

Making the Best of it: Following Christ in the Real World

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[0 : 00] Let us pray for those who teach and those who learn. O Lord Jesus Christ, be with us who are assembled in thy name, and grant to those who teach and to those who learn a right understanding of thy holy word, and a readiness to do thy blessed will, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

Is John Stackhouse in the audience? I see him not here. Well, it may be a good thing, or it may not be, but this intriguing title which I have for you is, as you can imagine, not my own creation, but it is the title of a book, which has intrigued me over the last few months, and I want to share with you my review of this book, and it has precisely this title, Making the Best of It, Following Christ in the Real World.

John Stackhouse is the holder of the chair which Jim Packer formerly occupied at Regent College, and I think only Jim knows how to pronounce the name of that chair, but you don't remember to do that.

What is it again, Jim? It's Stengu-Yutong-Shi-Pukasur-theology. Right. So this should give authority to the book, even if not to my comments.

So let me just say that I emphasize here the fact that it's an interpretation by myself. The last time I spoke to Learners Exchange, I felt very comfortable because I was sharing with you the findings of a group of Christians who had been meeting, and we'd come to some consensus as to what the Holy Spirit was leading us to in the scriptures.

[2 : 16] On this occasion, you have only my ruminations, and that's why I say, as interpreted by Olaf Slaymaker, and feel free to correct me either after the talk or after you have read the book, which is extremely interesting.

And I normally find it's necessary to read a book twice before I understand it, sort of rush through to get a general sense of it, and then go through more carefully the second time.

Well, it's taken me three readings of this book in order to feel that I have got to grips with it. And there are still some remarkable things in it which I still am hustling with.

So those of you who have not got very good eyesight will not be able to see the outline. Therefore... Thank you. Therefore... And, of course, the massive visual aid support which UBC provided when I was still a working member is no longer available.

So now we have these handmade visual aids. This is the outline of the talk. There are five points, which I know is far too many, but I shall hope to end with a reasonable time.

[3 : 34] It starts with the problematic that John defines as trying to be realistic about the nature of the world into which God has placed us.

What is the real world? He says we find defined in the parable of the weeds. Those who are using the authorized version will remember this as the parable of the wheat and the tares.

But in the more modern ESV, we now know it's the parable of the weeds. And the parable of the weeds is a remarkable parable which we shall talk about in a moment.

Secondly, there is a discussion about models of Christian engagement with the world. And thirdly, we look at the creation and redemption ordinances which John suggests define for us very clearly our relationship with the world.

Then he encourages us at point number four to look rather carefully at some of the great Christians of the 20th century. We're used in this class to looking at great Christians of the 17th century, but this is an attempt to move us forward.

[4 : 58] And finally, how to make the best of it. And I say in my extraordinarily positivistic mode, solving the problem defined in the parable of the weeds.

And I hope to suggest that in fact we still need a lot of help in interpreting that parable even at the end of John's discussion.

So, those are the five points and first of all the question of the definition of the problem. Jesus once described the kingdom of God in an unusual way.

The field into which seeds were planted is the world. Jesus teaches that the field is mixed indeed. It's populated by the children of God and by the children of the devil. Two constituencies that could hardly be more different. Yet, these two populations are intertwined in such a way that somehow uprooting the latter would also damage the former.

[6 : 18] The economy of the world as it is somehow requires that these two sets of neighbours be allowed to become fully themselves, maturing until the time of harvest when all is uprooted, judged, and rewarded.

as St. Augustine said when commenting on this parable, now is not the time for apocalyptic confrontation with the enemies of Christ, who might yet become his friends before the end of the age.

So over and within this landscape described in the parable of the weeds, there hangs obscurity such that weeds can look like wheat and vice versa, and such that the way forward is not immediately obvious.

The field presents not only evil to us, but also ambiguity. As Christians, we have a tendency very often to see the world in stark polarities of good and evil.

But the field is mixed and ambiguity is a factor with which we must reckon. We must also face the reality of our own ambivalence. The line distinguishing between good and evil does not, as Solzhenitsyn suggests, run between countries or people or classes, but within our own hearts.

[8 : 00] Realism requires that we expect good results because Jesus is Lord. But we do not expect perfect results, and we are not surprised or discouraged by bad results.

the combination of evil, ambiguity, and ambivalence leads to suboptimal expectations. For some Christians, only total victory will do, and they refuse to think in such terms as half a loaf is better than one, better than none.

It's undercut the whole presentation now. So in this mixed field, what does the normal Christian life look like?

And that's the question that John is tussling with. It starts with three alternative models of engagement between the Christian and the world, so we find.

And these three models are entitled cultural conquest, cultural withdrawal, and cultural persistence.

[9 : 27] resistance. The idea of cultural conquest is that we feel a necessity to reshape society according to Christian values.

We must take over society. For example, this is reflected very strongly in conservative Roman Catholicism, in the American religious right, and in various forms of liberation theology.

Secondly, cultural withdrawal. Christian communities must live in contradistinction to society, refuse all entanglements with the world.

And we all know the examples of such communities as the Hutterite community, or the Amish, and others. Some of us have had personal experience of more closed Christian communities in which entanglement with the world is strongly discouraged.

The difficulty with these two models of cultural conquest and cultural withdrawal is that they seem to be quite contradictory in relation to the parable of the weeds.

[10 : 47] weeds. If you look at the field in which the weeds and the wheat are growing, you don't see a little huddle of wheat in one corner with a stone wall around it so that there's no contact with the weeds.

we don't see the wheat overtaking the weeds, we see all the components of the field growing to maturity.

Judgment is God's and will occur at the end of the age. So we are left with the need to find a model which is here called cultural persistence.

I'll try and say a little more about that than the others because I think the others we recognize quite intuitively. But this model of cultural persistence is perhaps also thought of as the paradox of Christ and culture.

The tension of apparently serving two masters. Is this a kind of Orwellian doublethink to which Christians are encouraged?

[12:12] The thought surely is that Christians are to participate in and contribute to non-Christian societies while maintaining their ultimate allegiance to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. Must life in this category be lived precariously? How do we resolve this particular paradox? I think all of us do try to resolve this paradox but most of the time we do it in intuitive ways rather than bringing it out as a formal decision which we have prayed about and which we see as a standard model of engagement with the world.

So John directs us to the four commandments and this I think well presumably for theologians this is all very straightforward but for geographers this is quite exciting and I hope that you're more geographers than theologians are with all terms.

I have never seen this particular line-up of the commandments and maybe as I say maybe you're very familiar with them but the way in which John sets them out is that we have two creation commandments the first one the cultural mandate from Genesis chapter 1 the second one the great commandments which are of course identified in Matthew 22 but which we also know from the Ten Commandments these creation commandments apply universally to all people whether Christians or non-Christians the creation commandment which includes the cultural mandate encourages us all to be gardeners so this to encourage those of you who are more gifted in the garden than I but as you recall this verse from Genesis which has been so misused and which we have so screwed up as a society in terms of the dominion over the earth which is a careful stewardship of that earth which means gardening in practical terms that is a commandment to all people the extent to which we have allowed

David Suzuki and others to take over that commandment is a disgrace to our community but nevertheless it seems to me it's very helpful to see this and the great commandments of loving the Lord your God and your neighbour our duty here is to love not merely to avoid sin the whole concept of the shalom which can be achieved through the loving of God and neighbour includes the idea of governments and societies needing to bring about this shalom now of course there are many governments and societies that have in the past and even at the present are governments and societies in which Christians cannot cooperate but the point being that for us as Canadians whether or not we approve of Mr. Harper we have a government and a society in which we are allowed to operate as Christians and in which we are encouraged to participate so the point being here that these two creation commandments are not just for the

[16:17] Christian community they apply for the whole of society the second group of two commandments of course are known as the redemption commandments first of all the new commandment which Jesus gave to his disciples that we love one another the special love of Christians for Christians is that such love is a testimony to the shalom which is at the heart of the gospel however this may be the most difficult one for many of us part of the problem with the range of entanglements that we have in society is that we love many other people more than we do our Christian community but this is a specific commandment to us that we love one another this love images

Christ to the world the paradox of this new commandment in the church is that it seems exclusive but it is meant to be globally inclusive while the in-group loves each other it keeps its doors wide open to the society around us and secondly then of course the commandment which is specific to us as Christians the great commandment to go and make disciples these redemption commandments John nicely talks about them as emergency measures for an emergency situation by contrast with the creation commandments which apply universally these redemption commandments arise out of the emergency situation deriving from the fact that we have ignored the creation commandments deriving from the fact that we have fallen into sin and are therefore unable to love without the love of God in Christ in our hearts so the great commission to go and make disciples notes that the world is fallen and needs redemption in order to resume its proper function these commandments are only temporary in the new

Jerusalem they will not be needed so there you have the first tussling that John Stackhouse does with this field of ambiguity he says these four commandments help to straighten out some of that ambiguity in the sense that the creation commandments command stewardship of the earth and they command love at all levels of society we have failed Christ has come the Holy Spirit has come and we are empowered to love one another in a special way and to go into all the world and make

disciples this seems to be entirely consistent then with the model of the parable of the weeds that in fact the whole graciousness of God in allowing people to grow to maturity so that the opportunity for all to come to Christ is made available in this context well it's a start the second tussling that John does is the admonition to look at some of the heroes of contemporary Christianity I know we're going to expect to see Dr. Packer's name on the list but that's not his particular point he says there are too many good Christian insights from people who might not have signed up for the Montreal Essentials from whom we need to learn some of the ways in which we can interact with this field and he draws our attention particularly to three names all of us here have C.S.

Lewis as a hero but not all of us necessarily have Reinhold Lieber or indeed Dietrich Bonhoeffer as heroes what John is trying to do is not to suggest that these people have all the answers but he's saying that there's a particular thrust in their approach to society and to the world from which we as conservative Christians need to learn don't get the message that you have to go away and read all of Reinhold Niebuhr in the original in order to get John's point John's point is that there's a certain contribution here which we need to learn from now I have to again express my apologies for inadequate knowledge of some of these heroes but I think the points that John has made have impressed me very much and I've taken the opportunity to check back on some of these books and certainly

[22 : 41] I find it extremely helpful I think the best way to do it is just to give a potted biography of each of these three heroes and then to say what it is that John is asking us to learn from these examples all the time all the time basing this on the parable of the weeds and what it is that we should be doing as wheat well C.S.

Lewis his dates are 1898 to 1963 his fame was established at Oxford and then of course he was promoted to Cambridge for the last part of his life he achieved he achieved what is a remarkable triple first at Oxford now if you get a double first at Oxford you're probably going to become Chancellor of the Exchequer or Prime Minister or something but C.S. Lewis got a triple first in English Classics and Philosophy and then became the chair of Medieval and Renaissance English and in spite of all this learning he writes with a style which all of us have benefited from it's a personal individual challenge and every page of C.S.

Lewis's writings he defines a personal choice in all his writings either we seek pleasure he says which means drawing the world into oneself and devouring it and shrinking at the same time those of you who've read the screw tape letters will recognize what happened to Satan as the supreme shrinking narcissist or the two choices or we seek God thus being drawn out into the world to enjoy it God and oneself fully and forever his style is almost entirely individualistic there's no real sense of the church there's all sorts of problems that individual critics have talked about but the other aspect which is so wonderful in his writing is that in so many ways he reflects the Christian story of creation the fall redemption and consummation so that all his writings tend to be somehow a rehearsal of the biblical story but he wouldn't go down well in Germany he's not systematic enough if I list for you it's almost a scandalous list of reasons why culture is important he lists them as why culture is important to him first of all this is a way of earning a living by contrast with a German systematic theologian this is terrible the second reason for it is that culture can be harmful and therefore culture sellers should include some Christians and that was a strong motivation in his career a third motivation for involvement serious involvement in culture is pleasure and fourthly the motivation to awaken the unconverted to something more something more that points towards the gospel so it's not what you'd call a gospel sermon when you read C.S. Lewis but by inference the way in which it points to something beyond is always I think an inspiration in his writing many of us were greatly influenced by his little book Mere Christianity and I think that just refreshingly reading this the other day has the essence of his approach what he is saying then in relation to the parable of the weeds is that C.S.

[27 : 22] Lewis gives us an extraordinary example of someone who has involved himself in the world of culture at a level at the very highest level and at the same time maintained a clear perspective that there is something more than academic culture and that this points to the gospel in ways that are not as explicit as some might wish but nevertheless to those who read carefully are extremely encouraging and exciting well the second figure to which we are directed is Reinhold Niebuhr his dates are very comparable 1892 to 1971 for many years he was a minister in Detroit where he saw the problems of social unrest and social deprivation of the workers in the auto industry and his preaching was directed very strongly towards a social gospel at that time and there

are some very curious aspects of his theology which are very liberal and not necessarily the most helpful he's been called the theologian of public life the reward for that at the end of his life was the medal of freedom the US highest civilian honor and this was awarded partly because of his consistent preaching and his consistent ministry at this church in

Detroit but also as a professor at the Union Theological Seminary and in specific ways his preaching against the evils of the Ku Klux Klan which he was one of the strongest voices and his influence on Barack Obama and his family is of note he's also been called the prophet of Christian realism and here we come back to the word real the real world is what occupied Reinhold Niebuhr's life but it's not quite as simple as being a liberal versus a conservative approach because he talks about needing God's revelation he talks about the importance for humans to choose what we believe feel and do but that we're also limited by our sinful nature our duty in this world or in this field of weeds is to approximate the goodness of that better world in full realization of the limitations of this one he was preoccupied with nations and with leaders said very little about the church but he was indeed one who profoundly engaged with the world and the motivation for that engagement was very much that of looking to nations states and governments and society in the sense which is suggested in that model of cultural persistence that we talked about earlier the paradox of Christ and culture from Reinhold

Niebuhr's point of view is resolved not through individual commitment as it is in C.S. Lewis' case but through national commitment and he resolves his sense of Christ and culture through his ministry to governments and leaders the final of the three examples is Dietrich Bonhoeffer we've talked about him before in this place and John Conway came here with a video at one point which you may well remember his life of course was cut short 1906 to 1945 tragically shot just nine days before the end of the war and his work is still being widely discussed part of the problem being that many of his works were incomplete before he died he's been called the theologian of crisis and just to come to the end of this little discussion about

Bonhoeffer he is he sees the paradox of Christ and culture being resolved through individuals and churches together so you have the individual emphasized by C.S. Lewis the nation state and government and society emphasized by Reinhold Niebuhr and the church and the individual together being the focus of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's approach he's called the theologian of crisis because of course his whole life was shaped by the crisis of the Weimar Germany his theology was shaped by the German situation of crisis crisis of humanity crisis of the church crisis of individual persons so he came to focus his life and thought on transitions dangers and opportunities with respect to the identity of the

Christian individual and the church and of mission of the individual and the church and of the language of theology the heart of his theology was Christ there is no ambiguity about the centrality of Christ in Bonhoeffer's writing the word of God and discipleship are also quite explicit he was totally committed to the church as the bride of Christ and he struggled for his whole life to engage the church in Christian witness against the horrors of contemporary society Christ is lord of the world he said when Christ calls a man he bids him to come and die he calls us to die in order that we may live again in life abundant only

[34 : 51] Jesus Christ who bids us to follow him knows where the path will lead but we know that it will be a path full of mercy beyond measure and discipleship is joy if you ever get a chance to read his letters from prison that is a remarkable statement that discipleship is joy he was under the most extraordinary provocation in concentration camp under circumstances where most of us would feel that joy was a long way away but every letter that you read whether it's his personal or his church concern is marked by joy and I'm reminded of a book that has recently appeared under the pen of Jim Houston called Joyful Exiles which I recommend to any of you who know Jim or who would like to read about joy Jim talks about joy as being the mark of the

Christian and joy being a very deep sense not just of happiness but of contentment and gratitude very similar atmosphere is created in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's writing so I recommend that to you now the point that John is trying to make here is that here are three heroes of the Christian faith he's not saying these are orthodox evangelical Christians he's saying they have got the guts of the message about what this ambiguity in this field is all about they are totally committed they've committed their lives in the case of Bonhoeffer they've given their life for this whole mission and we really need to look carefully at how we are engaging in this field so finally and I guess you may or may not think that the paradox is resolved and one of the problems of course with theologians again with all due

respect is that they have very long words in their vocabulary and I put those in parentheses because they really do need to be unpacked he says there are four ways in which we should live as Christians in the real world and they are first of all dialectic without capitulation I don't know Jim is this a characteristic of theology that there have to be four or five syllables in each way no they don't have to use these words they use them as abbreviations oh well oh well that's exactly my next comment dialectic which you probably come across in the context of dialectical materialism but that's another long word

I prefer to think of it as dialogue but I'm told that's not quite right the classical context of dialectic is that in order to explore a problem that one puts forward a thesis and then the opponent develops an antithesis and as a result of this dialectic constant backwards and forwards discussion dialogue one is led to a more profound understanding of what the issues are all about so capitulation I suppose we know something about and the issue here is the extent to which the dialectic can be advanced before capitulation occurs and it takes a very strong and committed individual to stay with the dialectic or the dialogue in order to avoid capitulation now I know nobody here would capitulate but I wonder how many of us would have capitulated in a German concentration camp where one had actually been delivered just a month or two after meeting one's fiancée who one would never see again how many of us would capitulate under those circumstances so the point is that there's no available option in John's view and I agree with him of either complete withdrawal from the world or complete domination of the world we simply are in dialectic with the world we refuse to capitulate to the world we are to garden the world to take its potential and to improve it so in other words we have a responsibility to not only the environment but the world and at all levels of society secondly transformation without imperialism we contribute as Christians not only to the stewardship of the earth but also we are specifically responsible for carrying out the great commission we must recognize and applaud the fact that our non-Christian neighbors contribute to the human program of gardening and in my perspective not only do we applaud but we are envious of the achievement of our non-Christian neighbors in this area but at the same time we recognize that our Christian siblings make contributions to that same good one of the issues which can be troubling in reading this book is to what extent one is getting involved in relativism the John is very aware of that he talks about the importance of recognizing that he's not talking about compromising the faith he's talking about making judgments about ambiguous situations about situations where the better of two evils may have to be selected which he suggests is the most common lot in this field of weeds so whilst we specifically as Christians are responsible for carrying out the great commission at the same time we are involved in recognizing together with our non-Christian neighbors our obligation to be gardeners of the earth thirdly the plurality without relativism in recognizing that our non-Christian neighbors contribute to the human program of gardening at the same time we recognize that as

[42 : 56] Christians we are making contributions to the specifically Christian work of redemption each accomplishes something specific and good this does not mean relativism it means that we recognize the good that is done in society in responding to the first of the creation commandments but it also means that we have to recognize that we have obligations to redemption commandments which are distinct and which are not part of the non-Christian world so that plurality without relativism is a fine line to draw and involves in many cases a delicate balance but I think in retrospect and reflecting on the whole of John's message here that balance is the biggest theme of the book and I'll say a little more about that in a moment which we're running into time the fourth of these motifs is a conviction without hubris actually that's a fairly short word but it's still fairly unusual conviction without hubris we walk with confidence in Christ because we have the conviction that he is Lord he has called us into his company and he has assigned us a mission along with our standing orders of cultivating the earth we need to be both patient and persistent but it is critical that we avoid hubris there it is again what is it pride arrogance

I guess in other words we have great confidence in Christ but we don't project that as arrogance it is our Lord Jesus Christ who is the reason for our confidence and not our own selves we cannot succeed on our own we need each other in our Christian communities and we need the support and wisdom of other Christian communities but we also need the cooperation and gifts of other human beings we need our fellow creatures and most of all we need God the consciousness of the completed work of Jesus and the active presence of the Holy Spirit now that's a sort of a massive statement which really embraces the sort of balance that John is trying to encourage us to follow if I

could just recap very briefly he's saying that the the field of weeds is a curious and difficult situation for us to be in it involves no clear distinction between the children of the devil and the children of God no clear distinction to be observed on the outside of these individuals as you well know but he is saying that the balanced Christian life will take very seriously not only our responsibility to God the Great Commission and the command to love one another but we take equally seriously the creation commandments which essentially are for all of us whether Christian or non-Christian this balance then is further reflected in the way in which he puts these commandments together saying that indeed all these commandments apply to us as Christians whereas only two of them apply to the world at large and then he says look here we've got these three great heroes of the faith which have been alive while we've been here in Canada together and they represent people who have this balanced contribution if you take them together as a group of three this is a tremendously balanced contribution and again with respect to the motifs and the scenarios that he's putting forward here these are really the first steps in putting together a balanced way of living as Christians in this world and he's saying really we are in many ways at step one in clarifying exactly what our obligations are as

Christians as compared to the respect and obligations of non-Christians it's very different from the black and white approach which many of us are familiar with the blackness and the whiteness is clear in God's eyes but not many of us have that same wisdom and overview and therefore for many of us ambiguity and paradox is clearer than the black and white so that's the best that I can do for the moment but I'm very pleased if you would like to pick up the outline if you haven't really found my presentation clear and we'll just take that with that yeah good so anyone who would like to pass it back so I'm open

I think that there's a real possibility of misunderstanding some of this and the shortness of my comments may have made it even more ambiguous than it was intended to be but at least I resonate with the discussion that John has introduced here and however if you wish to take issue please do so and I've left the outline here so people can actually read it from the back yes please tell us about a university with regard to the parable of the seeds what is a university in our world where does it fit in it's an interesting question Harry I think that many of us are many of us in the university are troubled by the dominance of secularism but it seems to me that the intention of the university is to seek truth at the deepest level and there are some parts of the university which are successfully following that attempt but in a secular society the extent to which we can be successful in defining truth is limited so the role of the university in society is it seems to me to explore and to develop people's capacity to investigate the world around us

[51 : 05] God's creation is that the direction you're heading on the university is a dominant part of our culture and it seems that certain possibilities of truth are not acceptable within the university and how do we cope with that how do we learn to live with that well it's a massive question you know that when Simon Conway Morris was invited to give lectures at UBC the Vancouver Institute declared not permissible because this might conceivably erode some of the students convictions about evolution now

Simon Conway Morris is an evolutionist a paleobiologist who is a dedicated Christian so the secular arm of the university well it's not an official arm but of course it's an outreach arm of UBC the Vancouver Institute declares that this kind of perspective is not appropriate so you're absolutely right there are certain things which are not acceptable I find that in the 40 years that I've been involved in the university that it's become easier to make the point that Christianity is part of the equation when I was an undergraduate I was really very much lost as to where the leadership might be in the university with respect to any kind of

Christian perspective whereas it seems to me today that there's a massive amount of leadership it's a small percentage of the total university but nevertheless there's lots of writing that gets done by Christians and the environment is in my view easier this notwithstanding Charles Taylor's recent book on the secular age I don't know whether people have seen this book it's a 1200 page book describing in an amazing way the way in which our society has succumbed to secularism so that there's a fight and we expect expected to see a fight expect to see a relationship between you know one of the reasons why the secular has taken over is that we have not been as faithful as Christians in addressing the real world and I think John Stackhouse point is well taken here we've done an amazing job of in various ways and I mean the whole sort of mission of the church the expansion of the church and so on extraordinary contributions but this last century has seen

significant retrogression in the explicit secularity of the university yeah I don't know I think you have a very good point universities are crucial but let me see if I can explain my thoughts in a metaphor I see a highway of universities going between England USA Canada and Australia but I also see a lot of highways going on in the third world and other paradigms that are not explored in that big highway and yet they're explored in many profound ways in Russia and Latin

America Africa Asia and part of Europe and it's not even at the Christian level of the but it's also at the research level where we don't tap on that knowledge and to me it's really interesting the review of our heroes because they point to that for example in psychology and education if you talk to a professor they will know about a Russian researcher that which thinks of different roles than the Italian other people right but or if you look at theology and you look at the popular educational movement in Brazil you will tap into a different kind of literacy and beliefs and Christianity that it's starting to be touched by the university in the literacy issues and so there's still a lot of permeability that universities do not even have in what is community-based approach and what it is mass movement of people and that's our commission and so universities are not that permeable and yet within the churches we're not permeable and we don't look at other heroes that are happening right now because the

[57:14] Holy Spirit talks in all churches and we should look at that as we look at our past too where we bring St. Adesine and Teresa and all those people and so the liberation theology has in a sense a lot of failure but a lot of good of course and unknown people that have done all this work and then you know popular education in Brazil is amazing the joy of people living in politics in spite of honesty I've never seen that here well thank you for that global perspective I get that's that's important but of course the whole the whole issue of poverty is should be at the very core of our mission it seems to me that Jesus priority was with the poor and this is one of the things that of course Reinhold Niebuhr represents so strongly the concern for the downtrodden the startling statistic which came out from the United

Nations this week was that as a result of the economic downturn it appears that over 100 million folks will be undernourished and 1 billion people remain under threat of famine so that the actual implications of that global economic downturn is immediately transferred into the third world in a more dramatic way way so it's not that universities don't touch that the universities are very involved in that but as you say there are so many other good things being done in our society for the alleviation of poverty yes yes you carrying on that conversation I'm just thinking of John Sampas has addressed that in the three heroes that he had cited

CS Lewis was in the halls of academics and he was on the street with the everyday man and Bonhoeffer was in the trenches excellent point excellent point and if you look at that the example of Jesus Christ in his ministry he worked with tribes and Pharisees he worked with the intellectuals that were working people and he also worked towards those that were underprivileged and hurting and I think John Sampas is pointing us to a balance which is a key word that I think he brought out yeah thank you for that that's well I really like to hear this about balance and it has been said it has been my experience that churches are polarized on the subject of getting at a reasonable balance because some have gone so far in the direction of social and political justice which are reasonable things for us to get involved in that they've stopped preaching gospel or it's become virtually invisible and our most recent example of this is

First United Church down in the downtown east side which has been desanctified or whatever you call it consecrated anyway they don't have a minister anymore and it has been operating as a social agency for at least 30 to 40 years with social work students going there for fetal placements and stuff to ignore poverty and the results of poverty in that area would be really derelict on the part of any church on the other hand we at St.

John's don't even get beggars coming to our office because they would need bus fare to get here we are surrounded by wealth even though some of us don't associate ourselves with that with wealth and we come from long distance but the church itself is in a very high real estate area so we've got churches that are preaching the gospel and ignoring these churches and others that are diving into them and ignoring the gospel just exactly how did we get at that balance how did neither for instance who was interested in I would say maybe political and social justice how did he hang on to his faith or even propagate it in that climate well I think it's a very interesting point one thing I learned from the only thing probably that I learned from Lloyd Axworthy was his statement that in political life you can only have one issue to fight for at any one time because you will undoubtedly

be misunderstood by other people if you have two issues or more here

[62 : 46] John Stackhouse is saying we have four commandments and I can see how easily we can get stuck on any one of them our own children are stuck on the creation mandate and dad is a little bit too but the whole life can be filled up with the cultural mandate of creation and becoming gardeners of the environment the whole question of divorcing loving God with all our hearts and minds and neighbours ourselves we can some love God and not their neighbours some love their neighbours and not God we seem to be genetically programmed to hold on to one idea or one particular thing at any one time seems to me that's what John's discussion is helpful about in saying that really these are all commandments that we have in the scriptures some of them apply specifically to Christians some of them apply to all humanity and we need to embrace all of them yes

I really like that concept of unneeded that you present because it's really in our hearts and I for example let me let me talk about what I see from our church and I really pray and respect every option this church has and I have been to meetings where we are concerned with child constitution in Thailand and I have been to meetings where people are concerned about missions to different parts of the world and I'm totally welcome and respect that on the other token you know what Shira was saying is there was a doctor that went to Africa and then came back to Vancouver Eastside and said you know what eight patients here are dying at a higher rate in Congo and then prostitution and child prostitution and I'm glad we have genesis and the taking out people out the street and helping those women raise their kids and there's a lot of things we're doing and I just think we need a little bit more discussion to explore that ambiguity because it is within our hearts and it's so easy to just go judging and you know building on in a dungeon yeah the line runs through our hearts

I think that's important yes Bushel does Dr. Sackham talk about vocation affecting which of these models might be best raised by the individual in life yeah yeah there's a whole section of the book that I've not been able to accommodate here and in fact there's a whole chapter on vocation and it's extremely interesting and he divides it up not just by the kind of vocation but also by the scale of vocation and he talks about the individual vocation and the church vocation and the national vocation so it's there's a lot more in this than I've been able to compress here obviously but I think that's I imagine we'll see a series of books developing some of these ideas

Phil at first thought and of course I'd be very happy to be corrected first thought it seemed difficult to discern in the New Testament epistles the impact of the parable of the leaves as John expounds it now is that just that epistles were written at a different age or is he implying that it's actually a missing element there that we need a new epistle which is more outward going and more appropriate for our society in other words what position does John take really about the New Testament epistles he addresses that very directly and says we are in such a different political and institutional situation that it's very difficult to apply directly some of those injunctions which were essentially refugees from the Roman

Empire and it was so evident that that was a direct contradiction between the anti-Christian perspective of the Roman Empire and the emergent Christian community he says really we need to learn from that but we need also to reappraise what it is that we have in the free society he's not suggesting that democratic society is necessarily perfect but indicating that there really is no direct guidance in the epistles because of the context change now I know this is a slippery slope here too but I think it's quite right that the nature of that Roman Imperium was so publicly against monotheism at one level and so obviously against

[68 : 43] Christian individuals at another level that there was no possibility of collaborative activity but that's his perspective on it he's not calling for any epistle he's saying that the principle's clearly there and that well when Bonhoeffer found himself in an evil society that he had to take some action Harry just thinking about the national on CBC I don't know whether you've watched that or not who's the broadcaster who comes on at 10 o'clock the thing the theme of the national seems to be that we are a good nation but I want to tell you about some of the things that have gone wrong today and it seems that when you're talking about the relationship between our culture and our faith and our faith says there is a profound evil has a profound grip on our faith if there's something good that happens that's news as opposed to if there's something evil that happens that's news if Peter

Mancbridge said today these are the symptoms of the presence of the kingdom among us rather than these are in our good society these are the few mistakes we've made today we just need a

sort of cultural turnaround that's an excellent point it seems to me that what you're saying is that Christianity is countercultural at one level so it's that's that's that's right yeah and what what was refreshing although goodness knows I'm not a follower of the Dalai Lama what was refreshing about that edition of the son where the Dalai Lama was the editor was that in fact that's what happened positive things were reported and it was a shock because newspapers don't emphasize the positive there is one exception or used to be

I haven't seen it for a long time the Christian sounds monitor because that always emphasizes the positive so why aren't we all reading it does it I mean I'm not sure does it do you continue to just Augustine received a letter from a Roman soldier serving in no part of the Empire saying I can't stand anymore I'm going to go join the monastery and he wrote that Professor Wilkins in Virginia writes about this Augustine wrote him back and said don't you need to serve where you are the Empire brings order to this theatrical world so serve Christ there don't join the monastery these issues are old oh yes yes I happen to have the parish life notes with me today and I'm even just thinking looking in here I encourage you to all look in here and see the good things that are going on at

St. John you know that you can either participate in attend pray for or finance you know there's grief share there's divorce care hundreds of people have been helped by those programs including people here there's missions lunches there's operation Christmas child all of these things are going on in here in this very church and also I encourage us to consider that to and get involved even more than we are a lot of us are helpful point thank you we sometimes get too narcissistic global is good but local is mixed what God is calling a lot of us to do what am I being called to what's the next step I can take if I want to have a balance good thanks for that yeah good well that's a good point on which to conclude I think thank you for thank you thank you thank you thank you