it that they ordered a DVD and invited me to join with them in a review of the four-part documentary, which I did.

[1 : 27] Now, the DVD is based on a book published in 1988 by Paula Fredrickson, who carries the title Professor of the Appreciation of Scripture at Boston University.

And the book was apparently so well received at the time that it was made into a documentary and CDs and later DVDs were made available.

And it has been shown quite a number of times since. And in the DVD version, Paula and 11 other theologians, academic theologians, whose names and affiliations are quite well known, they carry such titles, Professors of New Testament, Religion, Judaic and Religious Studies, Divinity, Ecclesiastical History, Religion and Archaeology, and even Classics.

And they represent some quite well known institutions, Yale, Harvard, Duke, Brown, DePaul University, Union Theological Seminary, Princeton, Texas.

And they carry names that appear from time to time in the press, people including John Dominic Crossan, Helmut Kiesler, Holland Hendricks.

[2 : 51] You may have seen these people mentioned from time to time. And in the documentary, they are largely in conversational tone.

They come across as learned, as well-spoken. They're not polemic. They're not hostile. They answer calmly and carefully. They look at you right in the eye of the camera.

And they have this common, I think, belief that there is a huge difference between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.

The contents of the documentary are roughly as follows. The first hour takes up the concept that Jesus was shaped in his life and thought by the Roman world and the rabbinic leaders.

And the first hour ends with the tragedy of the cross. The second hour deals with the origins, as they see it, of the first movements that centered on Jesus' life and death and teaching.

[3 : 57] The third hour on how the Gospels may have been developed. The fourth on relations between Jews and Romans, including those two major disastrous revolts and also between Christians and Romans right up to the time of Constantine.

At the end of the showing, my first thought was that very little had been said about the resurrection except for a brief but quite telling comment by Paula where she says that the story of the resurrection is given in such and such a place.

but she says to me it says nothing as to me as a historian it says nothing. Seemingly it had not crossed her mind that the resurrection could actually have been a historical event.

Another clue from Paula as to the convictions of the speakers is given in an offhand way in which she says that in portraying the crucifixion Mark puts in the mouth of Jesus the words of Psalm 22.

Seemingly it did not occur to her that Jesus may actually have said what John said that he said. The stance of the speakers comes across I think in one of the reviews of the documentary.

[5 : 27] Here's what one of them wrote. Fredrickson treats the Gospels as literary texts almost as if they were plays or novels. So we get Mark's Jesus and Luke's Jesus and so on.

These literary creations give us all we shall ever know about Jesus the man. The Gospels are not biography or history. That was Anthony Campbell.

He's seemingly in support of the presentation. So the overall impression though the speakers do not actually use these words is that the Gospels are historical novels.

They get the times and places and the names of principal characters right. But the bulk of the story is they believe a late literary invention put together somehow by four different people long after the crucifixion.

the speakers believe that we actually know very little about Jesus the man and that the crucifixion was an unmitigated tragedy that it marked the decisive failure of whatever hopes Jesus may have had and created and that the divinity of Jesus need not even be mentioned since it's not a matter of historical import and that therefore the New Testament story of who he is and who he was is largely fictional.

[6 : 57] But are they right? Or did God actually come to earth entering history in human form? Clearly the crucial question is historicity.

And that's the underlying question which Dean Overman takes up in this just newly published book called A Case.

You'll see the title on the first page of the handout here. A Case for the Divinity of Jesus by Dean L. Overman. And I'll give you now just a brief introduction to the author.

Dean Overman is a former senior partner of an international law firm in Washington D.C. Before becoming a lawyer he had some theological training at Princeton and some education at Oxford and Harvard.

he has been fascinated by the subject of evidence all his professional life. In this book he reviews the evidence that Jesus identified himself as the transcendent God of the Hebrews.

[8 : 01] He also examines the evidence concerning the truth or falsehood of the resurrection of Jesus. He's also studied evidences of the belief of the very earliest followers of Jesus of Nazareth during the first decades following his death.

He's particularly concerned with the well-documented confession and worship patterns of the early disciples, the evidence that persons who were alive and presumably eyewitnesses to Jesus' life worshipped him as divine within an astonishingly short time of the crucifixion.

He also examines the documents of the New Testament and reviews the dates and contents of these statements. Now as to the meaning of the title of the book, I'd like to leave to a little later the question of how we might best define the words divinity of Jesus.

But as to the content of the book, we have only time this morning to consider a tiny part of it, but I would like quickly to give you the overall scope by referring to six major questions questions, which the author addresses, though not in the particular order I'm mentioning here.

And these are indicated by the questions on your sheet. The first of these, are the source documents trustworthy? And that, of course, the sub-questions are, what are they?

[9 : 31] And when were they written? And is there evidence of independent authorship? And are they consistent with each other and with the secular history? And how were they received by the first readers?

And who were the eyewitnesses? And what is their testimony? All those questions. Second question, what is known about the authentic Gospels and the unauthentic ones?

What can we say about the dates of writing? What do they assert about the divinity of Jesus? A third question, what is reliably known about the apostolic letters?

Again, questions of authorship, dates, and assertions about the divinity of Jesus. A fourth question, is there important evidence dating earlier than the Gospels, earlier than the letters, to the earliest days of the Church?

What is that evidence? And what does it tell us about the beliefs of the earliest Christians, again, about the divinity of Jesus? A fifth question, why did the early Church, the early Christians, so strongly believe in the divinity of Jesus?

[10 : 43] Why did they conclude that the resurrection of Jesus actually happened? What knowledge did they have which would explain the significance of that miraculous event, and where did they get that knowledge?

A final question, what evidence do we have that renders credible the oral transmission of the teaching of Jesus by disciples who years earlier, at the time of his teaching, were from time to time seemingly unable to understand the significance of some of the things that he said?

Now, in the few minutes left to us, let's just focus on three particular questions. First of these, how early did the Christian church believe in the divinity of Jesus?

And secondly, why did they believe in it? And thirdly, does this doctrine actually go back to Jesus himself? And can we be sure that we actually know what Jesus taught about it?

Let's begin with the first question then. How early did this powerful belief begin to take hold?

[12 : 04] We turn now to the first piece of evidence of early belief in the divinity of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15, verses 3 to 8, where scholars agree that Paul is quoting a much earlier document.

And in that passage the apostle writes, and I think you have the words with you, that which I have received I delivered unto you, followed by the quotation that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the twelve.

Paul writes, in our English translation from the Greek, of course, that which I received I have delivered unto you. Dean Oberman points out that those two terms, received and delivered, are technical terms used in Paul's day to refer to careful transmission of tradition without changing the wording.

so it's not surprising that in this passage Paul uses special language that does not appear elsewhere in his writings. This is indicated by the underlined phrases in that quotation, for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures, he was raised third day in the twelve.

Special language, specially transmitted. So this is one reason why scholars conclude that Paul is here quoting much earlier creedal language, and drawing on the scholarship of many writers who have probed the text, it seems that 1 Corinthians 15 and 3, the author suggests, may be the earliest written report on the life of Jesus and his resurrection.

[14 : 01] Dean Oberman argues that Paul was probably converted about two years following the event confessed. And probably received his foundational instruction of the time, in the early thirties, when he visited, as we know from the letter to the Galatians, when he visited Peter, James, and the other disciples in Jerusalem, after his conversion, that he stayed with Peter for fifteen days.

By the way, in this passage, Peter is called Cephas, that's his Hebrew name, and this may be itself a kind of pointer to the church's mother congregation in Jerusalem as the place of origin of the quotation.

Paul doesn't mention the source of the quotation, presumably because it had been so very well known to his readers that it wasn't necessary to say where it came from. Move on to a second piece of evidence of the early belief in the divinity of Jesus.

First Corinthians eleven and twenty-three appears to be another example where Paul is making a quotation from a creed, because again he uses the formal words for transmission and delivery.

I have received and I have delivered. The quotation says that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you, do this in remembrance of me.

[15 : 35] In the same manner, he also took the cup after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

Since in here the tradition leads us back in a way to the words of Jesus himself, and shortly I'll come to the question of whether we can be confident of accurate transmission of the sayings of Jesus.

But that's a second then piece of evidence taking us back much earlier than the letters, even, and earlier still than the Gospels. A third piece of evidence, a passage which many scholars consider to be originally a hymn honoring Jesus, given in Colossians 1, 15 to 20.

As Dean Overman indicates, it can be read as another example of first century worship and devotion to Jesus, reflecting the divine presence of Christ. And here I've copied it in much abbreviated form.

To read, Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation? For in him all things were created for him, and in him all things are held together.

[16 : 53] In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. Dean reports notes that a majority of New Testament scholars consider this passage to be an early traditional hymn because of the introductory phrase, the poetic arrangement of the language, the devices of rhetoric, and the distinct vocabulary.

Most scholars, he says, date the composition of the letter of the Colossians to around the middle of the first century, and given this earlier dating, early dating, the passage appears to be a hymn employed in worship within the first few decades following the crucifixion, well within the lifespans of many persons who followed Jesus during his life on earth and later worshipped in the earlier churches.

He goes on to say, the high Christology contained in the passage represents additional compelling evidence that the earliest church considered Jesus as God incarnate.

A fourth piece of evidence. Some weeks ago, Harvey gave us an excellent meditation on the hymn quoted in 1 Timothy 3 and 16, where Jesus is referred to as the visible expression of the invisible God.

It says, great is the mystery of godliness. God was revealed in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world and received up into glory.

[18 : 26] We spent a very profitable hour that morning thinking together about the meaning of these specific phrases, which in the original language we are told have a style of writing and a rhyming pattern that sets them apart from the rest of the letter.

Dean Overman says that in reading this hymn we're almost overhearing, although of course in English, but we're almost overhearing something of what the very earliest Christians used in their worship.

If we were looking for a short form definition of the divinity of Jesus, could we do better than take these words, God was revealed in the flesh?

However, for the long form, the fuller form, let's turn now to a fifth piece of evidence, that excellent and brilliant quotation in the second chapter of Philippians, again so well known to the readers that no reference to the source was needed.

And beginning here with a text, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself.

[19 : 43] taking the form of a slave and being born in human likeness and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that the name of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Written long before Paul's letter to the Philippians, isn't that an excellent definition of the divinity of Jesus? Ralph P.

Martin wrote, quote, The linguistic and stylistic evidence of this text goes to show that the hymn was both pre-Pauline and a product of the Jewish Christian community.

There are features which make it likely that it was composed first in a Semitic tongue and later translated into Greek. There are traces of style which are, so to speak, impossible in Greek.

[20 : 56] Phrases which appear to be simply translation equivalents from a Semitic language into Greek, and there is the use of words and expressions which are drawn directly from the Old Testament.

All these facts indicate the Semitic origin of the hymn in its original form. The best description of the section is that it is a Judeo-Christian psalm.

Let's turn briefly to those words in the second last line of the quotation, Jesus Christ is Lord. The first century Greek word Lord, which I'll pronounce, we are told could refer to a variety of dignitaries, but Dean's book has what seems to me a comprehensive review of evidence leading to the conclusion that every time this Greek word is used about Jesus in the New Testament, it goes right back to meaning the divine person, the one God of the Hebrews designated by the Hebrew word Yahweh.

The scholar F.F. Bruce, who is known to some of us here, I think, but very distinguished New Testament scholar, wrote in that passage, quote, it might not be appropriate to reword the

statement, Jesus Christ is Lord, as Jesus Christ is Yahweh, but he says nothing less than this is involved.

This usage did not originate with Paul and repeatedly Paul ascribes to Jesus Old Testament texts and phrases in which the word Lord represents the Hebrew Yahweh.

[22 : 47] Now I made a number of notes here on this point, but I think for the sake of time, move on to the significance of these earlier passages. In summary, these early hidden evidences and others, in the form of a rich liturgy of hymns or poems or creeds, are significant because they date back to the earliest days of the Jerusalem Church and were well known throughout the churches of the Roman Empire, well before the middle of the first century, providing evidence of deep belief in Jesus Christ as divine Lord and Savior.

But of course, that then leads to the question, why did these early Christians believe as they did? And we can identify, just for brevity, we can identify two principal reasons.

And first would be the resurrection. And that, of course, raises the question, why did they believe in the resurrection? resurrection. And just abbreviating here a large and important section of the book, we can say that the two main reasons were, first of all, the empty tomb, and secondly, his risen appearances in bodily form, first to the twelve, and then, as we learn, to more than five hundred disciples, and then to James and all the apostles.

And the resurrection, no doubt, was a very important element in their strength of their early belief in the divinity of Jesus.

But it seems to me more was needed. And I've ventured to categorize the second reason as the memory of all that he had taught his disciples about the meaning of his life and death and resurrection.

[24 : 36] They needed that so that they could see the full significance of the resurrection fact. It was, it seemed to me, the collective memory which enabled the disciples to say, yes, the resurrection proves, it confirms that he is the divine person, he is God eternal.

But, of course, that then raises the important question, could that memory have been reliable? Especially when, as he taught them about his death and resurrection and divinity, at times, they hardly understood what he was saying.

In this day of instant access to all kinds of information, the role of memory seems to be less important and maybe it's less trustworthy than it's ever been before.

So Dean Oberman tells us that to understand the role of memory in Jesus' day, we have to go back to history and learn a few things about education in the first century.

In that time, he reports, the Jewish education was largely learning by memorization. And that education was mandatory, at least for boys, until age 12.

[26 : 02] So that we can conclude that Jesus and his disciples would have attended school and learned by diligent repetition of memorized texts. And good teachers would, of course, have been sensitive to the needs of their students.

So the teaching materials were abbreviated into texts, which, as the author describes them, texts pregnant with ideas and marked by poetic artifices, rhythm and diligent repetition, was a way of teaching which greatly assisted memory.

Furthermore, rote memorization in those days was nowhere near treated as being so dull as we sometimes think of it today. The rabbis had this saying, first we learn and then we understand. And the idea was that in memorization, you acquired first a rich vocabulary and then concepts and ideas and examples and connections and demonstrations of reality and logic.

In other words, through memorization, your mind could be equipped with the very tools of good thinking. So first we learn, they said.

[27 : 20] Then we understand. Then we can think. And apparently the life of the synagogue, many ordinary men without special training who had memorized the scriptures were able to provide commentary and application of the scriptures to daily life.

And in his teaching, Jesus did not have to teach the scriptures. He could take for granted that his hearers already knew them.

So it's a very different time and age than it is right now. So that is the first point. That first century Jewish education focused on people learning how to remember things.

A second point that the author urges us to understand is the special authoritative role of Jesus has seen in that society. It was an authoritative role, particularly with respect to his disciples.

As we see in Matthew 23, verse 8, where Jesus says to his disciples, as Dean Overman puts it, the text can be read, you are not called to be rabbis, that is teachers.

[28 : 34] For you have one teacher and you are all students. And we can recall different passages in the gospels where crowds listening to him perceived his authority.

They said he spoke as one having authority. And added to that, of course, was his unique, his special teaching style. One writer has put it, and I'll give just a little of the evidence for that in a moment.

One writer put it. He used, quote, an abundance of parallelism, alliteration, assonance, rhythm, and rhyme, all devices that were very useful in making memorable the sayings that he taught.

Now, we can capture a little of the sense of this, even in the English translation of the Greek translation of the Galilean Aramaic language, which Jesus actually used.

For example, in Matthew, in responding to the question of John in prison, Jesus told his disciples, go and tell John, the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.

[29 : 53] Do we think the messenger disciples would have had any difficulty in remembering exactly what he told them to tell John? We'll take the six works of love in Matthew 25.

For I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, you gave me to drink. I was a stranger, and you welcomed me. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you took care of me. I was in prison, and you visited me. Or we take the structure of the sayings of the Beatitudes, which I won't recite them all here, but as we recall the way they are put, we have to say they are easily memorable, even in English.

But what about the language Jesus actually spoke? Professor Bruce has remarked, quote, An interesting fact which comes to light when we try to reconstruct the original Aramaic in which our Lord's sayings and all the Gospels were spoken is that very many of these sayings exhibit poetical features.

Even in a translation, we can see how full they are of parallelism, which is so constant a mark of Old Testament poetry. But when they're turned into Aramaic, he goes on to say, They seem to be marked by regular poetic rhythm, and even at times by rhyme.

[31 : 20] And Bruce remarks, If Jesus wished his teaching to be memorized, his use of poetry is easily explained. There's a striking example in modern times of Alexander Solzhenitsyn suffering in the prisons of Stalinist Russia, wanting desperately to be able, sometime to tell the world, the depth of suffering, his fellow prisoners.

And he was denied paper and pencil, and resorted to poetry, each day composing, rhyming couplets, and then memorizing himself.

In all, something like 19,000 lines were with him in his head when he left the prison compounds and eventually wrote the Gulag Archipelago. Excuse me, that's an offside remark.

But the role of memory can be crucial. And Bruce goes on to say, Besides, Jesus was recognized by his contemporaries as a prophet, and prophets in Old Testament days were accustomed to utter oracles in poetical form.

And where this form has been preserved, we have a further assurance that his teaching has been handed down to us as it was originally given.

[32 : 46] Professor Jeremias of Princeton, and by the way, he was one of the teachers under whom Dean Oberman studied when he was a student in the 60s at Princeton before he went into law, points out that there is strikingly in the sayings of Jesus a two-beat rhythm, and he gives reasons why some of the qualities of the two-beat rhythm in Aramaic increase the abilities of the hearer to remember Jesus' words more accurately.

As he puts it, quote, Because of its brevity, the two-beat rhythm necessitates terse and abrupt formulations whose sparseness and monotony lends to them the utmost urgency.

And that is not the whole story. Professor Birney discovered three other rhythmic patterns to Jesus' sayings, a four-beat, a three-beat, and a so-called kina, K-I-N-A, rhythm.

Apparently, each of the rhythms were used in a different mood in a specific area of thought, and Birney says, quote, The three-beat lines used in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament demonstrate that Jesus was employing methods of Jewish traditional transmission of holy texts when he conveyed his thoughts.

The style, he says, is especially effective in conveying meditative thoughts and proverbs and was the most frequent rhythm used by Jesus to drive home his sayings and maxims.

[34 : 16] Jeremiah also noted this kina rhythm was used by Jesus in Aramaic to express strong inner emotion, and this appears not only in admonitions but in the Beatitudes and in comforting statements about salvation.

Jeremiah's emphasized that one can only appreciate the strength of these rhythms when one reads the sayings of Jesus in the original Aramaic. In that language, even in the different gospel accounts, they indicate, he says, a distinctive way of speaking by the same person.

And so to sum up, Jeremiah says, the accumulation of the rhythms and the sayings of Jesus allows us to draw the conclusion that we have to do with a distinct characteristic of his.

In addition, they indicate his Semitic background and provide an important pointer towards the antiquity of the tradition. Now, I've gone into some detail here, but would you not agree that it's fascinating, so to speak, to look over the shoulders of scholars to see what they see of the form of Jesus' pedagogical style, artfully composing sayings so poetically emphatic that we might be tempted to say they were utterly memorable, even to those who on the spot may not have understood their full import.

And so, we are led to conclude that given the authority and the skill of the teaching of Jesus and his deep desire to implant in the minds of others vividly memorable explanations of the meaning of his death and resurrection, in the light of all that, it's not incredible that after his resurrection the disciples should have been able to remember quite accurately what he taught.

[36 : 10] But there's one last important question. what did Jesus teach about his divinity? And the short answer I think we may state as he took to himself the name of God.

An important point to remember here, and all of the Jewish people of course would have been well familiar with it, was that the name of God given to Moses in the wilderness was as translated into English, I am who I am.

Later God told Moses in going back to Egypt, he was to say, I am has sent me to you. And these same two words translated into Greek are often used by Jesus in referring to himself.

For example, in John chapter 8, verse 58, we read that when he was challenged by skeptics, as to his personal knowledge of Abraham, he said, before Abraham was, I am.

And his hearers were so sure this was blasphemy, they took up stones to kill him. It's not just that this saying implies his eternal pre-existence.

[37 : 29] One scholar by the name of Stouffer, he's quoted, by the way, in Leon Morris' commentary on John, says, it is Jesus' boldest declaration about himself, I am.

This means, says Stouffer, this means, where I am, there is God, there God lives, speaks, calls, asks, decides, chooses, loves, forgives, rejects, hardens, suffers, dies.

nothing bolder can be said or imagined. The same thing is recorded at his trial before the Sanhedrin.

Mark chapter 14, the high priest asked him, are you the Christ, the son of the blessed one? And he answered, I am. You will see the son of man sitting at the right hand of the mighty one and coming in clouds.

And the high priest tore his clothes at what he called blasphemy. A very different occasion in Mark chapter 7 when the disciples were in a terrifying storm and Jesus appeared and said to them, take courage, it is I, be not afraid.

[38 : 49] Dean suggests that these words could have been even more accurately translated as take courage, I am, comma, be not afraid.

other memorable sayings of Jesus include, for example, I am the light of the world, he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

Or this from John 6, the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. And you'll remember that people said, Lord, evermore, give us this bread.

And Jesus declared, I am the bread of life. He who believes in me will never grow hungry. He who believes in me will never grow thirsty. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to a son and believes in him shall have eternal life.

And I will raise him up at the last day. These, of course, are but fragments of the teaching of Jesus about his divinity. But surely it was the totality of these remembered fragments which immediately after the resurrection suddenly made sense so that they could say, in effect, he said this would

happen.

[40 : 10] This miraculous event therefore proves that he is our risen divine Lord and Savior. Well, some conclusions. You'll find them on the last page.

But I'll go over the message. Number one, the strong belief of the disciples and the divinity of Jesus came very early after the resurrection was beautifully expressed in hymns, poems, or liturgies which were widely known and used in Christian churches around the Roman Empire within at least a few decades after they were written.

Secondly, the reasons for that belief were themselves reasonable and historical because of the fact of the resurrection and the explanatory power of the extraordinarily memorable teaching of Jesus. A third conclusion, because of his status as teacher and because of the devotion of his disciples and because of his memorable teaching style, we can have confidence confidence in the oral transmission of what he taught and fourthly, we can have confident faith in the divinity of Jesus. I suppose we could add one more conclusion. We can see that this notion that the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus was no more than a late literary invention invention is itself no more than a very late literary invention.

[41 : 54] Bill, may I take a minute for a short anecdote from the book? It's quite short. Mr.

E.V. Rue, his name is spelled R-I-E-U, who died in 1972 was known in his day in England as possibly the most authoritative English-speaking Greek scholar of his time.

His translations from the Greek of the Iliad and the Odyssey were held in the highest esteem. Now, a certain knight, Sir Alan Lane, had challenged Mr. Rue to translate the four gospels, and he undertook the assignment purely as a scholarly endeavor, for previously he had never read or studied the gospels.

As he began, his son, who was by then a lay reader in the Anglican church, said, it will be interesting to see what father makes of the gospels.

And then he added, it will be even more interesting to see what the gospels make of father. When Mr. Rue had finished the work, he told J.B.

[43 : 10] Phillips, it, that is the process of translation, it changed me. My work changed me, and I came to the conclusion that these works bear the seal of the Son of Man and of God, and that they are the Magna Carter, the great charter of the human spirit.

Now, the subject is huge, and I really hope I can hear from you as to your thoughts on how we should understand it, and how we should live accordingly.

Thank you. Bill. From the mind of a simpleton like me, what can I grasp that will give me confidence of the divinity of Christ?

And I found that after his resurrection, where he received worship, was very important to see.

The first group that you mentioned in the beginning of your talk, were they in the faith or outside the very first group?

[44 : 29] They're certainly lacking faith in the divinity of Jesus, for sure. And their long and deep studies have proceeded, I think, from the presupposition that the Gospels have nothing to do with history.

And so that is the assumption they've begun with, and that is the way they have read the Gospels. people. When you put alongside of that the number of divine entities that would not receive worship, you put that alongside Jesus did receive worship, but the angels did not receive worship. right. Yes. That's a convincing thing. Good point, Bill. And Dean Overman deals with that point, that very point, the indications of worship.

Just for example, in the phrase Maranatha, which is a Semitic term, Paul quotes it directly, he doesn't want to translate it, just evidence of very common phrase of ascription of worship of the Lord and the longing for his coming again.

I've only touched on a tiny part of what's here in the book, but any other thoughts? Sheila. Well, this has been overpowering, Phil.

[46 : 07] It's just going to take me the whole of lunch hour to sort out what you said, but it was a wonderful reading, and I appreciate your putting this together for us. I have Paul Fredrickson's book, as it happens, I've seen some of those things on television, and you're quite right about historians ignoring history.

I mean, everywhere else they're going back to source documents and things like this, where truth resides, and this time they want to make it up, without the source documents. Now, a person who

did, I think, his doctorate in the classics, Paul Barnett, makes a very strong point in some of his writings about the detail in the New Testament that substantiates what was happening and when, in the reign of so-and-so, when so-and-so else was, governor of wherever, whatever, in the third year. He pins it down all the way through. And I forget the name of the book in which he does this. I think it's, oh, is it the first 20 years? Yeah, the first 20 years.

He does a lot of that kind of thing. So here's another historian who doesn't disregard that. The one point, and I hope I'm not misquoting Paula Fredericks, and I may have read it somewhere else, somebody makes the point that the disciples lost their leader, he was crucified, he was gone, and after his resurrection they had to make sense out of what they had learned.

They had not made sense out of it before. They absorbed Jesus' teachings without, as you graphically pointed out here, that they couldn't understand what they were listening to. Suddenly, they had to make sense out of what their experience with Jesus had been, and gradually they came to see him as the Christ, which I believe is the word for the Messiah.

[48 : 10] The Messiah is also a word used in connection with God. So, I don't understand how Paula and other people like her could have said that there was no real historic justification for these things.

Now, it is a conclusion that they had to make sense of what their experience with Jesus had been. But, you know, they went from a bunch of quivering disciples behind locked doors thinking, we're going to be next to rushing out and preaching the gospel.

You know, something really dramatic happened to them. and I think that we do have evidence of that in the scripture. That isn't made up. These are people telling their own story.

The declaration of Peter, the day of Pentecost, this man God has made both Lord and Christ. It was, if you take that record as having any historical value, you have to speak of an early appreciation.

revelation. Yeah. It's been very helpful, so thank you. Yes. I do appreciate it. Thank you very much for the talk.

[49 : 22] My question would go to how do Christians engage the world today? Yes. As you pointed out, using the word evidence, thankfully, in my opinion, that ties always in this talk at least to testimony and not to verifiable certain concrete things, per se.

So often in the dialogue today, if somebody is trying to prove Christianity true, the evidence that they would try to marshal the legal evidences or whatever kind of argumentation that way.

Yes. And this book goes more towards testimony as a crucial juncture. I was wanting to speak a bit more about that as it relates to how we engage the world.

Very good question. I omitted to mention, speaking of the scope of the book, I omitted to mention the last chapter, which is entitled How Should One Engage a Person of Another Faith Concerning Diverse Religious Beliefs?

I'll just give you the headings. By the way, the table of contents in this book is really beautiful. Each chapter heading and each subheading and sub-subheading is a complete sentence in plain English.

[50 : 40] And you have the feeling as reading it, here's a practice lawyer who's preparing a case before a learned judge, and he's got to have it logical, and he knows the judge may fall asleep at some point, and so he's got to have it in such a way that you can recap it quick.

And so I can give you some examples, but here's chapter nine, and the heading of the chapter is how should one engage a person of another faith concerning religious beliefs in a manner consistent with grace and truth.

And I'll just give you one of the subheadings. It says three categories of religious pluralism point to the need for honest, authentic dialogue in an atmosphere of mutual respect. But, he says, there are three kinds of pluralism.

The one is prohibitive, where you're simply not allowed to speak about your faith, as though it would be so destructive even to admit you had a faith. Secondly, and he says, prohibitive religious pluralism is religious totalitarianism, and we've got rightly to oppose that.

Secondly, relativistic religious pluralism, where it says, well, you believe that, and I believe this, and it really doesn't, none of us know that's true. Religious, relativistic religious pluralism is also a form of religious totalitarianism.

[52 : 00] I won't take time to try and make the case, but this is what he's saying. And the third point is, authentic religious pluralism requires a dialogue in mutual respect, centering on the effect of

one's faith on one's life.

That's just a hint as to what he's come to in thinking about our multicultural, pluralistic age, that we should not be afraid to confess our faith, but do it in respect for others, and do an appreciation of where they are and where they've come from, and stand out firm against totalitarianism.

Does that cover part of the question you had at least? Yeah. So he has in mind here, and certainly I'm sure he must have found this so much in his personal life, the challenge of multiculturalism and pluralism in our society.

And that is partly why I think he's shown such enthusiasm in collecting the evidences and reflecting on them for a Christian belief.

Another chapter I should have said too is titled, One Cannot Logically Maintain That All Religions Describe a Path to the Same Ultimate Reality. And there are 11 subsections there that I won't take time to read.

[53 : 26] Olaf, yeah. Thank you for listening. It was fantastic. We're all going to want to rush out and buy this book. And we should warn Bill Ryman. I forgot to talk to Bill.

I meant to do that, yes. Yeah. But anyway, I'll inquire and maybe let you know later. Just one comment if I made, just to confirm this point about memorization.

Yes. I was astonished as a graduate student to find a Jewish friend, who actually lost his Jewish faith. Yes. But nevertheless, was able to rehearse the whole of the Old Testament in Hebrew by heart.

Well. That, it was so astonishing to me, coming from a background in which the Bible had been presented as a very basic thing. Yes. That he urged to memorize, and I had strongly resisted. because my memory was poor, still is. But here was an individual who lost his faith, but nevertheless didn't leave the pages of Scripture.

[54 : 33] He could quote Abney, every single time. So surely these people in the first century would be reliable. Yes. Well, as I was reading this, I kept coming back to what Dr. Packer is telling us about catechism.

There's a rich field of instruction there that we've lost. Now, maybe it was badly handled in the past, but maybe we should think about it again.

Yes, Harvey. Can you think that a person could accept the methodology of the people in the video?

Yes. And yet, in another compartment of their life, belief, I think, I know there are such people. Does he meditate on that kind of phenomenon because maybe it's not that kind of book or does he imply anything about that?

People who are willing to exert belief put us not in the scripture. What belief are you thinking of, Harvey? Well, on Sunday they might very well believe that the resurrection really happened and the scriptures are reliable, but when they do their scholarship, they have a methodology that goes against the grain of that completely.

[55 : 56] Yeah. They want to keep their jobs. Yeah. It may be, but I would think there may well be a sincere disbelief too.

It requires quite a feat of the imagination though to think of how the gospels could have been so cleverly composed at a much later date in such a compatible way, not with perfect agreement, but with essentially the same agreement.

And they don't speculate a whole lot on how that kind of a miracle could have occurred. But that's, you know. So Harvey, I think you were touching on what are the roots of disbelief, are you?

Well, it certainly is interesting to watch these communities so interested in these documents, but then with an outcome that distants them on page after page of their history.

Yes. Yeah. Yes. It's like in computer science, what you go in with is what you come out with.

[57 : 15] Any further thoughts on Harry? Can I raise the difficulty with the resurrection is the problem our society has with truth of any kind?

We sort of dismiss the possibility of ultimate truth. You know, that we just go on and on. And the resurrection is, in a sense, a stark, immediate truth that you confront.

Now, you, a professor at the university, what does he do? How does he cope with what is truth?

I mean, in scientific terms, and how would that relate to us in our daily lives?

Because I think relativism just dismisses truth, ultimately. faith, and you believe what you want to believe.

[58 : 27] And the possibility of being confronted by the truth of the resurrection is quite overwhelming.

Right. Too much to take. I think in the universities, as perhaps everywhere in life, the, and in this relativistic age, the closest many people would come to an idea of truth would be the prevailing opinion.

Yeah. And it's very costly in times and places to oppose the prevailing opinion. And so people do not do that. And there are other areas other than theology one could mention where people have suffered from opposing the prevailing opinion, even in today's age.

So I think your question had to do partly with how professors could be so interested, have such a lack of interest in absolute truth, Harry?

Well, yeah, whether you can talk about absolute truth in our society. And I mean, the gospel professes to be absolute truth.

[59 : 43] Absolutely, right. And our culture, our society, I guess, says absolute truth is an impossibility.

Well, you know, the thoughtful physicists, I think, give us much help in this. Who does? Physicists who are thoughtful about the underpinnings of their subject because they are deeply committed to the idea that there is a real world and that we can gradually appreciate a knowledge of what it is. They have very little respect for pure relativism. No respect. They think we're dealing with reality.

Now, other scholars in a variety of fields, I can't imagine how they justify their despair.

They're... Olaf, maybe you can help here. people. Well, I was just telling you that John Paul Kinghorn is an excellent example of the kind of person that you're speaking about. Yeah. Because he talks about critical realism as being the basis of his philosophy.

As a Christian member of the Royal Society in London, the only theologian who is a member of that society, he's had to deal with the question of relativism in the first hand.

[61 : 05] And it seems to me most of his books engage this question directly. whilst naive realism is to be rejected, critical realism works on the basis of the knowledge that we are dealing with reality.

Right. We need to be careful. Right. But there is a reality there. He's a theoretical physicist, but he has a profound respect for experimental data.

and he's saying the job of the theoretician is to understand the data, not to force the data to fit a beautiful idea.

But just as a caveat on that, when we use the word absolute truth, I think we're a dangerous crowd. Mm-hmm. Because what the careful physicist says is that there's a 99.9% probability.

Yes. Yes. Yes. And I think that to make that case absolute is a form of idolatry. In fact, can't we go further and say the Lord doesn't give us the privilege to any of us to be absolutely sure of what we believe.

[62 : 20] We live in faith. We go by the best evidences we have, but there's no absolute knock down proof. In fact, that's true of all of science.

That, um, I used to teach the laws of thermodynamics years ago, and a great maxim for the students was these laws are held to be valid only because of the failure of all attempts heretofore to disprove them.

There's no absolute proof. That's just the way the world is. But anyway, Harry, we're wandering from your question about truth.

I just, uh, uh, I mean, we just, we just have this, this problem in our society that all religions are right.

Yeah. And, uh, yes. So that there's, uh, and that the most, the most Christ-like thing to do is acknowledge that.

[63 : 29] Yes, yes. And it becomes difficult to do with the light of the New Testament. I better not take time to read all the table contents here, but he does, does address these questions.

Here's, here's one of the subheadings. the divinity of Jesus raises questions concerning other religions. But defining the term religion is not a simple task.

But anyway, the world's religions do have mutually exclusive philosophical positions. And, uh, he gives some example for Buddhism.

And then he goes on to strengthen, to, to, uh, defend the proposition that all religions are true, uh, contains an inherent self contradiction, and so forth.

Um, so, uh, that, I haven't even touched on it, but he's much concerned about the very question you're raising. Yeah, Sam.

[64 : 42] It seems like the world struggles with, um, unique events, maybe especially as they pertain to the need for faith.

Um, I was talking with a colleague at work one time, and he was communicating how he disbelieves so strongly in the virgin birth, uh, because he looks for evidence of it today.

And in a moment of lucidness, I think, I asked why, if a God is able to step in and affect the laws of this world, and he deemed at one time only to cause the virgin birth to happen, what good is it going to do to look forth out of the game?

It would be kind of like saying, well, I wonder if Sam has any children in this world, and looking through DNA results, looking at all the people in the world apart from my son.

Well, you're going to conclude, you're going to come up with the wrong conclusion. And it's kind of the same with resurrection. To look through history and look for resurrections in our modern day if they haven't happened.

[65 : 58] Right. I mean, you're looking at the miracles. You're going to see, you're going to be going to be going to be going to be in the wrong place. You're going to look for the first chapter of his book, Miracles, talks about how we have to come at miracles, first of all, looking at our presuppositions and say, will I allow a miracle to happen?

Right. Otherwise, you can look at the evidence and say, there's not enough evidence. And if your presuppositions don't allow for it, you're never going to be convinced of it. You know, he says, if we start the presupposition that miracles have never happened, why, of course, they never will.

But it's interesting, though, I think on your point, how subsidiary objections tend to take first place.

The great miracle is that God entered human history.

And if he did, is it so surprising that some other surprising things might have happened? Ron. Ron. Bill, as an engineer, I try to get a little of hard information.

I identify with that. And you mentioned absolute truth. I think somebody mentioned it was 99.9%, maybe.

[67 : 14] In the field of physics that you're involved in, do you have to bring the element of faith in like we do in the Christian life? Faith in the data.

Because we can be confronted with wrong data or misleading data. And data has to be scrutinized. I'm only working in applied science, not in the fundamentals of course.

But the same thing applies. But every piece of data has to be scrutinized. But eventually you have to have faith that you have done that. And... Yes, you go by your best conclusion from the evidence available.

And I think that's what Overman is saying in the book here. Let's look at all the evidence. Those who read the scriptures with a prior assumption that the content is mythical will not be open to any evidence to the contrary.

contrary. I have to be careful about that. There's one counter-example. And I had meant to re-read it before coming here today. And that is the book called Who Moved the Stone by Frank Morrison.

[68 : 29] Where, as I recall, Morrison, a lawyer, set out to examine the evidence in order to disprove the resurrection. But as he went along, he changed his mind.

So there's a nice counter-example. How many of you have read that book, by the way? At least a few. Okay. I think that is not as exceptional as it sounds.

Oh, please give an example. Encourage us further. There's an example of Job, who set up in the 1930s, set up to demonstrate the illogicality of the scriptures.

Well. And ended up as a very strong Christian. Well. I think that the moment reads a biography of people who are set on this perspective. Yeah.

You know, these things are just impossible. Impossible. Yeah. The accumulation of evidence, even though they won't automatically convert one, can, in fact, have that possible.

[69 : 31] very good. I think Lee Strobel has the same testimony. Yeah. He was a lawyer. His wife became a Christian. He set out to show her how it was all brought in.

Well, good. Okay. Jesus has recorded this song 13 times in the Old Testament.

It is written. Mm-hmm. And it gives us great confidence in what we're reading. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. It is to be believed.

So it's an encouragement to take the Old Testament seriously. Yes. even though we find it very difficult at times to understand it. Mm-hmm.

Yes? The very author, Paul, of the words that you passed on, the words that I have received and delivered them to you, Paul himself did not want to believe that Jesus Christ was who he said he was.

[70 : 36] Right. Right. And yet, we saw the remarkable change in him. Yes. he had given us these words of evidence against his own previous beliefs.

Yeah. Subconsciously, he must have been convinced that his own intensely emotional reaction was because there was something there he couldn't get rid of.

Some truth some truth that he could not argue away. Yeah? Maybe just to come back on that a little bit, I think it is encouraging to see these people changing their mind, but I would just submit this for discussion maybe, or maybe we're done with that, fact, but that Paul changed his mind not because he saw the facts well, because he saw Jesus and was terrified.

And Jesus, and meeting, the experience of meeting Christ reinterpreted him. And so he had to reinterpret the data based on what he had experienced.

experience. And so as we're, I just want to be careful that we don't posit some place of autonomy or neutrality where we can just look at all the evidence and then decide that Christianity is probably the most viable because people don't come to faith that way.

[72 : 04] We didn't come to faith that way. We came to faith because we saw Christ and we knew that we were sinners and we repented. And so maybe just a word of caution.

just to say that we experience clear interpretation because we've met Christ. And that is the event that changes the way that we see the facts, if you will.

I'm not sure if that is congruent with what we've been saying. I think it is. I think it's well said. And I think it's consistent with what he's saying with the wording there about allowing us to speak of the impact of our faith upon our life.

And those of us who came early to faith, one reason we've maintained it, I suspect, is because there were those individuals who showed a consistency between faith and life.

And where that was absent, many people have turned away from the faith. So I think you're right to say this is not an abstract intellectual endeavor. It's interesting, the case is being made that science isn't that way either.

[73 : 14] Michael Ponganian, his book on personal knowledge, said hey, this understanding is all a very personal matter. Anyway.

applause, thank vous. Thank you. Thank Thank you.