

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTRY OF  
THE TEACHINGS OF KENNETH CRACKNELL  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO FORMER STUDENTS

A PROJECT REPORT AND THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF BRITE DIVINITY SCHOOL  
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The Implications for Ministry of the Teachings of Kenneth Cracknell

with Special Reference to Former Students

James Ray Holland Jr.

ABSTRACT

To be effective in ministry in the contemporary religious milieu, today's seminarians, tomorrow's church leaders, must receive more than a mere academic experience; they need practical experience as to how to function effectively within a socially diverse climate of faith. The author documents the long term impact of Kenneth Cracknell's attempts to nurture cross cultural understanding and cooperation within the seminary context. The intent of this exposition is to demonstrate that Kenneth Cracknell has purposefully created a transformative environment using interfaith dialogue as an effective paradigm for informing today's diverse seminary population. To that end, opinions, reactions and musings of a dozen former students are documented and presented herein as models of appropriate conversation for interfaith dialogue.

Kenneth Cracknell, Christian author and theologian, is retiring (2006) after an extensive career proactively promoting empathy and openness between people of differing religious identities. While Professor Cracknell has extensive experience in local ministry and foreign missions, his background includes the position of Director

of Interfaith Relations for the British Council of Churches, Senior Tutor at the Wesley House, Cambridge, England and Professor of Theology and Global Studies at Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas.

Kenneth Cracknell's teachings are anchored in three fundamentals: first, he advances a reasonable challenge to historically destructive theologies that have yielded centuries of suspicion and social conflict. Historically, social power mongers have focused on faith differences as a way to arouse mistrust between religious others. Second, the realities of the concurrent pluralistic global community necessitate a world view that invites mutual cooperation. This truth is framed by challenging students to embrace personal faith, define personal beliefs and even confess Christian traditions while accepting, respecting and peacefully engaging religious and cultural tension. Finally, Kenneth Cracknell demonstrated in his career the essential truth for living that we should, and must, love our neighbor as we do ourselves. The implications for ministry of the teachings of Kenneth Cracknell are grounded in the Golden Rule.

BRITE DIVINITY SCHOOL  
Fort Worth, Texas

Thursday, May 11, 2006

To the Dean of Brite Divinity School:

I am submitting herewith a project report and thesis written by James Ray Holland Jr. entitled "The Implications for Ministry of the Teachings of Kenneth Cracknell with Special Reference to Former Students."

I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry.

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Kenneth Cracknell, Major Professor

We have read this professional paper  
and recommend its acceptance:

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Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program

Accepted

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Nancy G. Ramsay, Dean  
Brite Divinity School

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## CHAPTER 1

### DIALOGUE AS METHOD FOR LIVING AND TEACHING

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CHAPTER 1  
DIALOGUE AS METHOD FOR LIVING AND TEACHING

Introduction

The fourth and fifth decades of the Twentieth century were not the best of times for childhood on the British Isles. World War II was about control, arrogance, defiance and power. Paranoia, apprehension and fear saturated every moment; no one emerged unscarred. While bombs fell like firecrackers, the whole of European culture was in a constant state of full alert. At war's end, Kenneth Cracknell was ten years of age. Bulldozers shoving corpses into bigoted burial graves were vivid pictures of real depravity. The mantra of "never again" was on the lips of all.

Kenneth Cracknell took it personally. He invested his entire career doing something about it. Six decades later, we reflect on the longitudinal impact of those most horrible of memories of evil reach out over subsequent generations through Professor Cracknell and informs our ways of being as ministers. Those World War II images of wickedness gave thrust and motivation for a life dedicated to change the way people relate with one another. Kenneth Cracknell, especially for a curious London lad, has done more than anyone could have imagined to ensure it would never happen again. My task is to present the implications of the teachings of Kenneth Cracknell on the lives and careers of his students at Brite Divinity School.

## Method of Research

Determining an appropriate method of research for this project has been a daunting task. While Professor Cracknell's curiosity will likely be satisfied by the dialogues presented herein, it is vital to prepare the reader for the conversations so as to not dishonor the reality and truth contained therein. To that end, I have presented a partial picture of Professor Cracknell's life. I hope that the substance of my presentation serves to answer the question presented in the title: what is the impact of Kenneth Cracknell's teachings on his students? What events are relevant? What is vital to the stated goal? I respectfully request that the information disclosed be received in the spirit of love intended. It is not my intention to overlook anything critical, nor is it my intention to embarrass anyone for the sake of a critical paper. It is with that disclaimer that I move forward in presenting my findings.

Kenneth Cracknell's teachings are grounded in three fundamentals: first, he advances a reasonable challenge to historically destructive theologies that have yielded centuries of suspicion and violent social conflict. Historically, social power mongers have focused on faith differences as a way to manipulate trust and arouse suspicion towards religious others. Second, the realities of the concurrent pluralistic global community necessitate a world view that invites openness, understanding and mutual cooperation. This truth is framed by challenging students to embrace personal

faith, speak one's beliefs clearly and even boldly confess Christian traditions while accepting, respecting and peacefully engaging religious and cultural tensions. Finally, Kenneth Cracknell demonstrated in his career the essential truth that we should, and must, love our neighbor as we do ourselves. The implications for ministry of the teachings of Kenneth Cracknell are grounded in the Golden Rule.

Nonetheless, it is notable that this is not a biography of the life and works of Kenneth Cracknell; it is not a Festschrift, nor is it an obituary. The essence of my project is to ascertain, as comprehensively as possible, the method and long term consequences, influences and implications of the themes that Professor Cracknell taught. To do so, I consider it necessary to survey his personal background, professional career and living theology. At different times, I speak of Professor Cracknell's ideology or methodology in the past tense. That is only because I am a former student and he is ending a grand professional career. At other times, I use the present tense. The distinction for me is that Kenneth Cracknell will not stop being Kenneth merely because this season in life is concluding. He is transitioning to a different life. At least, that is what I hear about Vermont.

As a research project, there has been no other lengthy study done on the teaching methods and impact of the theology of Kenneth Cracknell. That was fitting, and now, at the conclusion of his professional career, it is the appropriate time for such a study. Since dialogue was his method, then my task also was to dialogue with some of his former students to ascertain the long term impact of having experienced

Kenneth Cracknell as a person, teacher, counselor and friend. Professor Cracknell himself provided for me a list of present and past students he felt competent to discuss the nature of his calling. The twelve name below are the ones that responded. No one has intentionally been left out. These dialogues are presented as the real heart of this project. Everything else frames these examples of how dialogue can happen. While unconventional in form, it is quite appropriate to model genuine and authentic dialogue for the task at hand. I pray that the reader is challenged to look for ways to dialogue with others in much the same manner and attitude as demonstrated herein. Probably, the most difficult aspect of this task was to schedule the meetings and to take the time to converse. One goal is to stress the significance of taking time to be with people who are different. That in of itself will change hearts.

While it is readily apparent that this project has an imbedded bias in favor of its subject, I respectfully request that the reader does not take it as unreasonable or unfair. The impact our Professor has had on each of us cannot be underestimated nor understated. In terms of career path and social interaction, we all hope to live and breathe and have an attitude of compassion and caring for religious others. Each participant is highly regarded and quite involved in their own pastoral callings. It is remarkable that so many could find the time to interview with me. It is only because of their deep affection for Kenneth Cracknell. I owe each of them a debt of gratitude. These friends are my coauthors of this project. Much of what I am documenting is merely repeating to the reader what they have submitted and reported to me.

The following people were interviewed:

Peter Jones, Ph.D. Candidate, Perkins School of Theology, SMU, Dallas, Tx.;

Bette Buschow, Chaplain for Women at Dawson Prison, Dallas, Tx.;

Bo Garrison, MTS Candidate at Brite Divinity School, Fort Worth, Tx.;

Page Hines, Exec. Director, First Street Methodist Mission, Fort Worth Tx.;

Sharmin Demoss, Asst. Exec. Officer, Center for Survivors of Torture, Dallas, Tx.;

David Brockman, Ph.D. Candidate Perkins SMU, Dallas, Tx.;

Eleanor Forfang Brockman, Teacher, Tarrant County College, Fort Worth, Tx.;

Mark Hanshaw, Professor of Religious Studies, Richmond College, Dallas, Texas;

Yvette Hanshaw, Development Dir., Communities of Schools, Fort Worth, Tx.;

David D'Aquila, Elder, Rushcreek Christian Church, Arlington, Tx.;

Marilyn Zemba, Minister, White Chapel Methodist, Grapevine, Tx.;

Jennifer Rowley, Chaplain, Palliative Care, Baylor Medical Center, Dallas, Tx..

I also have recorded two interviews with Professor Cracknell.

With a couple of exceptions, all of the participants have completed their education at Brite Divinity School. Professor Cracknell and I deliberated the most effective manner to approach, remind and prepare participants for the subject at hand. Being true to his own teaching method, Professor Cracknell suggested that I not ask any questions, that I just introduce the topic and let them tell me what came to mind. In an ideal world,... maybe, but scheduling appointments without having parameters was a luxury I could not risk. Each received this battery of questions for reflection:

1. What are your reflections on the content of Cracknell's teachings. What was surprising about your experience of him? What changed you the most?
2. What are the pastoral implications of his teachings? How have you processed these truths? What are the practical implications of what you have learned?
3. How does all this play out in your studies or career? How did Cracknell influence your focus, passion and drive? In what ways did he build faith?
4. Within Christianity, there are doctrines that are seemingly incompatible. How do you synchronize the open view that other religions are valid and deserving of dignity with the passion you have for significant debates concerning critical personal beliefs?
5. What is the focus and purpose of interfaith dialogue? Why would others want to be involved? What are the broader implications of such a dialogue?
6. When thinking of the dialogue environment, are we assuming a certain degree of intellect, education or even interest on the part of the participants?
7. How has Cracknell's content affected your world view and spirituality?
8. Personally, how authentic is your "open heart?" Do you struggle with the conflict between permissiveness and the strength of your opinion?
9. How do you synthesize the notion that all faith is valid and there are some ways of expressing faith that are counterproductive or even toxic?
10. Openness, full acceptance seems to be in conflict with observed reality. There are people who have a world view, theology or politic that is not working. When do you leave immanent critique behind? When do you confront, challenge or intervene?

The actual interviews did not follow this battery of questions in order. Having prepared my fellow participants, I began each conversation with a simple hello. While, I certainly had as an agenda hearing my questions answered, I adhered to Professor Cracknell's formula as much as possible. Those dialogues are submitted not only as the research for this project, but as an integral component of its presentation. In keeping with Professor Cracknell's own teaching method, I submit these conversations as information to be discerned by the reader. I have lightly edited these dialogues and have attempted to allow original oral character to shine through. Therefore, as in real life, people do not always use the best choice of words, speak in complete sentences, avoid splitting infinitives, or even necessarily get their verbs and subject to agree. This literary format is intentional. Within the parameters of discussion, we can hear, see, feel and begin to know what impact the professor has had on our careers, passions, faith and overall world view. I invite the reader to read and listen as the pictures, imagery and ways of a loving and generous teacher passes once again through the hearts of his disciples into expressions of gratitude.

To frame these dialogues, I will first briefly sketch out the personal and professional life of Kenneth Cracknell. I will then discuss the understanding of how effective dialogue takes place and will ultimately speak to a theology of openness that invites the reader not just to be tolerant or receptive but to be inviting to those who experience life and the world differently.

### Family Life and Professional Career

“Faith is not found in explanations, but in demonstrations of good deeds...”

Kenneth Cracknell was raised on the cusp of a lower middle class London family just on the point of making good. His family heritage was Methodist and blue collar, certainly not the social elite. The Cracknell household was poor, but they were good people in the best sense of the word. His father was a model of generosity and helpfulness. He was a good example of Christian life, always in church. He was supportive, but interestingly, he was not an intellectual. To read a book was painful to him, but he knew enough to pass tests and become a member of the insurance fraternity. Later in life, Kenneth made a mistake by offering one of his own publications to his father to read. He just could not get his mind around the content. The Cracknell home had no scholarly books in it.

During the war, Kenneth's father was stationed in Oxfordshire in the middle of England and he served on bases shared by the Royal Air Force and the American Air Force. He came home on weekends and brought with him a Saturday Evening Post (which was not accessible to the general public). On such occasions, Kenneth curiously studied the magazine's content and pictures. Kenneth's fertile imagination was invigorated about life outside of the confines of London. He was introduced to the world at large; a place he has ultimately come to visualize as potentially peaceful.



Kenneth's paternal grandfather successfully expanded a street fruit cart into one of the largest wholesale produce vendors in London. His maternal grandfather had great success in the postal workers union. World War I found Grandfather Sutton in East Africa. Upon his return, he defended retention of seniority in service in court against the Crown Postal Services and won. He also talked incessantly about his African experience to his young adoring grandson. These early stories of Africa unconsciously pointed Kenneth to a later missionary destiny in Africa with the Ibo tribe where he joyfully encountered a wonderful people who told him about the Creator God. God was already there.

The Cracknells lived very near a Royal Air Force fighter squadron base which received much attention from the Germans. Often when they blitzed the base, they would miss and bombs would hit somewhere nearby. In his home, he was protected well and not fearful, but the Cracknells must have been petrified. His mother worked in the home and she read popular books as a pastime. Kenneth's younger brother was nine years younger; his parent's really didn't know what to do with their bright son. He did not have much to do or things to entertain himself, so he read and read and read. The difference is that, unlike other family members, he read about God, society, church and family. For whatever reason, Kenneth Cracknell was to care about things, relationships and interactions that were significant to the whole.

Early in childhood, the lad Kenneth was intrigued by the logic and consequence of Christian theology. In the youth group of his local church, he

curiously wondered about reality and religious others. Kenneth often attended synagogue with close Jewish friends just to find out what their religion was about. His youth minister considered Kenneth a naughty teenager that should rather accept what had always been accepted. He was the first, but certainly not the last, to fancy Kenneth Cracknell a pest! He has always been a square peg in a round hole, but he would not compromise his own truth. Of course, he does not agree that the holes are round and questions the sanity of those who do!

Kenneth began serious theological studies at the age of sixteen and commenced to read everything he could get his hands on. He sought out the greatest scholars of the era, looking for answers that were only to be found in the deepest of reflection. He continued to be confronted with the sternest of reprimand. Institution and tradition were well defended, and in that confrontation, Kenneth lost a significant degree of respect for the hegemony of the Christian church. It just did not make sense. This divine curiosity later pushed him to lessons in the best places of education, missions in third world locations and to dialogues with religious others.

Having experienced ineffective drivel from people hired as professors as well as from the more traditional religious klutzes who found comfort in old staid ways, Kenneth headed off to Africa to be a missionary to people who needed God. He always knew that church was a good thing but that the structure was a bad thing. The surprising lesson learned in Africa was experiencing the real presence of God in other religious systems. It is there where his respect for religious others was nurtured to full

maturity. The publication of Justice, Courtesy and Love was inspired by his discoveries about missionaries who had discovered the presence of God in the people among whom they worked. He put together teaching outlines that he had used in classrooms while in Africa and submitted it for his Bachelor of Divinity, which is the second highest terminal degree offered in Oxford or Cambridge. Professor Cracknell made it clear to me that he is not a “doctor” by degree, which is one good reason among many to refer to him formally as “my dear professor.” Other reasons are enumerated throughout this report. Kenneth Cracknell is still learning.

After returning from Africa, Kenneth Cracknell found work in a city that had a significant portion of non Europeans. He began to minister to them and like a snow ball hurdling down a mountainside, he became more and more involved in assisting and defending the social, political and ethical rights of religious others. From his heart, he only spoke the truth as he perceived it, without expectation of any kind. He engaged the marginal newcomers effectively and ultimately became the chairman of the community relations council. In this way, he became the interfaith person that he now is. Soon, he was approached by the British Council of Churches (BCC) and appointed as the Director for Interfaith Relations. For the next ten years, he traveled the globe representing the BCC within the World Council of Churches. At the end of that ten year period, he was tired and needed rest. He had seen too many airports.

Kenneth was invited by the British Methodist Committee on Theological Education to take a leading position as Michael Gutheridge Chair in Theology and as

Senior Tutor at the Methodist Wesley House at Cambridge. After being clear about both personal and professional misgivings, the secretary agreed with Cracknell's disapproval of the status quo at the Wesley house and offered him the job based on those same reasons! Being true to his stripes, Cracknell took his hiring as a license to bring about change. One of the great monuments of Kenneth's career was his achieved goal of reforming education at Cambridge. While at the Wesley House, in spite of five hundred years of elitism and differentiation, he continued to grow the multiple theological schools of different denominations into one cohesive unit, the Cambridge Theological Federation. Bringing an agreement at the ecumenical level in that setting was one that offered hope for him and his capacity to effect change in the world at large. It is a real monument to his ability to create, organize and put into action an ecumenical blessing that remains a great value to the church.

After eight years in Cambridge, he became Professor of Theology and Global Studies at Brite Divinity School, Fort Worth, Texas. He has also continued as a consultant to the World Council of Churches on interfaith issues (since 1979) and has visited churches all over the world for the expressed purpose of inviting religious mutuality with all people. Kenneth has been a junior pastor, an unpaid social counselor, a non Jew rabbi and a half time full professor. Over the years, he has compiled a remarkable diversity in experience which he has faithfully passed on to his students. As a professor, Kenneth Cracknell has published works by himself as well as in partnership with others.

Here is a list of the writings of Kenneth Cracknell:

Cracknell, Kenneth. In Good and Generous Faith: Christian Responses to Religious Pluralism. London: Epworth Press, 2005.

\_\_\_\_\_ with Susan J. White. An Introduction to World Methodism. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

\_\_\_\_\_. Justice, Courtesy and Love: Theologians and Missionaries Encountering World Religions, 1846-1914. London: Epworth Press, 1995.

\_\_\_\_\_. with Max Assimeng, and Gerrie Lubbe. Encounter of Religions in African Cultures. Geneva: Dept. for Theological Studies, 1991.

\_\_\_\_\_. Towards a New Relationship: Christians and People of Other Faith. Westminster, London: Epworth Press, 1986.

\_\_\_\_\_. with Christopher A. Lamb. Theology on Full Alert. London: British Council of Churches, 1984.

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell, and Kenneth Cracknell, ed. Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Reader. Oxford: Oneworld, 2001.

In the year 2000, on the occasion of his 65th birthday, Kenneth Cracknell received a Festschrift:

Martin Forward, Stephen Plant, and Susan J. White eds. A Great Commission: Christian Hope and Religious Diversity: Papers in Honor of Kenneth Cracknell on His 65th Birthday. Oxford; New York: Peter Lang, 2000.

Just reading the titles of these works shows the central themes of Cracknell's interests. It will be a task for others to summarize and critiques these works. My reading served primarily to increase my knowledge of the major themes in his published works as well as to prepare me for the dialogues presented herein with former students. I do want to say something though about his most recent work.

Professor Kenneth Cracknell has been nominated for one of the most prestigious awards, the 2007 Grawemeyer award for religion for his book In Good and Generous Faith: Christian Responses to Religious Pluralism. In that publication, he addresses, the most serious interfaith issues facing the twenty first century church. He presents a theology for Christians that serves new relationships of dialogue and understanding, mutual support and close cooperation, with devout followers of other religious ways and paths and leaves them without having a sense that they are somehow being unfaithful to Jesus Christ and betraying the missionary heritage of the Church. Drawing on several decades of experience, he presents a convincing argument for the biblical understanding of the purposes of God and the Christ as the universal presence of the Word. To be fully engaged in inter-religious relations, Cracknell says, is to act in good and generous faith.

### Teachings of Kenneth Cracknell

“Do for others as you would have them do for you...”

There is but one unmistakable and infinitely powerful force among us that triumphs over all others. It is the unconditional, unfettered love of one human being for another. For many of us there are few times that we really see this unlimited and unmitigated love in the action of others. Unfortunately, speaking personally there are even fewer instances in which I demonstrate it myself. Yet when found, it is felt and becomes emblazoned upon our hearts, never to be forgotten. Those of us who are Christ like are those who listen first and see the heart of the other; thus the focus on our potential for loving.

Kenneth Cracknell is a practitioner of the Golden Rule. Seeing love, seeking it, and sharing it without condition creates unity and dispels tension and intolerance. In love, decisions are simpler, truth is easier to recognize, and the pilgrimage of life carries on in beauty rather than dread. It is clear that world peace is nurtured by a higher level of knowing and comfort. Those actualities in interpersonal, cross cultural and interfaith relations nurture diminished tension and vulnerability to conflict. Once we begin to both see and seek love in one another, love begins to seek us,... and to save us. It is essential to see the love as love, emanating from that which transcends us all.

Drawing on his extensive experience of working in interfaith dialogue, Professor Cracknell has invited the students at Brite Divinity School to be confident in encountering people of other living faiths. For the past decade, he has shown how Scripture and the Christian tradition offer a wide range of resources for engaging religious others in generous and constructive dialogue without losing sight of the Christian gospel. He has few peers in the field of interfaith relations. Few can bring the breadth of his experience and skill to combine biblical scholarship, theological reflection and the history of interfaith and interdenominational discussion to the classroom setting. For me, it has been a remarkable experience. I am honored to be his student and friend.

For many of us, Professor Kenneth Cracknell is a teacher par excellence. He brought a distinct style to his teaching. It is personal, witty, reflective and intimate. His classroom presence showed the non assuming and calming attitude of spiritual conversation. To class he brought an almost comical roughshod presence, a free-flowing beard like Moses, a semi tucked dress shirt with the academically required slacks, all appropriately bookended with casual slippers. Although remarkably organized and most generously informed, he unsystematically drew us in to his microcosm, or maybe I should say macrocosm. It is a vision of a World with global peace, generous faith embraced by a simple love of people. His words were aptly chosen and the ideas were clear and crisp.



He always offered a multiplicity of ways to understand the cross cultural ideas that he so carefully portrayed for us. For him, in speaking of religious others and living religious myth, story and understanding, he was telling us about God. He tried to inculcate into the minds of his students an attitude of reverence, gratitude and respect for other religious traditions. While most of us hailed from evangelical backgrounds, Professor Cracknell's fertility in analogy was exercised through art, music, story, experience, dialogue and genuine encounter. He helped us walk along the horizons of faith, wherein we observed the reality of an ever expanding truth: God is everywhere.

### Dialogue in the Service of Peace-Making

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God...”

Undoubtedly, Kenneth Cracknell's passion since his youth has been interfaith dialogue and cross cultural cooperation. In this area, he has made commendable contributions to the Church. He stoutly refuted the stereotypes and prejudices about other religions, which we have inherited from the early European scholars. He worked towards a new understanding of interfaith cooperation. In the age of pluralism, he firmly believed that we are called upon to cooperate with people of different faiths and of no faith to build a peaceable and just world. There were many times early in the career of Kenneth Cracknell wherein he exasperatingly wondered if he could play even the smallest part in ever getting the ecumenical community to affirm emphatically and joyously the presence of God with all humanity. Professor Cracknell's vast contribution to interfaith understanding and the theology of religion will live on through his writings, and through his influence upon those of us who were honored with his trust and friendship. It is in this atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation that we can witness to the Gospel.

What is the need for dialogue? Well, there are many good reasons. First, and foremost is the nature of the Christian calling into service to and for others. We are to be priests to the World. Just how well has the Christian community fared at that

commission? Have we abandoned the one sidedness we condemn in others when we proceed to make our own formulations normative for all religions? And, when we say “we” who are we talking about? The global community now has many who carry the Christian name without the slightest suggestion or indication of one's territorial affiliation. Increasingly, the vast majority of Christian are not in the West, but live in and amongst a plurality of non Christian people. To be honest, that is also true in Europe and America as well. It is time to open our collective eyes and make sense of a world wherein most of history is shared by political war and social conflict that at some level are religious in origin. That is a challenge for religious leaders. Can we, as Christian servants to the world, intervene into the world so as to bring harmony and peace to all? Of course, each religion is responsible. We all share in the power of religious fervor in the global economy, but here I am concerned with the Christian community of faith. Are we truly capable of being a servant to the world?

A commitment to truth, justice, and peace thus makes engagement in authentic dialogue a moral imperative. I can only know the truth of myself, consciously recognize my own peculiarities, and confront the unconscious and unintended consequences of my commitments by encountering those who are different, those who are unwittingly excluded, and those who bear the material and physical scars of the institutions that depend on failed and stunted perspectives of isolationist drones. The entire notion of a global community in peaceful dialogue is a remarkably different sociological goal than what most of us have become accustomed to and experienced.

We are individuals with some capacity for freedom but we are not autonomous, rational, and self-reliant. The fact is that our common welfare is dependent upon our capacity to engage one another in peaceful dialogue. This process is not without tension; it is not ever a party, but what alternative does Humankind have anyway? The pictures of World War II should always haunt us and drive us to being uncomfortable even with some kinds of peace. Our mandate goes beyond just not calling each other names, nevertheless that would be a remarkable beginning.

Interfaith dialogue demands that we genuinely encounter people as their own person. The task is demanding, but it is critical that we eschew presumption, assumption, prejudice, bias and manipulative ambition. That is not to say that we do not have an agenda, we do, but our goal is not well served by stereotypes. As a leader in dialogue, the task is to engage religious others faithfully so as to find a way to live together in peace, harmony and love. We cannot foster positive relationships by demanding that others abide by our preconceived notions and conditions.

Preparation for dialogue is critical. We need to be aware of linguistic and cultural norms that might inhibit the mutual spirit. We should be cautious in making historical references or blaming others for social ills that might bring distrust or resentment to the table. It may serve us well to know the ways wherein we are different; those that are not negotiable and the places wherein we can be free to give. We are not about to compromise our faith but neither are they. Religious conversion is unethical. Interfaith dialogue is not a passive or subtle form of proselytizing. It is an

occasion for mutual sharing and a search for unity and fairness amongst people who would not normally interact. We need to live in harmony as human community. Our global situation is such that the Earth is too small to live in conflict.

It is for that very reason that a hearty attempt to get a general feel for other religious traditions is the order of the day. Freedom for all parties involved to have the capacity to define themselves and their faith in the ways that they believe and in the words they know is essential. Our listening should be keen and focussed but necessarily critical and reflective. People will bring to the table of communication a multiplicity of theological commitments and cultural loyalties. An awareness of this can help us avoid unrealistic expectations and help focus on central, rather than peripheral, issues. Acknowledgment of our own and others' loyalties can pave the way to deeper sharing. Be aware that misinformation is not welcomed. The best position is one of divine curiosity. There is much that religious people can share in an atmosphere of learning and openness. However, people of other traditions are no more anxious than we are to engage in acts of worship which blur very real differences of theology or world view. Neither do they relish the appropriation by others of their religious symbols or sacred texts.

One of the questions asked of all of the participants in this project was to address the tension between distinctive theologies amongst mutual partners in interfaith dialogue. How do we approach religious others, give full integrity to their beliefs and maintain one's personal loyalty to our own roots. We assume a mutuality

in a spiritual walk with those we rub shoulder with. For the peaceful interaction of interfaith dialogue, there is no such understanding. The function, role and purpose is distinctively different. Goals are different. For a higher purpose, we are to suspend judgment to listen. In listening, we become better listeners. We are not creating a syncretistic faith nor a new religion. We seek ways to understand, affirm and achieve global peace. It is a worthy cause.

That being said, religious plurality is a worldwide reality. Interfaith relations and cross cultural dialogue are not optional. These experiences free people to meet each other on an equal level, presenting abundant opportunities to tear down the religious fences of neutered ignorance. It is in such meeting that we as religious communities may not only be enabled to engage in interfaith dialogue, but may also discover avenues for contributing to political peace. In such situations, one of our goals must be that we should be able to plead the cause of the other tradition without simultaneously losing our own identity. Some might be fearful of syncretism or uncritical compromise and there is a real danger that we become so alienated from our own community that we actually lose credibility as catalysts for change.

God is rich with diversity. God has created for us all a time and place that cannot possibly be limited to one interpretation. Quite creatively, God has also given us the gift of discernment. The ability to discern one's own unique path among so many possible paths is one of the greatest moments in defining self. Faith is an individual choice that is probably in line with the traditions one experiences early in

life. Kenneth Cracknell has not proposed to convert or change anybody. Instead, in class, we heard it said in various ways that to make that choice because of coercion or out of rebellion is not a genuine change of heart. That is true for everybody from whatever background. All are valid. Should we want that dignity for ourselves, we must first provide it for the other. Wholesale condemnation and prejudice are not healthy attitudes for a spiritual seeker from all religious paths. They do not work.

Every religious pathway includes various forms of meditation, prayer, repentance, praise as vital in a daily relationship with that which is holy. Those forms of worship serve to make us us complete and whole so that we can venture into the unknown, unfamiliar and perhaps uncomfortable. Our personal walk of faith and spiritual maturity affirms our identity as followers of the way. A major thrust of Kenneth Cracknell was for us to be fully engaged in our own religious identity. That provided for us a framework from which we could benefit spiritually from dialogue with anyone, within or without our own tradition. To be moved and changed is a meaningful step in the journey but to understand that change in the context of identity and to affirm it begins the reward of diversity. It is like an artist getting colored pencils for the first time. Others are quite amazing if we take the time to know them.

People may be invited to participate in one another's liturgy, music, story, ethics and ritual. Collectively, we may worship together or pray together or pilgrimage together, meditate, fast or commune together but the creation of the relationship itself with God requires the soul of an individual. Therefore, people

should be encouraged to participate to the level or limitations within which they feel comfortable and not compromised. Individuals should be given the freedom to define and determine their own limits to participation. Some find such participation as a source for expanding their own vision of God, for bringing the riches of the other's tradition into their own, and for learning methods of spiritual discipline, assisting them in their own spiritual journey.

We must look to the unlimited possibilities for expressions of social justice and reconciliation when seeking a common understanding and partnership. Though we may not find that our path is the same, can we find that our need for reconciliation and that God's hope for justice and reconciliation amidst the gift of diversity are worthy? Engaging in dialogue and stretching to learn about another's faith journey are essential parts of creating human bridges and links where before they might not have existed. The next step is where religious plurality in its finest moments can take shape. As interfaith partners and friends, we begin the more difficult steps of affirming and lifting up differences, of listening to God's call to bring people together in new and meaningful ways and of working together to enhance our spiritual lives.

One last major suggestion. There are a many discussion points that will serve all of Humankind well. Most discussions about inter religious understanding involve two central elements; first, the understanding of the Divine, which of course is central to religion; and second, the nature of Humankind, society, culture, economy, ethics, etc. There is a third reality that we should all be as concerned with and that is the



ecology of Earth. While there has been much debate in other circles, it is clear that the Christian mandate for Humankind to nature is one of stewardship. If we do not deal with this reality in spiritual ways, we will not kill the Earth, we will kill our own offspring. The study of nature or the earth in a theological and spiritual context within a universal framework must be carried out in such a way as to promote practices by all factions of society that will enhance, recycle and actively nurture the functions of nature. It is where we live.

I invite the reader to experience these dialogues with me. The following conversations are given to model cohesive ways to interact effectively in concert.

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## CHAPTER 2

### DIALOGUES WITH FORMER STUDENTS

“Since we have such a hope, we speak with great boldness,...”

Dialogue with Peter Jones

Ph.D. Candidate, Perkins School of Theology, SMU, Dallas, Texas

Thursday, February 2, 2006

JAY: Kenneth Cracknell affirmed my Brite experience. Most at Brite are more liberal than I was comfortable with and he made me more comfortable. He affirmed me and let me go where I needed to go with a rather violent passiveness. He was clear in his walk with me about things I perceived from him as making him uncomfortable. What are your reflections on your relationship with Cracknell?

PETER: It was simple for me as well. I never felt under attack. I really never felt that he disagreed. I would not have responded the way that I did. He was unique in that way. That is the lesson of interfaith dialogue. It is OK for us to have our own journey.

JAY: That is not the norm for my Christian faith. I never got the “scaring people into Heaven” deal. Hell is a rather obnoxious notion and it never sounded like God to me. I struggle with the atonement element of Scripture.

PETER: It is one thing to view Scripture as a collection of random individual thought. It is another to think that God inspired it all. There is a lot of leeway in between.

JAY: Cracknell says that Christian Scripture is no more or less inspired than the Koran or the Vedas. There is so much coherence in Scripture if it is read contextually and allegorically. Basically, God wants us to be the best we can be.

PETER: That is the tension between atonement already occurred and the Eschaton. The notion of the “already but not yet” time frame. The real fact is that conversion affects people and families, but there is also the complete depravity of the world.

JAY: What is your background?

PETER: Disciples. When I went to Brite, I was so liberal they made me conservative. Cracknell had that impact on me. I now attend a Roman Catholic church.

JAY: Unfortunately, the reformation did not change theology. Augustine had such a problem with his libido that he surmised that all humans are depraved.

PETER: No, evil is our own fault. If there is something that I understand to be original sin, it is not that we are finite or limited because we interact with people around us. It is our innate tendency to make what we believe to be the universal truth. That is what screws up culture. In that sense, society is depraved.

JAY: God is not involved in that process?

PETER: Sure, but we screw it up. Conversion of the heart is the central gospel focus. That is the beginning. Our morality and ethics come from God centeredness. I am interested in the culture impact of those relations as they emanate from religious faith.

JAY: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” just might work. How do you get that into people’s heart?

PETER: I am not a theologian. I believe in the incarnation and I believe that God converts people. While at Brite, I married into a Catholic family. I then started going to Mass. I was originally offended by the priest's whispering around the crackers. Over time, the more I realized the sacredness of the ritual. I have strong disagreements with the Catholic church, but I am open to the experience. Cracknell opened me to the notions of dialogue. I wasn't even aware of what I was doing wrong. I didn't think that we could talk about religion without judgment. I now propose a hermeneutics of virtue: you have to see the good in the other person regardless of what else is there. I have interacted with Eastern Orthodox, Methodists, all forms of faiths. This is central to my present spiritual reality.

JAY: I am reminded of Martin Luther King's famous speech. It is surreal that we even have to raise the question of tolerating others. Is that biblical?

PETER: People may be morally neutral but they are not value neutral. Human life has inherent value. To not acknowledge that is wrong. My work is about how groups encourage or discourage ethical interactions and relations from within.

JAY: That is true, but the Imago Dei for me is that we are "not" God. All of creation has inherent value. But we aren't a bunch of monkeys with typewriters either. Humans are stewards of nature. As a dog handler, my dogs show me God in ways that I just can't see elsewhere. "Love one another and when necessary speak." They don't have to speak.

PETER: One thing that helped me with the Imago Dei comes from Eastern Orthodox. It is the distinction between image and likeness. We are all made in the image, but only with diligence can we achieve likeness. That comes from conversion, faith and perseverance. Those that have attained to the likeness have moved beyond pride, fear and selfishness. Vital to my understanding of dialogue is that potential likeness exists in everyone. People come to interfaith dialogue from different places in every way on every topic. If we can learn to accept one another in that context, there is little struggle elsewhere. When I was confirmed as Catholic, it was easy to be open to that experience. It wasn't a huge leap.

JAY: You went from extreme low church to extreme high church.

PETER: The church is the people, not the institution. The institution drives me nuts, but it is the people that matter. The Catholic institution is medieval and wrong; not rooted in Scripture. I disagree with their understanding of papal authority and sexual morality, but there is something to the idea of the ordained meeting together and having great things to say, but they cannot make absolute statements. Formerly, the Vatican affirmed that the magisterium was everyone. It has evolved into a limitation of teaching to be the capacity of bishops and the Pope. I disagree, but that is OK because that is not "the" church.

JAY: That understanding speaks volumes for your educational experience and the process of a diligent pursuit of wisdom. Tell me about your spiritual process at Brite.

PETER: We had real observations and insights. I have changed in positive ways. It is critical to say right things at the right time with right emphasis. Cracknell has that. He is not pretentious. He has wisdom, but he is genuinely in dialogue with his students.

JAY: The definition of humility is “to remain teachable.” I believe that Kenneth Cracknell models that. I get the impression that Cracknell has not finished learning.

PETER: I hope I don’t ever learn so much that what I know is all I need. Learning about people is fascinating. It is really amazing to be in dialogue; it is humbling.

JAY: What are your reflections on your experience with Kenneth Cracknell.

PETER: Many of my life and religious choices are based on what I learned about authentic inter-religious dialogue. I had to develop a significant self critical understanding to talk with others. I had to learn to think about different people with whom I have to interact. The Jewish-Christian dialogue class was a watershed. I did a paper for that class on a mock dialogue, I called it a dialectic dialogue wherein the parties discuss matters they have in common but not really personal in nature. Instead of talking about or comparing specific beliefs themselves, they talked about the ways in which they understood different common dichotomies like individual/community or text/reader. There are political and moral implications to the whole idea of openness. While Islam, Judaism and Christianity have some common history and theology, Christians and Buddhists can speak to the social or political impact of religious attitudes and morals.

JAY: Jesus spent most of his time addressing the venom of envy, resentment and pride, probably, because it removes us from one another. How do you compromise the “one another” aspect of interfaith dialogue over and against your strong angst with the Pope speaking ex cathedra, et al.? How can you maintain the tension between opinion and religious others being OK regardless of world view? Where do you draw the line?

PETER: I have never made that compromise. I won't be blown by the wind for others to inform me of right and wrong. I am not to be critical about what I don't know, but I can hold them accountable to their own faith tradition. That is eminent critique.

JAY: Eminent critique?

PETER: Within the discourse of liberal political philosophy, there is the presumption that those in dialogue share the same ethics. Eminent critique is an ethic of dialogue that holds one accountable based on confessed criteria. When conflicts arise, the dialogue table is the place for mutual reciprocity for consistency in world view.

JAY: Is that the purpose of dialogue?

PETER: Because I am an ethicist, I am focussed on accountability. It is vital, for each of us, to seek ways to relate to people who are different. We need others to help us be everything we can be. Self reliance is wrong because of that; it is not possible to be self transparent enough. Only in the encounter with “the other” can we be in community. We can't love one another until we can be with one another. To be an authentic Christian, we have to be genuinely “other centered.” Too many live in an upper class social bubble. We have to be exposed to radical differences and radical



struggles to become fully realized. If we are truly communal, we will reach out to the marginalized and the poor.

JAY: There you go quoting Jesus.

PETER: The only way that people have a true conversion is to have an everyday dialogue with people. You can have authentic self learning from people that are like you, but each of the people in the conversation should come to the table without masks and open to critique. To be at that dialogue table, there is a burden and responsibility to be honest, truthful and loving. That is why I am an ethicist. This is the core of what drives me.

JAY: So we are always in the process of converting to the likeness of God.

PETER: Yes. The hermeneutic of virtue becomes a habit which overcomes the selfish tendency to hibernate and isolate from human interaction. There is no truth, no conversion,... nothing without a faithful and ethical interaction with others.

JAY: I prefer that to the term of depravity. We tend to be self focussed.

PETER: Yeah, It is a default condition to not do right by one another.

JAY: The broader implications of an open dialogue are?

PETER: It is the hinge by which social ethics opens and shuts. I became Catholic because I was predisposed to be willing to concede that I don't know everything; I should listen to learn. I found out what was weird about me because of the differences I was willing to engage. The basic thrust is to avoid selfish prideful arrogance that says that we know "the Truth." We may have some view of it or a crucial insight, but

the only way to know Truth more wholesomely is by engaging others who have what you don't, who are who you are not. That is the blessing of cross cultural engagement. Together, we learn more about ourselves and the truth than we can ever learn alone in an ivory tower. The implications of interpersonal communication confront presupposed self-knowledge where in success beyond that will impact a multitude of others. Peace demands everyone's cooperation.

JAY: To be like God can gain momentum and dialogue is a primary propellant?

PETER: When an individual lives in a microcosm, that small world inhibits potential. One in that isolated environment would not even know of possibilities which require hard decisions. Openness requires that I am willing to grow beyond who I am now and that I realize I can't do that alone. Perhaps one can arrive at such knowledge as the object of something like a self-enlightened interest. However one looks at it, we need each other.

JAY: When thinking of the dialogue environment, are we assuming a certain degree of intellect, education or even interest? Some people just do not care.

PETER: I don't think it matters. You cannot have an engagement with someone who is radically different without changing. One of two things can happen: you either become hardened in your original position or you will learn more about yourself and others in such a dramatic way that cracks in your self-understanding begin to appear. Also, we are involved in dialogue whenever we move through our culture, that we simply cannot avoid. We reinforce in ourselves and communicate to others our

commitments and beliefs when we shop at certain places, when we choose to vote or write legislators, and when we worship in the midst of the impoverished, as examples. But, we cannot choose what culture we are born into, but as adults we bear some responsibility to respond to that culture in productive and critical ways. Nothing good will come of things unless we do so. That means we have to engage others from other cultures, not just my fellow middle class suburbanites. We need to be more conscious of the ways we depend on a culture and cultural institutions that we support by our actions and lifestyles. Simply by speaking and existing personally in a particular culture and age, one is part of a global dialogue. We can ignore that fact or we can actively engage it. God's grace will bring real justice. But we have created many injustices that we can reverse. We had better get to work.

JAY: I immediately think of the skin heads or the KKK,...

PETER: Think of how difficult it is to maintain those hard line positions. They have to be continually brainwashed. Unless you are in a cultural bubble in a forest, you just cannot avoid encountering something that challenges such a position. When I say dialogue, I am not just talking about a formal situation with people getting together to talk about their wants and desires, or for discussions about political or economic liberties. And it isn't just individualistic. We are to be about the business of doing what is the best for the whole. If we're already related to each other in deep ways as I have described, then it turns out that helping others live a good life is a constitutive part of my own good life. Dialogue is essentially moral and "naturally" altruistic. So

it's not easy to be a KKK member, and it can be even harder if we quit reinforcing the radical individualism that pervades our culture and add to our cultural discourse the fullness of the common good. We need to add to our cultural lexicon those things that include and honor the community that constitutes us all and enables our flourishing. Obviously, hard-line positions on race, religion or whatever are not concerned with the well being of our society. When I think of dialogue and discourse, I think of societal ills and how we are to make our world better. Everything seems to be polarized. Either we are radical individualists or communists. Neither is right and both violate the principles of authentic dialogue. There is a broad "in between," but it is first necessary to recover the proper idea of the common good.

JAY: Personally, how authentic is your open heart? Do you struggle with the conflict between permissiveness and your opinion?

PETER: It is a daily discipline. I have to remain focused and vigilant. Humans are predisposed to be selfish and arrogant but have learned by God's grace that we are all children, brethren and sisters before God. We need each other to flourish, individually and as a species. Truth remains, dialogue continues, and we continue to seek justice.

JAY: Full acceptance seems to be in conflict with observed reality. There are people who have a world view or theology that is not working. When do you leave eminent critique behind? When do you confront and challenge? When do you intervene?

PETER: Idealistically, intervention is not absent but constant. Marriage is designed to do that: to raise children in a home with basic and fundamental Christian beliefs who

can get along with others who disagree, you need caregivers working together, challenging each other and loving together. Intervention is a constant part of diligence and accountability. There has to be a force within or exerted by the conversation itself that serves to hone our morals, ethics, and living conditions. The people who grow and learn the most are people who can deal with differences. We ought never simply let each other roll along through life with the illusion that we are truly free. Only together can any of us grow in authentic ways, live well, develop morally and gain understanding into Truth. So, is there a point when intervention is necessary? Yes, ... now and always. Violent intervention is another question, even in the somewhat benign sense of merely restraining others from doing what they think they want to do. If that's what it takes to protect life, so be it. But we can never take life to protect life, doing so negates in principle the possibility of reconciliation and involves injustice. Retributive justice should not be meted out by human hands. I'm against the death penalty. So whether intervention is or is not justified is not the question; we ought never stop "intervening." Rather, what levels of intervention are justified is the focus of debate. God knows I don't have any easy answers there.

JAY: It is difficult to maintain openness when others are rude.

PETER: Indeed. If I get the opportunity to author a book it will be about reading between the lines, recognizing the goodness of other people and responding to their actual behavior and words, however offensive, in ways that might open them up to their own potential goodness. I think that resonates with Professor Cracknell's interest

in “generous” faith. The opening point would be that the fundamental hope of any interpersonal and cultural interaction really is to see the goodness of other people. The virtues, then, must include the ability to see the whole person, potential goodness and problems together, and to respond in ways that can help us connect with the other within; that is, to be more authentically self-aware of our own limitations and gifts.

JAY: Do we presume that others are fearless, unassuming and willing to change?

PETER: We have to make a place at the table where people who are already marginalized have a voice. So anyone at the table is forced to hear and deal with these voices. More often than not, we forget over half of the global population. A small oversight indeed. Individualistic liberalism just doesn’t get it. Billions of people live their full lives outside of the present economy and die young as a result. We just don’t address truths very well because we arrogantly think we know the Truth already.

JAY: I am skeptical and it seems theoretical.

PETER: I have no illusions. I can only hope that we can make some difference. We are discussing second order issues. Praxis is where it must find its home. Some of us can learn how to and must take a step back from our moral life and think thematically, systematically and critically in a clear way so as to enable adjustments and go back to praxis. The liberationist part of me is that theoretical assumptions and epistemological presumptions don’t make a lot of difference unless we merge them with missions, evangelism and real lives. Christians, by definition, must have a special concern for the poor, marginalized, and oppressed. Only by being with, listening to and acting

alongside these people can any of us hope to know the truth about ourselves, our society and our values. That is not to say that the poor carry the truth, only that we'll never get to the truth without solidarity with the poor. The poor are not morally or epistemologically pure, nobody is, and the oppressed are not some homogenous unity with common interests because there are all forms of oppressions that generate all kinds of conflicting interests. We all need to be redeemed, saved from ourselves and from the socio cultural practices rightfully deemed institutionalized sin. Social sin is real. Only in solidarity with those rendered poor and oppressed can we step back into the realm of ideas for a few moments to reflect on what we are doing and how we can do it better. If what we are doing does not liberate people, affirm life and dignity, and bring hope, then, what are we doing?

JAY: That is exactly right. Helping people is our job.

PETER: Because I have been so immersed in school, I have not had the chance to do a full second order reflection. The bottom line is that I am a member of the ecumenical council for my church. Kenneth Cracknell has empowered me to see the truth in different ways. Obviously, my conversion to Catholicism was facilitated by what I learned in these discussions. I was enabled to experience personal encounters within the Catholic church. It certainly could have been something else, but it made things easier in my marriage. My entire career focus is a result of what I learned while studying under Cracknell.

JAY: Other than that, he hasn't had much influence at all! I thank you for your time.

Dialogue with Bette Buschow

Chaplaincy Volunteer for Women at Dawson Prison, Dallas, Texas

Friday, February 6, 2006

(Dialogue begins after introductory conversation regarding Bette's background...)

BETTE: My parents persistently argued about my eternal state. They were both assured of their high moral position. While they disagreed on things, it was a deep faith I wish I had. I have never been that strongly convicted that I was "right."

JAY: It seemed to be easier for them. They were defending a struggle. The God that I know wants me to assess and think and ponder about grand things. It took what it took for me to get here. I wish it had not but I am glad it did. The journey is tough and I am grateful, but I don't wouldn't do it again!

BETTE: Ricouer's first naiveté, you've been through the critical period. The second naiveté does not settle in and stabilize the way that the first naiveté does.

JAY: It does not appear that a lot of individuals ever enjoy a real second naiveté.

BETTE: The second naiveté seems to be about acknowledging that which cannot be understood, in the truest sense of not being understood. I look back and think of that is what is. Looking back on the first naiveté, it seems symbolic. When I look at concrete fundamentalist interpretations, I have problems. I cannot look at it that way.



JAY: When does “if it is OK with them, it is OK with me” become problematic?

When has openness gone too far? If folks are struggling with divorce, finance and addiction maybe it needs to be challenged and disrupted. Maybe they need to look at their world view and theological bearings. On the other hand, who am I to say that they are not living up to their potential?

BETTE: I am not called to intervene. The only problem I see with that circumstance is that is when they begin to judge. I am completely willing for people to stay delusional in their discontent as long as they allow me to be authentic my own way.

JAY: That is not going to happen, with the second naiveté comes the Francis of Assisi prayer that it is better to understand than to be understood. A significant aspect of the second naiveté is that it is a more mature spiritual existence which demands humble leadership. I have to own and claim spiritual progress for my own existence.

BETTE: You cannot be a true practitioner until you have attained later age. In the Buddhist tradition, one has to live through the more simple stages, to become a forest dweller later. It is just not possible, to me, to be a saint at the age of nineteen. There is just not enough exposure and experience and, suffering basically, that brings one to the point to understand life-reality. It does take real tragedy sometimes for us to grow.

JAY: Without trauma, I am not sure that any of us would even care about that which is Holy. If everything is OK, why would I pursue anything different. Trauma and crisis seems to be the means by which the first naiveté gets challenged, disrupted and ultimately exposed for the immature perspective that it is. I am testifying. I do not

pretend to speak for everyone, but this truth is apparent, that without suffering or a significant future story that draws me to a more complex reality, I ain't going. Heaven forbid, for some their life seems to be OK. I deal with Heroin addicts who will boldly claim that life is OK. When do we intervene? At some point, theory needs to be put into practice. As ministers, we need to know when to hold them and when to fold, according to the great theologian Kenny Rogers. The conflict, it seems, that we can become nonjudgmental regarding Hinduism and Buddhism and yet be hard headed about Christian interdenominational conflict. How do you determine when to stand up for your core beliefs? How do you synthesize the notion that all faith is valid and there are some ways of expressing faith that are counterproductive or even toxic?

BETTE: I don't regard myself as a minister. I was on a spiritual and intellectual journey at Brite that necessarily involved not taking any of the pastoral care or churchy stuff like liturgy, stuff that is required to run Sunday morning church. I graduated with an eclectic 48 hours. For me, theology is the mother of all sciences, it involves science and history and art and music and all of the expressions of life. I am in a place where I label myself as a mystic. I am spiritually at a place where Sufi or Buddhist or Monastic Christians are. When I met Cracknell, I was ready to leave Brite.

JAY: Cracknell redeemed Brite for me. He has been a real relief. That is not to demean anyone else, but it was good to meet him.

BETTE: He was an oasis. Here is somebody who would allow you your own journey, respect you for it and not intervene in any terse way. He has a lot of power that is mutual not dominating. It influenced me greatly. My first course was a theological course, I felt like I did not belong! I had a lot of questions and everyone had answers. I felt that it was mine to bring questions. When I finally met Cracknell, he rejoiced in the questions and blessed the questions. In my first course with him, I found Buddhism. There was this deep residence in some parts of me that Buddhism served to explain. It opened a door which asked the question, maybe we are not supposed to be alike. Maybe we need to go beyond the God in our own minds and allow it to be a deep mystery that is beyond understanding. We think that it matches the person next to us, but maybe our understanding of God is of our own design. Maybe it will serve us to acknowledge God as something beyond our own reality and imagination. Moving to that place allows me to say to the person next to me, "You have your picture of God, I have mine."

JAY: The disconnect is that you have your picture of God and you are asking me for money or food or counsel. I know that trauma and accidents happen, but for some, it is a trend, they are in a cycle of attrition. They can say that God is working, but it is not. Does that make me judgmental? It appears that some people give God lip service and assume that life cannot be any better. I think differently. Cracknell has it figured out. He would tell you that it is not about footnotes, it is about helping one another. It is about the people. How does that conflict play out in your ministry?

BETTE: My favorite image of God is, that spark amongst us particularly when we are doing helpful things. I would define God as that spark between us that happens when we are in community. When we are doing service, art, imagination, or something that is born of the exterior happening but processed internally. Most institutional religion does not emphasize the internal work that allows for facing the dark night of the soul in whatever form it comes to you. It is that necessary process that will confront each person to realize that their own self serving strategies are not functional. I think this is why this totally weird and strange way that I have come in Prison ministry. It is one synchronicity, accident and happenstance after another. It is unfolding as a vocation. I hold my hands out and it comes to me.

JAY: You do consider that God is providing?

BETTE: I would not put a label on it. I am careful about what that implies. If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him. But what I see in the ladies in the prison is an external rescue system that does not require them to do anything at all. They are waiting on the next white knight or Jesus. To them all they have to do is to read the Bible, pray and wait and they will be delivered. That is just not true. If we don't do the internal work necessary for God to work, we will continue to get what we have been getting. We end up in Maya -in delusion, we don't get it. These women cannot fix their lives through external agencies. They have to internally adjust to the reality that they have issues to deal with and choices to make. Yes they are not separate from God, but God is that soft voice within them that they seem to ignore. Psychology

would call it individuation. Until now, when they come to crisis, there needs to be somebody inside yourself before you can handle the tough times in a truly spiritually mature way. Their God is the God of The Old Testament -- The power rescuer. That just doesn't cut it. To me Buddhism takes me to the place where I can take the filters and the lenses and the fault finding and excuses and leaves you with you. It is internal before it is healthy outside. That is an informal sort of expression of a deep seated theological expression with me that rises immediately when I hear these prisoners' stories. They are in the middle of the dark night of the soul. They are honest. They are cracked open and ready to make the turn. They are ready.

JAY: How have you brought a systemic order in your world view to the tension between Cracknell's teaching and the reality of suffering? How have you processed these truths over time? What are the practical implications of what you have learned?

BETTE: I got involved first in prison ministry by taking artists to the prison. I saw amazing things happen to women. In a positive sense, I am a feminist. These women have never told their story or objectified their life. Art has given that an expression. I have seen amazing things happen for both artist and the women.

JAY: The internal whirlwind cannot be explained. It takes pictures and sounds and simple 'ahas'. It is what Cracknell refers to as fertility in analogy so as to explain the...

BETTE: Preverbal.

JAY: Certainly nonverbal; which is mystical. Words, definitions or cognition does not do it a justice. That is the mystical application of Cracknell's teaching.

BETTE: I have never had a conversation with Cracknell regarding Nietzsche, I would love to. I think he was a prophet. That interior place of discipline, openness and non judgment is where the artist goes. That is the place that art comes from.

JAY: Today's interpretation may differ from tomorrow's, but neither is wrong.

BETTE: The nonjudgmental way that art leads you is a spiritually connected and as artists, Ricoeur describes it well. Art is a discipline, I am a musician, if you don't practice you lose it. The practice of spiritual discipline every day keeps us moving. If you are not disciplined, you lose it. Much of the artistic process is meditation.

JAY: That is very inspirational and encouraging.

BETTE: Cracknell assured me I wasn't crazy nor alone, off base nor weird. He connected me to historical tradition within many religious traditions of a minority that screams, "Wait a minute!" Tolerance and openness within a nonjudgmental place that has real expectations of what is possible alongside the discipline and the agony one has to go through to get there. There is a tremendous amount of love and gratitude to him for giving me permission to travel my own road.

JAY: Absolutely. Bette, I thank you for your time. It has been delightful.

Dialogue with Bo Garrison

MDiv Candidate at Brite School of Theology at TCU, Fort Worth, Texas

Wednesday, February 8, 2006

JAY: What are your reflections on the content of Cracknell's teachings?

BO: I enrolled in Brite without any denominational, doctrinal or theological parameters. I was religiously naïve. Kenneth Cracknell accepted me and did not try to impose anything. It was an amazing relief and blessing to get his support. Second, he made us ponder the nature of missions. My concern is with what religions have to say about how the global community gets along. He gave us a gentle nudge to look again at Christian Scripture and the nature of spreading the message of what we believe is the essence of the relationship between God and humankind. Although, it was an incredible amount of information, Kenneth Cracknell didn't try to get us to unpack it. He wanted us to rethink what we had been taught and ask discerning questions about morality and tolerance as it relates to the world at large. I had to actively pursue taking a stance that was not my own. It was imperative to try to look at the world from somebody else's perspective so as to better understand God's activity in the world. The most important thing was to attend worship and ceremony of other religious belief systems. I found no tension in participating with others in the way they offer praise, worship and build community. The real tension comes from ignorant

judgment without investigation. Participating with religious others has produced a tangible change in the way I live life. We all have our own manner of which we view God's participation. I began to look for that in other religions. It served to help me form my faith; it made me a stronger Christian and I hope somebody who can speak of faith and belief within the dynamic of others speaking about theirs. I am grateful.

JAY: How does that play out in your studies? You have done a significant amount of traveling; a nomad of sorts. How did Cracknell influence your drive?

BO: I have always had a strange spiritual desire to expand my attention and focus, but I never before had that affirmed. It meant that I was not heading in the wrong direction. I was doing a higher calling and meeting a definite need. He refined and defined the lenses and filters through which I relate with the variety of cultures I have experienced. "Encountering others" is an exercise in empathic listening, it is a vulnerable listening, but there is also conversation. I am part of the discussion. I had to learn to express my faith. There is a huge implication of self reflection within the context of interfaith cooperation. If I don't share my side, then I believe that I am cheating the other person.

JAY: Within Christianity, there are doctrines that are seemingly incompatible. How do you synchronize the open view that other religions and faith systems are valid and are deserving of dignity with the passion you have for significant debates about critical personal beliefs. How do you deal with that apparent conflict?



BO: I don't necessarily have that conflict. My understanding of a logos theology came from Professor Cracknell. Reading the gospel of John is the Logos speaking. The Logos is the current that runs throughout Scripture and through all other faith systems. I really believe that as a steady and stable understanding of the Christ. I don't believe that God can be withheld from anyone. That it is only for a select few. God can be seen in every religion, in all the different ways in which their faith is expressed, whether in ritual or language or meditation, whatever. It is easier to let people be people and God be God.

JAY: Cracknell was timely for you. He said that maybe he hasn't taught anything, merely pointed out and gave definition to things they students already knew.

BO: Spiritually, I was aligned with what Cracknell was teaching. I was ready. It wasn't just affirmation. I learned a ton, but I did not have the means or mode to study, grasp or learn about what I was feeling. I didn't have a map. How do you look at other faiths? I have always felt that necessary, I just didn't know how. Just shaking his hand, listening to his chuckle, looking into his eyes; he is a marvelous example and model. We went together to a Sikh temple, they asked him to speak! People of other religions trust him. That is powerful. He is such a shining and beautiful example of what people can be. He is revered as someone who cares. You never get the feeling that he does not care.

JAY: What is the purpose of dialogue? Why would others want to be involved? For you, what is the focus of interfaith dialogue?

BO: We live in a world that is more and more globalized: economically, politically and religiously. Especially the United States is a melting pot of a wide variety of cultures. It would be rather arrogant to not consider trying to understand others. They are across the street, in the stores, they are everywhere. What do you do? You can avoid them, or you can ignore them or you can pigeon hole them. Is that appropriate? You should treat them as your neighbor. Ariarajah wrote a book called, Not Without My Neighbor. He confessed that he had an undying faith with Jesus as a salvific figure. Others must have a different salvific figure. I cannot make judgment on others based on their background. It is actually delightful to have engaging discussions. People become neighbors there.

JAY: Hmmm, “not without my neighbor,” that sounds like your focus.

BO: Ministry is service and service cannot be done without dialogue. When in dialogue encountering one another you are ministering to one another. Dialogue is a necessary tool for ministry. You can’t missionize without being willing to being missionized yourself.

JAY: Wow. That sounds like a competition. Winner gets title or deed of ownership.

BO: Not really, I think that there is vulnerability. If I already am fully formed and am not willing to concede some humility, aren’t I coming down off the mountain top? We certainly can speak as one speaking from the mind of Christ, but true listening is vulnerability, and heaven forbid that I gain strength from it?

JAY: I can be willing to listen, but are we assuming the other party is willing to listen. I believe that I have an educated opinion. My tuition bill is worth something isn't it?

BO: Yes, but that is not the focus. You have to set aside the innate belief that Christ is the sole salvific figure for the entire World. I just try to complexify the context of the moment. It can sometimes be a difficult line to carry, but through dialogue what you might leave at the door is more powerful after the fact because of the exercise.

JAY: Because the encounter is better than prejudice, bias and,...

BO: War. We haven't dealt with differences very well. We have to give others the respect and dignity we want for ourselves.

JAY: Others bring something significant to the table. They have real joys, real passion and real goals. However surprising, people are much more alike than different.

BO: They have the same spectrum of perspectives as the debating factions within Christianity. It is not even about understanding another religion, it is about dealing with individuals. We are looking for ways in which we are compatible and can thrive together. What we can learn how to better deal with each other as Christians.

JAY: So it seems that the point of dialogue is dialogue.

BO: The encounter in of itself is success. A Shiite Moslem and fundamentalist Christian may have a screaming fit, but that encounter is a success. A failed dialogue is a successful encounter. It is always better than not talking at all. We walk away from the discussion still human and having needs, and not accomplishing anything. It does not take away from the ramifications of taking the time to be together.

JAY: Cracknell's teaching has a rather interesting effect on my ministry. More than anything it has affected the language I use to tell the gospel story. I think the gospel story is simple. The only reason that I invite people to join me as Christian is because I believe that it works. I believe that the power of God is available through Christianity, it is not combative and not competitive. It is God's job to deal with people the way the God does so, but ultimately it is my job to deal with others the way that I would like to be treated.

BO: You mentioned Liberation. That is crucial to dialogue. Where are the poor, the weak and the oppressed and does this religion fight for them? That is where religion is critical. That was Jesus' message. That is who he hung out with; it was not the religious elite.

JAY: The religious folk killed him!

BO: That's right. We need to deal with the oppressed. Our paradigm has to change. That's what Jesus challenged people with and we are still trying to get it. Wherever, Africa, Asia, United States. You can't do theology without it.

JAY: There are three rules in Christianity: Love God, Love your neighbor, Take care of the widows and the orphans. How hard is that? If we are not taking care of one another, we are probably not doing the bidding of our Creator. It is relational.

BO: The experience of dialogue in praxis is critical.

JAY: All we can do is all we can do. I appreciate your heart.

BO: Thanks for lunch.

Dialogue with Page Hines

Executive Director, First Street Methodist Mission, Fort Worth Texas

Tuesday, February 21, 2006

JAY: I am with Page Hines: What are you now doing in Ministry?

PAGE: I am currently director of First Street Methodist Mission formerly First United Methodist Mission. We are in the process of becoming a 501(c)3. It is part of the First United Methodist Church, Fort Worth. The building is located about a block from the church. We provide groceries, sack lunches for the homeless, clothing, infant formula.

JAY: Do the people you serve have to go through a lot of hoops, paperwork, etc.?

PAGE: We do have some requirements, especially for groceries: a rent receipt or utility bill for proof of residency but only picture ID for a sack lunch or clothing.

JAY: They have it rather easy. Do you struggle with rough personalities? Is it hard to deal with the people who tend to need your services?

PAGE: We have about 150 volunteers with two paid staff. It runs fairly smoothly.

JAY: Good. Give me your reflections on Professor Cracknell's teachings and content.

PAGE: Kenneth Cracknell's strongest impact on me has been a new sense of understanding, compassion and acceptance of everyone. I believe that because of his classes and teaching I am much more accepting of all people in general and specifically people of other faiths.

JAY: How is that distinguished from other professors?

PAGE: Most professors, by the nature of their classes, teach a curriculum comprised primarily of dates, events and vocabulary, but Cracknell teaches understanding, dialogue, and mutual respect. There is nothing to memorize, instead he teaches “big picture” type life lessons. One of Professor Cracknell’s classes was the first class I took here at Brite and I remember that after that first semester I was hooked! From my experience, Kenneth Cracknell has always allowed his students to take off in almost any direction of interest, in relation to the class topic, that they wanted to go in to do their research papers. I have always appreciated that flexibility and opportunity to tie in my particular areas of interest.

JAY Did you visit other religious worship services?

PAGE: Yes! My husband and I went to several places of worship and, in fact, even now we continue to seek out new opportunities to visit different faith services.

JAY Were you in this ministry when you started Brite?

PAGE: No, I started attending Brite four years; I have been Director about one year.

JAY There seems to be a ethical sense of social justice in the open view. Would you have reacted differently prior to Brite? How have you processed these truths?

PAGE: I am much quicker to argue many paths to Heaven and that everyone gets to go. Professor Cracknell has opened up my faith and because of his teaching, I believe I now have a more beautiful faith.

JAY: The Ordination board has requirements, how do you synthesize your professional qualifications with the argumentation in your denomination and Sunday Morning Bible School and the belief that for everyone Christianity is not the only way? I believe the Bible can be understood. The conflict is how do you deal with the fact that I know this to be true and a group of people is teaching something that I believe to be counterproductive or toxic. The conflict is holding our ground as theologians while arguing that Hindus, Islam and Buddhist are OK. Have you considered that conflict?

PAGE: I believe that Kenneth Cracknell offers his beliefs and theology to his students as to how he reconciles everything. It is not an easy process and one that needs continual reevaluating. Scriptures can be heard and understood in many different ways; some in a very broad sense and some in a more strict understanding.

JAY So, It is OK for them to be them, but in dealing with struggling people, I need to be dealing with them from my experience. This is not a trick question, what I offer is Christianity. I don't have to worry about the dance. That being said, what is this dialogue business all about? Why would anyone be interested in interfaith dialogue?

PAGE: We all have to talk. Many hang-ups do fall back on our understanding of faith. When we communicate (dialogue) the better is the chance of bringing peace to the world.

JAY Well, yes. The heart of all culture is their religion. The history of the world is the history of religion. Would you say that religion is the source of world problems?

PAGE: Well, yes and no. The source of the problem is our human understanding or manipulation of what we say our religion stands for, it is not the fault of religion in and of itself. For example, if, as Christians, we start with the belief that everyone else is going to Hell, what sort of dialogue posture are we starting with?

JAY: Do you struggle theologically with God and suffering? I am interested in social justice, but sometimes it doesn't seem to be helping. It seems we feed the same people over and over. If there is a hell, I know what it is. Are we making an impact?

PAGE: Yes. I believe that our faith calls us all to struggle with suffering. If the answers become easy, then, we are neither in touch with our community nor our faith.

JAY: Tell me about Cracknell's teaching style, why did he give me your name?

PAGE: Kenneth Cracknell made it okay for each student of his to have their own opinions and to struggle with faith at their own pace. Personally, I love and admire Kenneth Cracknell. He has been generous to me in many ways. He opened up his heart, his struggles, his home and his arms to me. He has made me think in ways that I had not previously be enchallenged to think. He made me struggle with my faith and, consequently, he has made me grow. I am a much better person because of his classes.

JAY: There are three rules in Christianity: Love God, Love your neighbor, Take care of the Widows and Orphans. We often forget the last two. Dialogue has changed the way that I present my message. What do we do with all this misery? Are we sitting in this Ivory tower and looking out on the suffering peons? We better not be. God needs us to be there for them. Other than that I have no opinions. Thanks for your time.



Dialogue with Sharmin DeMoss

Assistant Executive Officer, Center for Survivors of Torture, Dallas, Texas.

Friday, February 24, 2006

JAY: Sharmin Demoss, how long have you been out of Brite?

SHARMIN: I graduated in May of 2000. I had discovered Israel and worked over there. I begged Cracknell to do an independent study on the Peace talks and the discussion between the religious groups and how that was working or not working. I saw some societal differences that might cause a problem for resolution. It was easier to make the Palestinians the common enemy than for Jews to look internally as well as those from Islam. Hamas is now the problem. That is easier than to confront the ways that Ashkenazi Jews and Ethiopian Jews were being treated differently. The Western Europeans hold the power. There are vital differences and Kenneth Cracknell was vital in pointing me in the right direction to better understand that. I spent about 8 hours a day making friends in Israel and all over the USA. I was able to mediate some dialogues. It was easier to do so as a Christian neutral party. When I graduated, I knew that was my passion. A couple of professors confronted me and I immediately went into the MTh program. I was grand mothered in, but I was not able to complete the Spanish requirement. So I was back in school. I could not make it work, but in that process I learned so very much.

JAY: You did not finish?

SHARMIN: I did not, but I can use the hours for a Ph.D.. Program. As the assistant Director here, I am out of town 8 or 10 days a month and work all the time including some Saturdays. Maybe later I can use the hours.

JAY: What benefit would you get from a Ph.D.?

SHARMIN: My boss is 70 years of age. I would receive a lot of public relations benefits, etc. Of course, a DMin would do the job as well.

JAY: My doctoral work has been right on for me. I went to Cambridge, I worked in the inner city, at the children's hospital. I did a residency for chaplaincy at the VA hospital. I did not chase as many footnotes as a Ph.D., but my experience is that a DMin was exactly where I needed to be. It has been awesome. Maybe so for you as well. Most professors have spent too much time chasing footnotes and are often not very well practiced in face to face pastoral care. That is not true for Kenneth Cracknell. He has his ways, and his approach does not diminish his faith and enhances mine. How have you dealt with the doctrinal differences between religions?

SHARMIN: What Cracknell taught me just rings as true. I had worked with principles of dialogue before as an educator. I was excited to see how they played out with Religious dialogue. The concepts are so clear and powerful. In pastoral care, there is one who is seeking help and the other is the helper. That is not true for Dialogue. We come to the table as equals. There is always a religious agenda, but we can be intentional in our setting aside of that for the better good. We are mutual helpers.

JAY: Societies have an agenda. We all are formed within our culture and strive for that society's survival and well being. How is the dialogue context affected by that?

SHARMIN: There are certainly religious and social agendas whether we acknowledge them or not. Defining and understanding one's own agenda is a job in of itself.

Everybody has one, but we set that aside to make the gains needed to produce a goal.

When I go in, I go with the acknowledgment that I am a 2000 Liberation Theologian –not a 1970 one. I do not think that we can bring peace with arms. I did not think in terms of Marxian theology. God is not dead, and I don't think that most Liberation theologians do either. Gutierrez' theology is significantly different of late than it was earlier. Preferential treatment of the poor does not mean that they are the only ones going to Heaven. Early on, it seemed that you had to be born poor. The idea that the impoverished have to choose power. They need the vision and the hope to know that they can rise above their circumstances. Of course, Gutierrez had an education, so he wasn't getting to Heaven.

JAY: That would be a major flaw. I am a cross between Process and Liberation. I find it difficult to camp in one area. They each tend to focus one specific aspect of theology.

SHARMIN: Well, Liberation looks like Process and Narrative is a means.

JAY: That is exactly right. Liberation is the result, Process is the reality of our experience and Narrative is the mode of engagement. These different labels for theological foci are not entirely in conflict. That theological Venn diagram has a

rather larger intersection. They all serve to inform us of different aspects of God.

They are all metaphors in Scripture that need to be synthesized. That is also true of different religions! I think we just had a moment.

SHARMIN: When each of the camps deny the other, they are all rendered powerless.

JAY: Process is the watermark of God's identity. Narrative is meeting people within their own story. Liberation defines the Christ's intent. The Christ in the heart's of people liberates us. God-fuel is the deal. If I can get God-fuel in you, you will be healed and become everything you can be. The problem is that we can't get people on the same page.

SHARMIN: If I am full, I hold on, if I am rich, I hold on for dear life. There has to be an inner core change that says that when I am full I am empty and when I am empty I am full. Emptying one's self in order to be full. I did liberation theology in dialogue with one Engaged Buddhism (liberation Buddhism). When I put that together and looked at core beliefs. I looked at the outward and visible signs and I saw that both were on to something real. I had heard of the concept of emptying one's self, and saw it in Buddhism, but I began to read it in the Christian scripture. I process everything different. What makes me a Christian is easy. I believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate; not a prophet, not a good guy, not a rabbi. That relationship with a personal God incarnate means something different. I do have something to offer.

JAY: That is Cracknell's understanding. We are not passively disinterested in our own faith. We are not diminishing our own faith because of these views. Other

religious systems are grand, but at the end of the day, I am a Christian. Do I have to be upset with others who think and believe differently? If you're happy and things are good, God Bless You! If you aren't happy, maybe I have something to tell you about.

SHARMIN: We are all kids. We all deserve dignity. If I am full, I can't help. Of course, I don't go into my back room to determine what others need either.

JAY: There is a conflict between confidence or faith as a Christian and an open view, when right in front of my very eyes, there is a full blown tragedy wherein people are struggling and they are claiming something that is quite incredulous.

SHARMIN: I had to come to grips with my role in ministry. What are my gifts? What do I bring to the table? When I worked in chaplaincy in a hospital, I had to back off completely. It is not ethical to impose beliefs on people confined in a hospital.

JAY: Good point. I was not thinking about chaplaincy. But even in that situation, don't you even consider ways of communicating your beliefs, not to convert or count as a miracle, but to actually help them in life for the long term?

SHARMIN: Well, I deal with people who have been tortured. I just really struggle with how effective it is to speak to them about God in ways they are not used to. It may be better to open the conversation with an attempt to understand how they feel about God and their sense of God's presence. One of the things we do know about inclusion is that we make assumptions that are usually exceptions. The truth is that whoever is helpful will receive a response. People who have been violated so terribly just don't want to lose a friend. Now that they have found relief and have escaped

from unimaginable horror, they have found a kindness and don't want that door closed to them. They will try to say yes to every request. Are they converted/ they just can't say no. People who have been tortured revert to a very innocent naïve childlike state wherein any concrete help is where God is. The deeper questions, like does God love me and how does God let that happen? Come later. How quickly they rebuild their theology is subjective, some stay at stage 2 and never mature past that cultural tribal religion and others mature far beyond what they would have attained otherwise. When you talk to somebody who has a warmth and a history of faith that is where they are. Introducing the concept of God is vital, but God has been there. It is troublesome at any level to claim a God that others don't have.

JAY: Well, here we go again: broken home, babies hungry, poverty, etc. At some point, I do feel obligated. There is faith that does not work or is counterproductive.

SHARMIN: We have had people with faith that was counterproductive, Buddhists, Moslems, Christians. That is available as well. To be in a mode of helplessness is not productive. The notion that one can sit and God will take care of it is silly.

JAY: That is my prejudice against monastics. There are some who are just lazy living in a monastery, doing nothing and calling it Moksha enlightenment. I don't think so.

SHARMIN: My tendency goes toward the book of James. You show me your faith by your works and I will show you mine by my actions. Sometimes, I may have to take the time to back off. I can do, do, do. There are things that I have had to learn about myself. It is really easy to see the fault in others.

JAY: More fun, too. The hardest lessons are those I have to learn about me.

SHARMIN: I am not a “saved by works” person, but it is a total misconception of Christianity that it is “wait and see.” It is peace and healing in the present moment.

JAY: Pie in the Sky in the sweet Bye and Bye. That is not Christian, and not in the Bible, but there were those in the 1<sup>st</sup> c. being tortured. There is a redemptive message.

SHARMIN: That is right, There are practical implications. God can be seen in the life of the faithful whomever, wherever and however that looks like. Sometimes it means more and sometimes it means less, but if God is in your life it will show.

JAY: Summarize your reflections on Cracknell’s impact on you.

SHARMIN: There are many ways to understand life and God. We will be perfect, but there is more to life than just beating up each other. I always wanted to know how to get along better and to help. Dialogue is a platform to bring unity and healing and wholesome coexistence with others. The most important thing is that he showed me how to do that. In the interfaith dialogue class, him and Rabbi Mecklenburg were role models for a cooperative attitude of service that each should take. That is the most important helpful thing. I now know what it should to look like. I so appreciate Kenneth Cracknell.

JAY: And I appreciate you and your participation in this project. I will be in touch soon.

Dialogue with David Brockman

Ph.D. Candidate Perkins SMU, Dallas, Texas

and

Eleanor Forfang Brockman

Teacher, Tarrant County College, Fort Worth, Texas

Wednesday, March 1, 2006

JAY: OK, folks, here we go; tell me about your education, career and profession.

DAVID: I am a Ph.D. student in Systematic Theology at the graduate program in Religious Studies at SMU. I am working on my dissertation in Christian Theology of Religion. I teach two courses at Perkins: World Religions and Church in Social Context. I am Episcopalian.

JAY: Episcopalian from Birth?

DAVID: Raised Lutheran but I wanted to reconnect to the Pre Reformation tradition of the church. I could not accept several doctrines represented by the Catholic church.

JAY: What are the differences between the Lutheran and Episcopalian traditions?

DAVID: There are not many differences. There are many similarities, but the main distinction for me is a higher sense of the presence of God in the Mass for Episcopalians. I also discovered a good bit of diversity in Anglican Theology. The incarnational orientation is inviting and helpful.



ELEANOR: I was raised unchurched. I became Episcopalian at the age of twenty five. While in England at Oxford, I had quite a conversion experience. It was a difficult time. I had somewhat of a break down during which time the Anglican church received me and helped me through some dark times. I now understand that experience as a spiritual experience. I was confirmed in the church during that time. For the last five years, I teach English as a second language at Tarrant College here in Fort Worth. I also have an art studio, mostly for my own well being.

JAY: Very good. Tell me about your experience with Professor Cracknell.

DAVID: What I picked up from Kenneth Cracknell was a principled open mindedness to religious others. He exhibited a refreshing sense of curiosity about faith and religion, both within the Christian community of faith as well as other religions. He showed me that religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue could be ground in strong Christian faith. Early on, I had assumed that those two endeavors were mutually exclusive.

JAY: In its essence, it is very Christian.

DAVID: I also learned about the different theological approaches within the Christian tradition as they interact doctrinally with other faiths. What surprised me the most was his generosity. He is an exceptionally generous, warm and encouraging person. He has been extremely generous with his time and very encouraging to my own path. He did not try to indoctrinate me. Although I am aware of some distinctions between our traditions, he has been very respectful. I am also very grateful that he has shared

the podium with me as guest speaker as well. That has been very helpful to me as one who is looking to do that as a career. He knows when to step aside and when to get out of the way, that is very important for scholars.

ELEANOR: My conversion was predicated on discovering that Christianity was not the narrow evangelical world that I had been force fed. I read a book by an Indian monk named Griffin which made me aware that a Christian faith does not have to disregard other ways of knowing and did not have to condemn those not exposed to Jesus. The eternal damnation of Hell just doesn't make sense. I was invited to think of those scriptures in much more relevant ways. I have been to hell. God led me to other professors that helped me reframe my understanding of life. Kenneth Cracknell was one of those who served to form my spiritual life. He showed me social graces.

JAY: Social graces?

ELEANOR: The application of Jesus' life. How, what, when do we help the needy?

DAVID: It is, what I consider to be a "Holy Spirit thing."

ELEANOR: I just wasn't aware of this whole new world wherein the Christian faith was concerned with the well being of the hurting and the poor. It is refreshing Truth.

JAY: How prevalent is this attitude in the Bible belt?

ELEANOR: Not very, but I am doing it at work. Sometimes, I look the other way.

JAY: What difference has Cracknell made for you?

DAVID: With me, it is a crucial difference. I am doing work in Theology of Religions. I had already decided that I would pursue an academic degree in some area,

but had no idea I would be doing what I am doing now. I had some experience with Buddhism in my teen years, but it was not an organized study in any way. My encounter with other religions came through my course work while under Cracknell. He gave me permission to look into other areas. Now, what I am doing is teaching a course at Perkins in World Religions, which is due entirely to Cracknell. I organized the course in similar ways as he taught.

JAY: Eleanor, implications on your pastoral focus?

ELEANOR: What I have learned in Cracknell's course gave me tools to handle students from other contexts. I am also much more sensitive to religious others. To be respectful and for that to go unnoticed is a real gift. What Cracknell has done for me is that I assumed tolerant and open attitude for myself as well which allowed me to pursue my own interests. My experience was organized by where I was led by my relationship with God. Humankind's relationship with nature and the environment is very important. I was able to study Hindu and Buddhist ecology under Cracknell.

JAY: Ecology? The world is not ours.

ELEANOR: There are many who think otherwise; that we are the rulers of the Earth and we can do what we want with it. We all depend on the world for our life. We interact and are interdependent with nature. We need to be better stewards.

JAY: One of my mantras of life is, "This place was made better because he/she passed this way." The implications are all around us. Not only does that mean that I cannot dump refuse or throw trash out of my car, it means that I must pick up what

others have left behind. Christianity is designed to be a counter culture. If we cannot tell a difference between society and church, it is probably not Christian.

ELEANOR: If we get nasty with another person, they resist, that is true for nature as well.

JAY: There are many doctrines within Christianity that are incompatible: oil and water. When do you intervene and confront illogical doctrine? Speak to how you deal with the internal dissonance between tolerance and your personal truth.

DAVID: That is the question to ask. I have considered it at length. I have two interests that I am working with in my dissertation. On the one hand, I have an interest in religious dialogue. On the other hand, I am very intrigued by liberation theology which demands that we take a stand for social justice. There is a need to say "no" to certain things. Back to the first hand, there is a need to say "yes" to those who are different. We should have principles that form our foundation for both. I study how religion embodies itself in political matters; how politics becomes religious.

JAY: History is the study of religion. Culture has religion running through its veins.

DAVID: But what kind of religion? Slavery, for example, was sustained by Christians who were not able to see the contradiction of politics and faith. They did not sense the tension that is so obvious to me. Slavery is evil. Social mores takes on the elements of the cultural goals of survival or economy or whatever. Christianity is a view of life that forces us to accept our limitations and to turn human institutions into openness. Otherwise, we become addicts to feel-good things: patriotism, sex, drugs,...

JAY: Humans can make idols out of anything.

DAVID: In inter religious dialogue, we learn about ourselves by looking outside of the water we swim in. In effect, they hold up a mirror to see what we look like. It is easy to see ourselves as “first world privileged.” Dialogue makes me encounter the truth from the outside. Inter religious dialogue is not only respect for others, it is essential for knowing oneself. It is a checkup, so to speak, as to how we are living the principles of the Good Samaritan. Are we the good neighbor? Jesus points out the most discriminated, the harshest... That is your neighbor. It is a rude awakening, but it is the truth. Of course, it works both ways, others can learn from us as well.

JAY: The function of dialogue is as much peace and politics as self reflection.

DAVID: It is part of being a faithful Christian; being a witness of Christ.

JAY: Eleanor, I am interested in your take on this. You have spoken of a dramatic spiritual experience. This process must have been very therapeutic for you.

ELEANOR: I had to learn how to process very emotional things in reasonable ways. Just because we don't agree, does not mean that we can't get along. It sounds simple, but it seems to be a minority voice. Oddly enough, contact between other religions can be more gracious at times than contacts within the Christian faith. Nevertheless, interaction between people is vital. I need to be respectful. My point of view may be correct, but I need to allow people to be where they are.

JAY: OK, here it is: bills unpaid, children hungry... Sometimes the world view and theology of others is just not working. When is it not OK to be where you are?

ELEANOR: Someone who is claiming to be a mystic and it's not working?

JAY: Not necessarily, but they are playing religious role games and showing up every Sunday for church or synagogue or mosque, whatever. There are times when it is obvious that God is not being effective in their life. I have a real hard time looking the other way.

ELEANOR: Of course, the issue is not their theology, but their faithfulness.

JAY: I know that people can be screwed up regardless of their stated faith, but I know that God has helped me through Christianity. I cannot speak to how God works in other faiths. Does that disqualify me? Or does an attitude of tolerance disqualify you?

DAVID: I know that dilemma exists but I don't have to deal with it yet in such an intimate way. There are no qualifiers to being real and accommodating with religious others. Or for anybody, loving one another takes on different meanings dependent on a variety of factors and influences, history, relationship, culture, boundaries, etc.

JAY: How do you deal with the significant world view differences between the religions? For example, Hinduism does not believe in Heaven, yet some argue whether they are going to Heaven or not. Aren't we self righteously imposing our questions on to them?

DAVID: Christianity does seem to be obsessed with salvation. Other religions are concerned about other issues, such as unity with creation, Chi, divine energy,...

JAY: That is not "non Christian."

DAVID: Of course, we have the Holy Spirit. Let me go back to the divorce unpaid bills. Etc. One school of thought is that what religions can talk about is not the similarities or differences between faiths, but how we all live together. There is an ethical priority over theology and doctrine. The point is to address mutual problems, such as human suffering. The focus is the common concerns amongst religions: the well being of people is worth paying attention to. I came to Christianity out of a profound spiritual conversion after a mid life trauma of sorts. Christianity provided me with a relationship with God that straightened me up. It was practical.

JAY: That doesn't breach boundaries?

DAVID: Not at all. Dialogue can be confessional. I would like to hear from them how their religious structure served them. We have most things in common, to care for children, etc. They run deeper than religion; it is a manifestation of the presence of God. Those commonalties and spiritual realities should be discussed by everyone! Why do we have to have a formal table?

JAY: Interesting. I like that. I presume that we are not going to offend the other party?

DAVID: We probably should be civil, but a true conversation is about reality.

JAY: The Ivory Tower of scholarship sometimes doesn't lend itself to those conversations. If I spent this time and money to know concepts and could not lovingly communicate it, it is a waste.

ELEANOR: Absolutely, we have to live lives in a community of people who are different, at least in the USA. It is a fact. Of course, they are all wrong, but,...

(laughing.)

DAVID: You and I both have had somewhat of a prodigal son experience. It does seem to motivate us differently; us non traditional students tend to be more forgiving.

JAY: You can tell that I am non traditional?

DAVID: All people tend to frame their theology from their experience. If your only experience is school, or the Mormon tabernacle choir or a farm barnyard, whatever... That is the place from which your journey begins. To be aware and sensitive to those beginnings is the essence of mature dialogue. We don't need to correct people with doctrine, we need to accept them, bless them and love them. That is much harder than arguing and debating. It is about community relations.

JAY: It is definitely more difficult but the rewards are incredible.

DAVID: That is one of the important things about Cracknell. He showed us encounter in a real way. It is what Jesus did. No masks, no pretentious; Jesus met people.

ELEANOR: It is about helping others. It is not noble, but it is the way of faith.

JAY: That sums it up folks, thanks for your time.



Dialogue with Mark Hanshaw

Professor of Religious Studies at Richmond College, Dallas, Texas

And

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Yvette Hanshaw

Developmental Director, Communities of Schools, Fort Worth, Texas

Monday, March 13, 2006

JAY: Well, let's get started. We both know David Brockman. Tell me about you.

MARK: David Brockman and I are both in the Doctoral Program at Perkins. We are all part of this program that is curiously situated between Perkins Theological Seminary and SMU School of Religions. We straddle the two departments and have to deal with the faculty of both departments. The benefit is that we have more resources, but the problem is that they don't have as much structure as I would like. Historically, students will focus on traditional fields in Theology and spend time mostly at Perkin. We have pushed the envelope to expand this scholastic focus.

JAY: Why is that?

MARK: I have a great love and interest in Hinduism. I don't know fully know why, but I have been enamored with Hindu mythology. It is rich and beautiful.

JAY: How do you compare Christian and Hindu theology? Nirvana, Karma,...

MARK: I don't know that Christianity has a karmic theology; maybe in Calvinism.

JAY: Karma is not fatalism.

MARK: No, it is not, but it is understood that within the natural cycles of life we are taken from place to place. In curious ways, we can redefine that as predestination!?

JAY: Hmmm. I don't think so. I asked Kenneth Cracknell this same question. I think you are saying the same thing. Essentially, we are byproducts of our culture and each component of it. We are rendered by many things in life that we do not have control over. That is obvious, but in the classical definitions, I cannot warm up to the concepts of predestination and I don't like transmigration, moksha, maya, nirvana. I have a tough time with that. I would rather have more control. I believe that I am victim to Western Hyperchristianity that claims rugged independence.

MARK: I don't think that Jesus thought of life that way. And that is the biggest differentiation between the two faiths. There seems to be a deeply imbedded sense in Western theology that says that we are independent and isolated. "What I do only affects myself." One Hindu theologian, John Height, talks about the fact that implicitly it is not workable. If I throw garbage on the ground, it affects us all. It is a fallacy to say that we are independent, instead we are deeply intertwined in ways that we, in the Western world don't appreciate and don't acknowledge.

JAY: And don't like, but that doesn't really address the huge difference between the promise of Hinduism, Nirvana, cooling down to non consciousness and the Christian promise of eternal consciousness with God. It seems that we are self aware in the afterlife. Is that a fair distinction?

MARK: I don't think so. I believe that there is a bonding, a union of an interwoven relationship with all expressions of life. In the next life, we may not be fully aware of the individual self, but what is really a unitary whole. We are all a necessary part of a universal whole. Imagine that a leaf on a tree might have the observation that it is

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independent, but that is a fallacy. The general principle is that we are like the elements of that tree: bark, root, trunk, branches, leaves. To see ourselves as individuated beings is wrong. We need to realize and accept our interwoven connectedness that binds us together and sustains life. We are an integrated whole.

JAY: The Bible is a "Y'all" book. Tell me about your relationship with Cracknell.

YVETTE: I work at a small nonprofit organization, Communities of Schools, as development director. I worked at the YMCA for seven years and am now working in Fort Worth to elevate the graduation rate. It is about fifty percent. I have no desire to be a minister. I really struggle with absolutes in theory. Religion seems to think there are many. I am conflicted.

JAY: You are preaching to the choir.

YVETTE: Kenneth Cracknell fed me. I found a direction in not having a direction. Previously, I thought the world was black and white and now find myself being OK not knowing.

JAY: There is no box.

YVETTE: Much of what I learned was terrifying. Armageddon, Satan, demons, punishment, etc. Recently, visiting my father, he turned to a San Antonio “Hell, Fire and Brimstone preacher.” I sat patiently.

JAY: The hardest thing I have had to do was to rethink everything that I had learned.

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YVETTE: I went to a Krishna temple, and other worship services. I found such a commonality. Of course, the women were all together, and they do have sects, but they do believe in one God.

JAY: They do have sub deities that they worship, Shiva, Vishnu, Kali.

MARK: There is a wonderful book that explores the comparisons between the Christian Trinity and Hindu notions or characterizations of Brahma.

YVETTE: Cracknell directed us to encounter many wonderful people of differing faiths. He really moved Mark’s interest and certainly affected our entire career.

JAY: The best promotion of tolerance is getting to know people. Go talk to people. My parents came out of a generation that didn’t drink out of the same fountains as blacks. I am not interested in sitting in the seat of judgment. Heck, if you are happy, maybe you need to be teaching me! The fundamental truth is the Chi of life; if you move into the flow, you will be productively content.

MARK: Some Hindus would say that Jesus is an avatar of Vishnu. The three grand Tri Murti are Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Kali is a form of the goddess. It is a different sect that engages in a predominant worship of the goddess, the “Shakta,” which is one of the three grand sects of Hinduism. Very few worship Brahma.

Brahma is God of creation; what has been wrought in creation is Maya which deludes us and disallows us from being everything that we can be.

JAY: Are they angry with Brahma? Do they find the Great Unknowable distasteful?

MARK: No, it is a reflection of what Brahma is. Modern Hindu theologians consider

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the multiple deities as representing varying personality aspects of the single God.

Brahma brings physical life which is the source of delusion. I am intrigued by the goddess sect, one form is Kali. The feminine nature of God has been lost in Christianity.

JAY: Have you been influenced by feminine theology? There is very definitely a strong feminine aspect to God. I am grateful for what they bring to the table. Early in my Brite experience, I was confronted by feminism because of my use of the word “man” in a class presentation. I was well informed. It was delightful; wisdom, holy spirit. I have never received such a thrashing that was so beneficial. It is an aspect of God that has been ignored by classic Christianity.

YVETTE: I really have a problem with “Trinity,” I don’t like the “father” symbolism.

JAY: There are so many more ways that God can be experienced. My experience is that it is OK to be frustrated with the Creator. In fact, knowing God as feminine gives me more names to call her when I am angry! Just kidding, but we need a God that we can embrace and that can embrace us in all of our hurts and pains. Isn’t God responsible anyway?

MARK: We can learn much from other religious traditions. In the Shakta movement, there is a great understanding of the Transcendent. This is the great value of what Cracknell brings to me. He led me to knowing God. We can go through Seminary without asking these questions.

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YVETTE: He is totally non confrontational. There were some in class that did not want to go beyond their comfort zone, but most people were really receptive.

JAY: It is tragic, but to be honest? If I could get away with not grappling with it, I might not. What motivates you to work outside of your own experience that you do?

YVETTE: My friend, who was raised Roman Catholic, informed me at length of her beliefs. When she was done, I dissented. When I challenged her, she did not want to hear it. She is smart enough to have to deal with differences, she just did not want to become the process.

JAY: How do generations pass without questioning the institution? En masse patriotic blindness? What causes the hysteria that denies others their own God given dignity.

MARK: Fear. Humans want a bedrock. A pretend bedrock is better than none at all. My perception is that I would rather have an imaginary foundation. I want something to hold on to. I would rather knowingly fool myself rather than to risk the unknown. Once I let that foundation go is there anything out there that I can hang on to?

JAY: For the short term. "You almost persuade me" is what Agrippa told Jesus. The truth is that the truth is liberating. Others don't have to be wrong for me to be spiritually stable. This is the issue behind interfaith dialogue. In our culture, others are

ever present. We have to engage them. If we are to live in peace, we need to be accommodating and it is helpful to look through someone else's glasses. It is just reasonable. Actually, it is necessary in as much as it is possible.

YVETTE: It is liberating when I learned that I did not have to worry about others' faith. I no longer have to worry about. In one sense it makes it easy, but in other ways it makes it more complicated. Mark is a Methodist preacher, and politics is what it is.

JAY: Ordination is tough for Methodists. What is most enlightening for me in that experience is the focus on social activities. The community ambiance seems to be an agenda. Basic Progress is strongly influenced by Wesley. How do you handle the tension between your Christian calling and your stated understanding of other faiths?

MARK: Cracknell helped me understand that the Bible is not exclusive. His treatment of Scriptures were very reasonable to me. His subject matter asked those questions.

JAY: Speak to his teaching style.

MARK: He asked the questions that others did not dare ask. This is not a bad reflection on other professors. They were all wonderful and highly influential. Of course, there are doctrinal issues that are imbedded in those other courses, but Cracknell was where we considered how the Christian faith can interact with other faith traditions. Cracknell offered an environment in which we could explore and consider other variations of spiritual experience. He offered a method and freedom wherein my own faith was not compromised, in fact it was more clear to me why my beliefs are relevant. From a professional point of view, it is critical that we be able to

engage people in all walks. Cracknell encouraged us to do it. I feel like I am equipped to help others with those questions.

JAY: How does this experience empower you to deal with people in crisis?

MARK: It brings a spirit of openness. I was involved in a medical missions. It was a situation where we dealt with physical problems. The benefit was to bring a focus on being an example. We are Christian role models. Converting is not my agenda.

YVETTE: There was sensitivity training as well. Going into a foreign culture without trying to engage them on their own terms is really naive. We went to Central America.

JAY: The one thing I find the most difficult is to be aware of people who are anal retentive about faith in their microcosmic theology and not judge them, yet look overseas and say they are OK. We have a family tree of influences, that includes toxic faith and bitterness. How do I stay open to people that I am rubbing shoulders with?

YVETTE: That is what I deal with too. I struggle being around people of my tradition. It is very difficult when they are fighting amongst themselves. It doesn't take a great deal of research to realize it is stupid and irrelevant. Half the time I don't want to be around.

JAY: If it wasn't for people, the church would be great. Jesus called out his own disciples for those very reasons. Of course, we have been faithful to that.

MARK: That is the institution. We get imbedded in our own institutional structure and that becomes our god. The implications of that institutional structure can be debilitating. Institutions inherently operate towards survival and self preservation.



Once religion becomes institutionalized we are forever battling against the hardened agenda of self preservation. Every religion suffers from the building of walls around itself. As Christians, we have not done a good job of assessing our own existence. Noting the distinction between what the institution calls us to do as opposed to the Bible would go a long way to preserving the dynamics of a living organism that Jesus wanted for us to be. That is just too uncomfortable.

JAY: Of course, the people that Jesus had a problem with was the religious folk.

MARK: I am not anti institution, but it be should be more self reflective than individuals.

JAY: It is one thing to tell people what to do but Cracknell actually shows us how. He really showed me how to look at my institution and my own theology. He has said that he doesn't really teach, he just points out the obvious about questions we often have not asked about things we probably couldn't put into words anyway. I was looking for something that had never been lost. The relationship between the creature and the Creator is simple. Love God; Love your Neighbor. There are plenty of people who need direction without me arguing with a Baptist or a Buddhist about doctrinal differences. On my best days, I am not impressed with my own scholarship!

MARK: That is true.

JAY: You have been wonderful. Thank you for your time.

MARK: I don't know if we answered any questions.

JAY: You answered them all. I appreciate it.

Dialogue with David D'Aquila

Elder, Rushcreek Christian Church, Arlington, Texas

Tuesday, March 28, 2006

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DAVID: Tell me about your ministry.

JAY: I was raised in an extremely fundamentalist rigid religious environment that did not make sense to me. I don't like the atonement aspect. I did not ask to be born, and did not particularly like being blamed for not being good enough. I rebelled, became atheist and found that lacking spiritually as well. Eventually, my journey brought me back to a different understanding of what it means to be Christ like. In the true spirit of kindergarten, I like the story. It is not in ethics, my mother told me to be sweet, I needed a gracious power filled God that could manage my life. Most of my spiritual experience was undocumented and without guidance. My ministry, Basic Progress, provides documentation and guidance for others. That is as simple as it will ever be.

DAVID: You authored and designed a spiritual program for character development you personally needed and looked for, but couldn't find?

JAY: You might want to let it go. We don't have time. The short answer is yes.

DAVID: Fascinating. Much of my experience informs me that the spiritual realm is bigger than doctrine and creeds. We can find the movements of God in lots' of places. One of my parents is Catholic; the other Protestant. God and I have struggled.

JAY: Many of us have. It seems that is God's agenda: for us to pursue diligently.

DAVID: But that doesn't quite seem fair when the church itself becomes the biggest hindrance. I asked questions and was summarily dismissed as naive and immature. I wondered out loud and my musings were considered child play. Most of the time, I received smug shrugs of polite discontent because I dared wonder why things did not match up well with my experience and my version of logic. It was very confusing and disturbing, but only when I truly engaged the theology presented. Otherwise, if I just played along and pretended not to be bothered, I was affirmed as being a fine upstanding citizen. Hypocrisy is highly rewarded in church.

JAY: That is an interesting take on the experience. I did not consider it in that light.

DAVID: The truth is that for many people it works. There doesn't seem to be a significant consequence to being shallow. For me, it never held water.

JAY: What exactly are you talking about?

DAVID: Being raised as a member in two different faith systems was major, but the real curiosity was when I perceived racial, gender or social injustice being carried out in the name of Jesus. There was a real air of superiority that I just didn't understand. Prejudice, bigotry and sometimes just outright meanness were considered to be orthodox Christianity in practice. I have always found it appalling.

JAY: Do you consider yourself above it all?

DAVID: Now that would be rather ironic, wouldn't it? But it is hard not to. I can't hardly find a way to accept such a view of people or of God.

JAY: And that is at the heart of the topic we will bounce around, that God is,.. And who are we to determine God's boundaries?

DAVID: Right, that is actually liberating. And religion alone is not that boundary.

JAY: Life itself is a subset. God created this and we think we are so smart. Seminary teaches us ways of doing and ways of being. I, personally have a profound understanding of John 1. The Logos created, etc. All of my tuition has served to make things real simple. I have mostly been debunked. Decrapped if you will. I know that certain belief systems will be nonproductive. If you worship that light bulb or that couch, it may suffice to keep you sober for a couple of days, but it won't be long before you need to adjust. How do you deal with the fact that there is truth and the open understanding that everybody is OK in their own pursuit to that which is Holy? Lets say that God loves others in the ways their religion frames it. How do you deal with conflict in openness and personal preference?

DAVID: So you are asking this question in reference to Kenneth Cracknell; his teaching style, theology. What is my experience with Kenneth Cracknell?

JAY: That is correct. What spiritual meanderings were created by your experience with Cracknell? He asked me to research the effects of his teaching and theology.

DAVID: I am grateful that he named me among his former students. It is a reminder of my calling. Since school, I have been working in a professional printing firm. How can I give you an analogy as to what Kenneth Cracknell did for me. Many of my professors have helped enormously; many reached out and believed in me. They

allowed me to share things about myself that I had not previously had the courage to speak prior to my exposure at Brite. I was able to dialogue with God, Church, Scripture etc. in such a way as to bring a tremendous healing experience to my life. I was an elder and convener of elders, a moderator of elders at Rushcreek and going through a theological adventure that was everything I needed to be. I was middle aged and in seminary, wanting to get an MDiv behind me. In the last third of that degree, I met Kenneth Cracknell. He did two things: He modeled spiritual enthusiasm. I could see it in his eyes. I wanted that. He also informed me that the entirety of Scripture boiled down to Loving God and Loving your Neighbor. While simple, it is daunting. I know it is Jesus, but I heard it from Kenneth Cracknell. My life journey since has been formed by the hearing or the rehearing of that simplicity. Cracknell is obviously cool. He wears a suit with casual slippers! What other proof do we need? He spoke to me in a powerful and deep way. All church history, liturgy, counseling, doctrine, theology and all that I was learning from the scholars was not why I was at Brite. What he reminded me of my need for God. I never left church, but I had left God. There is a divine power available to us in prayer, sex, beauty, nature, in all of life and death. It is clearly there. Cracknell reminded me that the numinous experience was real. He affirmed that experience.

JAY: So, other than that, he is irrelevant.

DAVID: Yeah, but I'm not done. I wondered how Emerson and Thoreau fit into all this. They showed me so much about God but were presented apart from religion.

JAY: Thoreau attended Harvard seminary and was profoundly spiritual.

DAVID: I know. You understand my disconnect with those who might limit our avenues of discovery. I sought the “otherness” of God. It did not matter how I found it. Those who tried to lead me were,... well, I became skeptical about their agenda.

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JAY: I see. So, Professor Cracknell was perty timely.

DAVID: He affirmed that it was OK to be in touch with a real experience with God without church, dogma, history, scholarship,... It was OK to seek that holy other even without Jesus! We certainly may need to concede that as possible.

JAY: Don’t worry about me. You can’t shock me. Go with it.

DAVID: I encountered him at a point in my spiritual journey where his openness allowed me to come into dialogue with my seminary experience within myself. I felt so affirmed that he was opening these doors. He is schooled and trained, certified and ordained and has missionaried and has come back and said, “Yes.” It is not a “no”. There is only “yes.”

JAY: That is good.

DAVID: Much is paradoxical in the spiritual realm. There are many “both/ and.”

JAY: What is the Both/And of the Yes?

DAVID: We are yes in the now living and there is a “yes” out there seeking us out.

Yes No is the wrong continuum.

JAY: There are dozens of continuums.

DAVID: That is right. How dare we define God by our own experience?

JAY: Christ is much bigger than Jesus, but Jesus was a function of God's activity.

That is what is speaking through John.

DAVID: I don't doubt that it happened for Jesus. I just doubt that it happens only to Jesus. It is not a contradiction to say that no one gets to the Father, but through the

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way. It is available to me in a Catholic church where I am excluded from the

Eucharist; it is available to me at a Sikh Temple where I am merely an observer. God is available. How do I know that? I know it, because it happens to me. I have the same experience as breaking the bread in a Disciple's church administering the bread as an elder. It is available to me in other ways; I am still coming to God in truth and in the way. Do we not witness that? Are we not given eyes and ears to observe that others have attained a relationship with the Divine who are not Christian? Are we Stupid?

JAY: Yes.

DAVID: Cracknell taught me two other things. He told a story about a Methodist missionary teaching the gospel. A local tribal chief said, "I understand what you are saying. You are talking about pointing the way to the High God. Right?" "Yessir."

The tribal chief says, "we know that God!" God had already been there and is already at work in all forms in many ways. To proclaim the gospel is good and true, but we are claiming that we come on behalf of the God who is already here. If I am able to say that and then walk to the communion table and officiate; that, if nothing else, made my seminary experience worthwhile. It allowed me to leave Brite whole. All of my understandings are incomplete, but what I can be complete about and whole about

is that, David, you have always been in the company of the Holy Other. Your parents are Italian and English. Whether at the coliseum in Rome or Stone Henge; to a catholic priest or whomever and you are in the company of God. That is real cool.

JAY: I was looking for something that had never been lost.

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DAVID: Way leads onto way. Robert Frost. When you look at John, who am I to say that I have the way; is it given to me? Sometimes. But I don't have exclusive right to it, nor am I the only source or recipient. It is not my way or our way. It is not about us; and it certainly is not about the labels and the books and the boxes. It certainly doesn't require footnotes, although that may be the best we humans can do.

JAY: Footnotes? I hope not.

DAVID: (laughing) Symbiotics is what I am talking about. We need God to work through our stuff. It is the best we can do with God incarnate or Spirit or biblical interpretation;, but it is pointing elsewhere. We are unified in spite of our stupidity.

JAY: Does God need us?

DAVID: I don't know.

JAY: Good answer.

DAVID: As far as unity between people, Ecumenism is already in place. There is only one body, there is only one church. It already exists in that way. Diversity it is there already. And that is not bad it is actually beautiful. God made all of nature. We are creations of God. Nature is diverse. It is good. God said that it is good. What Cracknell said that it is OK to be Christian and worship that God.



JAY: Don't let the fact that you are ordained keep you from worshipping God!

DAVID: That should not limit me, you are right. God called me this place, but it is not the only place to serve or experience God. My current role in pastoral care better not limit me; it should expand my experience of loving God and loving One Another.

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JAY: There you go quoting Jesus again.

DAVID: What I heard Jesus say was this, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God." He sounded like Kenneth Cracknell when I finally heard this for the first time. It is clear to me that an opening was provided for me to do a certain kind of ministry in the realm of Interfaith Dialogue. As a good American Protestant, I feel guilty.

JAY: How does the Catholic half feel?

DAVID: It isn't over yet. We will get to it soon enough.

JAY: I never would have guessed those feelings. Do you feel called to Dialogue?

DAVID: It is on my heart. I was angry because of the differences between my parents. I knew they loved one another but they could not talk to each other about God. At the catholic church with my Dad, I had an experience where I was so much at home. I then went with mother to a Disciples church where we would sing and be very folksy and it was real for me. From a child, I knew that it was OK. It was OK to have the ritual mystery and it was OK to be totally in the presence of something very friendly. My parents' parents did not attend their wedding. And that is how the marriage went, there was never a blending of the cultures, but I had no choice. What I learned was that as different as they were on the outside, they both believed in the one God and the

same Jesus. They sang the same songs. I took something away I was not able to define until my experience with Cracknell. I was unimaginably blessed in that process.

JAY: I believe that God is fair and how God works that out is God's business.

DAVID: God has worked it out well for me.

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JAY: And how does that affect your capacity for Interfaith Dialogue?

DAVID: Well, it is OK. I am so beyond being judgmental. I struggle with some Christian doctrine. I really hate the institution.

JAY: So did Jesus. It is nice to say that we are going to be casual and non committal but rather arrogant to think that we are stepping down to meet with these folks.

DAVID: It is difficult, but people do not respond to condescension.

JAY: Maybe the task involved, speaking confessionally, is to not think of myself so highly. Humility may be the entire goal of interaction with religious others. We do live within a religious climate, as Protestants, that has been affirming of judgmentalism. And that is one thing that transcends denominations!

DAVID: Right. It is almost like we need to expand our boundaries.

JAY: You are right, but in ministry, I deal with those in a spiritual process, most do not need broader parameters, but more specific instruction, such as, "what next?"

DAVID: We are called to be Christian ministers; to model; to do; to help others because of God. If we believe that God is everywhere and it is up to God to invite everyone to worship, then when you encounter your neighbor, if your neighbor does

not think, act, do, worship like you, so what? At least on a one on one basis, we can accept each other.

JAY: Is there right and wrong? Can you be right? Can you be wrong? We can all have integrity, but what do we do with offering the presence of God practically? When can

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I invite others to reconsider their understanding of God?

DAVID: We have to intuitively trust that we do embody truth, but we don't have to be so anal about it that others are condemned by not being where we are. It is not that we are in a "right" vessel and required to help others reshape to our vessel. We are in a stream heading to a bigger river which heads to an ocean, and we don't own any of it. Because we think that our creek is the only water, we are screwing up the world!

JAY: Religion is perty important to Politics. Jesus lost his temper at the temple.

DAVID: That is correct and with different agendas. We do have a commitment to help people in need, but we have a social responsibility to get along. Accepting and tolerating others in their cultural path does not mean that I can't be true to my faith.

JAY: Devotion means to be less judgmental and more understanding. Our consternation should be directed at those who are close minded and temperamental.

DAVID: Yea. The religious folk are the problem. It is not the faiths, it is those who are so insecure that they have to convince themselves that they are right and might.

JAY: Amazing. I appreciate your testimony regarding your family's journey. You are a good guy, even if your Protestant side doesn't think so! (Laughing.) Final Words?

DAVID: Creation is Good and God said so. Diversity is wonderful. God bless you.

Dialogue with Marilyn Zemba  
Minister, White Chapel Methodist, Grapevine, Texas  
Wednesday, March 29, 2006

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JAY: Marilyn, what a pleasure to finally get to chat. I know you wanted to be a part of this. Why has Kenneth Cracknell been so important to you?

MARILYN: I have had a remarkable life. I started a business with a partner and we tore it up for awhile. I ran and ran and worked too hard. It was terribly difficult. I burnt the candle on both ends. I never gave myself a break. I could not get enough and ultimately I had a breakdown. I thought that maybe I was a workaholic, but I wasn't just that. It was anything. It was other things I obsessed on. I was seeking a reason to live; a career, just a reason for existence. That was what I was looking for. I began to fill that emptiness while experiencing Cracknell's classes.

JAY: And that is what we are talking about; that emptiness and the search for meaning. Where can we find the stuff to fill that hole. That stuff that appeases that divine loneliness. We look for it in cars and bars and wars. Killing lives and wives. It won't last. All of our searches for immediate gratification end in further frustration. All humans have within us a hard wiring Causal Quest. That is what I call it in Basic Progress. It is the search for the First Cause. The Big Bang Theory may explain how it happened but it does not explain why or from where. The same thing with any

scientific theory, evolution whatever,.. The First Mover is where our spiritual home is. And that is the function of religion: to help us respond to that which is holy. Humans have a spiritual need to belong.

MARILYN: I started working with a program called Alpha. It is a basic non pressure environment wherein people are introduced to the basic precepts of Christianity. We ask questions like spiritual gifts and core beliefs. It is for some who just need more; some who are entering into a spiritual walk and others like me who are returning. It is a simple discussion environment that invites people to get out of self and become community.

JAY: All humans have obstacles that inhibit their spiritual health. Sometimes, it is as simple as missing out on a father's blessing or ignoring an insult as irrelevant, whatever.

MARILYN: I went through a period wherein I had no capacity to value my own existence. I was going through a counseling cycle that was three times a week. I had become my own god. I was blaming my parents, I needed their approval. Deep down the desire for approval was driving me to do more than and earn more and act more. I was looking for something to fill it. The ultimate frustration is when none of that works. I hated me and them and I never felt a moment of happiness. I ended up quitting and went into a depression of several months that was nothing more than me feeling sorry for me.

JAY: That's all you knew to do. Switch vices and devices, until we find God.

MARILYN: That's right. I was hopeless. I had lost all hope.

JAY: How did it change? What happened?

MARILYN: Well, I just kept living and a friend of mine along with several others intervened and demanded that I seek help. I went through several groups, starting going to church and of course the therapy. It wasn't really much so I ended up at Brite about a year and a half ago to find God. The implications of his theology is my world view.

JAY: It formed your understanding of the world. You did not enroll to become a pastor?

MARILYN: No. I just desperately needed to find a place to rest.

JAY: You are speaking to me now, that is why I enrolled in 1995.

MARILYN: Did you find God.

JAY: She wasn't lost. I was.

MARILYN: (laughing) That's funny. I am not there yet, but I have been able to sleep better. My first experiences at Brite were in Cracknell's classes. It was more than I could stand. It just blew me away that God is found in many forms and in many ways, including other faith traditions. It took me awhile to assimilate that truth, but I ultimately came to appreciate the ways in which God had gotten my attention.

JAY: I have an interesting proposition for you. Let me say that I have deliberated much on that last statement, that God got your attention. I really believe that others do not have to go through the torturous dark nights of misery and loneliness that I and

you have. Is it possible that some live lives who get the paper, play softball, chase their jobs and careers and are fully satisfied. That is the way that I can understand why some do not respond.

MARILYN: I do not think that the joys of eternity are out there. We can experience that happiness when we find the spiritual relationship with God in community.

JAY: Christianity is communal; it is not a solo journey.

MARILYN: There are many who do live as drones. I do not believe that God made people to be that way, they just do not know that it can be better.

JAY: It does make it easier, but who I am to say that someone else's relationship with God is inadequate? Isn't that the position of those who might have a dialogue?

MARILYN: Well, we have to assume that those in dialogue are both involved in a goal and have a common agenda of healing or peace or whatever.

JAY: That is true, but life is spent with real life people and real life problems in real time. Not to say that Interfaith Dialogue isn't important but it does have its place.

MARILYN: It makes me prioritize; I have to pick who and where to minister.

JAY: Usually, I have to worry about who to help first. I just can't always tell who is ready. I wish they would change colors. I would spend time with the orange ones. If they were red or purple or green, -not my job. I think I could be much more effective.

MARILYN: (Laughing)

JAY: I deal with a myriad of people who are confused about life and God and don't know it. They think "this" is as good as they will ever had it. When do you intervene?

MARILYN: The challenge is that there are people who want a change in their life. I reached a point where I knew that I did not want to do. A lot of my friends were lifting me up in prayer. However it happened, something changed within me.

JAY: I was never afraid to die, I just did not want to keep on living like this. I

couldn't sleep, I couldn't laugh. One time in early fall 1988, I was walking briskly and a huge leaf slapped flat into my palm as I lifted it up to my face. I could see the veins and the colors. I began to cry. I had not stopped at any point for any reason to be OK. I had to work double time to feel even. I had no friends and certainly wasn't one.

MARILYN: We have been to the same place. I really cannot judge anyone else's journey; whether it be Christian or not.

JAY: Tell me about your experience with Cracknell.

MARILYN: My first introduction to Cracknell was at the intake group in January of '05. He spoke with our group. I was enamored with his speaking style. He seemed full of grace speaking about God. I could sense a depth of knowledge. I immediately enrolled in one of his classes. It was the Interfaith Dialogue class. What I understood about his approach was the importance of community and faith development. I always feel like I am making progress in understanding how we should treat each other in the eyes of God. I believe that he genuinely values every individual.

JAY: That is true. I asked him once the most important thing he taught in his classes. He answered almost tersely, "the students." Like it was an insult to consider doctrine



or a special moments or wise quotes to be anywhere near as important as the people he was lucky enough to teach. His response was guttural and his love is genuine.

MARILYN: How many professors have genuine conversations with students? I took missions and globalization last semester because that is what I need for my own

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healing. I have advanced in thinking and theology and how to treat people. I did not memorized verses or dates or anything. I was learning how to interact and not just globally, it mattered in and amongst my peers at work and my neighbors at home.

JAY: That is the reality of theology. If it doesn't have implications in the home, I couldn't care less. I learned a long time ago that the Ivory Tower of Scholasticism is a fake world. It is a house of cards that is stapled together by footnotes. It isn't all bad, but much is far too objective and isolated from the struggles of every day "rut things."

MARILYN: Of course, it is good. It is a big a part of God's plan for me. I needed some substantial reality. I believe God gave me Cracknell to frame the rest of my life.

JAY: Most professors come at Scripture to find out who God would be like if everything was perfect and in a vacuum. Cracknell's theology is about universal truth. How can we read John 3:16 and ignore most of the global population and say that God doesn't care?

MARILYN: I had an experience with a mosque that wasn't as open as Cracknell would have liked. It seemed like an attempt to convert those of us who had come to be with them. It was uncomfortable; I did tell them that there is only one God.

JAY: Allah, Elohim both words for God.

MARILYN: I was defending my faith to missionary Moslems! It gave me insight into how others must feel. I told them that had God not come into my life, I would still be miserable. I have God and may God bless you, but I don't need to be like you.

JAY: When you have had the experiences that we have had, we don't speak from logic, but from our experience. I have been to hell and this isn't it. Maybe more people should be miserable enough to look for God in whatever ways God directs.

MARILYN: It is perty cool to be on this side of it. I don't wish it on anybody.

JAY: Rewards are high. I was flooded by the youth group here. They aren't self aware and pretentious and full of self. Isn't that the goal? We must have left it behind.

MARILYN: And that in the midst of politics and money and boosters, etc. They don't seem to be old enough to care about the crap. They are accepting of one another.

JAY: Give them a couple more years, but for now,...

MARILYN: Then, they will need their hell so that they can find God.

JAY: That is the life cycle. And we have died to self. I can find that in the Analects and the Vedas, but I found it in Christian Scripture. So this is my story. Back to the Drone question. If there are drones, I am called to be so much more than that.

MARILYN: That's right. And that isn't exactly a blessing all of the time. I believe that there are some that are drones, but I believe that some are just fine with survival. Somehow Cracknell encourages us to invite people to be more, to be everything that God want us to be. He encouraged me to spread a living gospel that is about life.

JAY: What a blessing. Thank you so much for your time.

Dialogue with Jennifer Rowley

Chaplain, Palliative Care, Baylor Medical Center, Dallas, Texas

Thursday, March 23, 2006

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JAY: I am with Jennifer Rowley who is chaplain for Palliative Care at the Baylor Medical Hospital. What is Palliative care?

JENNIFER: Comfort only; no longer looking for cure.

JAY: Good. We are in discussion regarding your experience with Kenneth Cracknell: his teaching style, personal influence, theology and especially how that has impacted your theology and professional career. You may speak freely in reflection regarding your Cracknell experience.

JENNIFER: Where do I begin?

JAY: Open theology, interfaith dialogue, tolerance,... You have received the battery of questions which were essentially the questions that arose out of previous interviews. Professor Cracknell basically uses a "let them tell you what they want to" approach. Those questions were basically a framework for preparing me for these dialogues. Just tell me what comes to mind.

JENNIFER: Well, let me tell you how I got involved with him. As I traveled through my MDiv, I knew of Kenneth Cracknell's focus; I thought it interesting. but I really did not see how that could be relevant to my goals. I had met him and Susan while

studying at Cambridge , but had not taken any classes with him here and did not see the need to here, I was all about Pastoral Care. After finishing the MDiv, I got an opportunity to write a handbook for anyone of any faith traveling alongside a dying person. That was the first time I had to think outside the box. I had always been open and tolerant, racism and bigotry always turned my stomach, but I had not addressed it in this way before. This book, Companionship for the Dying, caused me to do the specialized work that caused me to look at all the ways through all the faiths that God cares. I had to learn to teach everyone to be spiritual companions, not necessarily religious companions. Kenneth Stone told me that this was Cracknell's specialty and suggested that I meet with him and use him as my primary advisor. I called him and asked for his help. He responded graciously, thought the project interesting and I have had a remarkable learning experience.

JAY: I bet. Your work regarding care giving for the dying sounds amazing.

JENNIFER: This amazing circle of people at Brite sensed in me a need for me to grow in this area and forced me to encounter the ideas of Kenneth Cracknell and grow spiritually in this area. The hospital adjusted my hours and funded the extra work. It worked out great and everything has been exactly what I needed to do.

JAY: What Interfaith experiences have moved you pastorally?

JENNIFER: The Rothke Interfaith Chapel in Houston is a very black building with black walls that lead to a penetration of light. There are benches around Sacred Scriptures from all faith traditions imaginable. I had some extra time. After three

hours of sitting on the bench and meditating on Scripture of many faiths, I received a phone call from the president of Baylor that informed me of their intention to help and confirmed this direction for me. This project change my life entirely. I have an entirely different mission than I had before.

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JAY: What is that mission?

JENNIFER: It is to ignite spiritual companionship in a hospital setting, and to do so without regard to culture, race, gender, religion. It is to help people pray to their God for people in the midst of crisis that is not attached to any faith tradition. It is the language of love. The research I am doing now is going to doctors and nurses and inquiring as to what we can do as chaplains to make it easier and to provide better spiritual care giving. We have prayer gardens and want to include ritual, symbols and ceremony that will bring closure, blessing, affirmation and healing to this most glorious of life cycles. We will soon have an Interfaith World Day which will have an inclusive prayer that speaks to the family of humanity as being in this together. All hands, all faiths, all backgrounds we are all a part of this. It is vital that we care for these folks. They are worth the time and effort.

JAY: Have you sensed that religious others were being treated differently?

JENNIFER: Well, I didn't sense it, because I wasn't paying attention, but people can be real bigots without knowing it. Kenneth Cracknell opened my eyes to this. It is a project that will never end; he treats it that way. He is so hospitable and so patient. He knows we are a small part of a huge dream to bring all people together.

JAY: How did that process play out in your own spiritual formation?

JENNIFER: He pushed us to experience other worship styles and faiths. That was so marvelous, because we were able to meet real people with real love and know them. That is what beats the argumentation. It was interdenominational and interfaith. It is really hard to condemn people when you know them.

JAY: I agree.

JENNIFER: I am learning more and more. In our pluralist hodge podge of society, it is very common now to have dual allegiances. People are finding that you can learn and practice from all forms of faith. Why not?

JAY: I am interested in knowing how you bring the natural tension between an open interfaith tolerance and theological doctrine or opinion. Is it difficult in any way to accept others in their walk and belonging with others in your own?

JENNIFER: There is no tension. My obligation to my family and my faith partners is to be true to myself and what I know. Being true to myself includes being loving and caring for all peoples regardless of their opinions.

JAY: Hinduism is significantly different in its understanding of afterlife and the place of humanity in this life. The caste system has to be awkward for you.

JENNIFER: Yes, it is. But does that mean that I should hate them? I do abhor it, but so what? I certainly don't think that judging them by their religious system helps. And social injustice is not exclusively Hindu. We have our own as well.

JAY: Good point. How do you handle the cognitive dissonance between everyone is OK and I have my opinions?

JENNIFER: That is a personal style issue, but my way of handling it is to know of the irrational notion that anybody is right. I can't annihilate relationships because I disagree, I can't shy away from people who are different from me. My independent side of me seeks a sacred intersection. I will not be on common ground with people. If they need me to be on common ground, I will be a source of discomfort for them. We all need to walk with the God of our own understanding. My son is bed bound and he loves the televangelists on Sunday Morning. It is so hard for me to not turn off the TV and scream I am not watching this crap. But isn't there a Sacred Intersection for everyone? I can distance myself and choose not to travel paths of angst intentionally.

JAY: I understand that from a distance we can say that we are OK. The Baptist fire breathing brimstone preacher caught up with dispensationalism in dialogue with the snake handling poison drinking pentecostal holy roller from Oklahoma.

JENNIFER: What is your goal in that? Do we have to have one?

JAY: Are they OK? But I really don't think that drinking poison is what Jesus meant. In more cases than not my ministry is about debriefing. The most difficult aspect of my work is to help people dispel insane notions about God that has crippled them spiritually. I hate to say this, but I probably prefer to work with Atheists. Religion does not do a good job with life and Church is not a very good steward of the gospel. I

have to intervene. It seems that I would be hypocritical to hold a strong line with my own faith and give everyone else a free pass.

JENNIFER: I see what you mean. I have not really considered it in that way. It is so much easier for me to be tolerant of other faiths than my own. In avoiding them, I guess I do judge, but wisdom does dictate discernment. I am not claiming to be impervious, I just aim to be loving. I can be choosy about with whom I share spiritual intimacy, but I respectfully disagree with anyone who does so in such a way as to offend or limit anyone based on religion.

JAY: Good enough. We can be so open with our theology and opinions that right and wrong can become four letter words.

JENNIFER: The pragmatics of experience dictate that truth will hold the day.

JAY: In prison, they were all non Christians. In challenging them to accept the Christian faith, they would argue that it was too hard.

JENNIFER: Christianity?

JAY: Yes. I would walk to the wall and bang on it and holler, "you are in prison."

How has your old way been working for you?" Some people worship Satan and other dark forms of spiritism. At some point, we do need to honor God's presence in therapy and ministry. Do we have a right to call them on it? ?

JENNIFER: Yes. But I want to lead them to their own reflection. I do not want to leave anyone in a state of spiritual darkness or spiritual chaos. Maybe if they don't



express it as pain, maybe they are happy, I don't know. I might explore their belief system and its effectiveness, "How is this helping you in the long term?"

JAY: How is the dialogue working in the Hospital setting? Openness can be an agenda that drives us to spiritual places that may not be healthy?

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JENNIFER: I am accepting of anything that brings health. Health has some trademarks. There is a quality of contentment to people who are spiritually well. I met a man today who is a quadriplegic who is happy. I am not worried about him. He said to me that he did not worry about anything because God is in charge. I wanted to tell him that he is coauthor with God. Although we don't agree, I am not worried about him as opposed to a lady who was visiting her dying mother and told me that when her mom died that she would be dead as well. That suicidal statement needs to be addressed. Bottom line? If someone can show me how drinking poison brings healing, I will probably be OK with it.

JAY: I am not the one to make that case. Thank you for your thoughts.

CHAPTER 3

DIALOGUE ABOUT DIALOGUE WITH KENNETH CRACKNELL

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## CHAPTER 3

### TWO DIALOGUES ABOUT DIALOGUE WITH KENNETH CRACKNELL

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#### Dialogue on Personal Life Story

Tuesday, April 4, 2006

JAY: I am interested in the early influences on your career. I am aware that your fear of constant tension regarding the next bomb falling had a significant effect on your desire to promote interfaith peace. Ultimately, I am interested today in hearing about your life as you might share that with a son or good friend. Tell me about your home, your early childhood environment, etc.

KENNETH: So you want me to talk,...

JAY: Yes sir.

KENNETH: The thing about me is that I was raised on the cusp of a very poor London family in the process of making good. I found my great grandparent's marriage certificate that declared that my great grandfather was described as a railway company's carriage cleaner. His own son became a postman and he sorted mail.

JAY: Your paternal grandfather?

KENNETH: Maternal. He left school at the age of twelve, but had great ability and skills and had great success. He made it in the trade union. He rose to be assistant general secretary of the postal workers union. But, 1914-18 was crucial to him

because he was sent to East Africa where he spent two or three years. That experience was written on his life forever. When I was a boy he talked about it at length; he told me all about it. He told me about that experience endlessly and endlessly. This grandson cannot remember much of what he talked about, but it was grounded deeply in my heart. I was not aware of that early subliminal seed planted by my grandfather; but after I went to Africa, one of my aunts said that she always thought that I might do that because of my grandfather's influence on me and what he had told me about Africa.

JAY: He was in East Africa and you were in...

KENNETH: I was in West Africa. I went, not knowing that this seed had been planted deeply by my grandfather. My grandfather being in the trade union, His Majesty's government, the king of England, we have almost forgotten what it feels like to have a king, but the king of England sent him to Africa in the KAR, The Kings African Rifles. The king promised that everyone in the union would not lose their seniority. When he returned in 1918, he found that the government reneged on that promise. As with most governments, they did not care to honor their promise.

JAY: He lost his time in service?

KENNETH: Well, he almost did, but being a very able man, he took the Crown Postal Services to court, represented himself and won. There is on the statute books of England a case on the books, Sutton versus Rex, "Rex" being the king, wherein this lowly little man took on the king, the crown, the government and he absolutely

won. The judge was very complimentary about this man who was not a trained lawyer but had a remarkable capacity for legal argument. He was a very able man with no education. I am immensely proud of him. He was one of the lights in my life. My other grandfather was also quite successful. We called him a “barrow man” where he pushed a fruit cart in the beginning and sold produce in the street and made it as a wholesale fruit salesman in one of the great London markets. Later, I always loved going to the fruit market with his outlet that said T. Cracknell as the sign. I felt that I came from able stock. I knew neither of my grandmothers, they had no influence on me. Both sides were Methodist going a way back, so I had no alternative but to be Methodist. Early on, in the youth group, which that youth leader could not answer,...

JAY: (laughing) Probably made him mad!

KENNETH: It gave me a vocation, I thought that Christianity had to make more sense that what he was making of it. I began to study theology and read everything I could get my hands on. I commenced my theological studies at the age of sixteen. Of course, C.S. Lewis had a profound influence on me. He explained all sorts of fascinating things.

JAY: You knew him?

KENNETH: No, I never met him, actually the year I went to Oxford because he was there and the year I was at Oxford, he transferred to Cambridge and he died in 1963 before I had the opportunity to meet him. He was not the evangelical that many evangelicals make him out to be. He says explicitly that God speaks through other

religions, but considered the question of where the better revelation of God was to be found. As I continued my Methodist studies, I became a preacher by my later teen years and joyfully discovered that the Anglican Methodist position on other faith traditions.

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JAY: How is the Anglican Methodist different from American Methodist?

KENNETH: Well, it is difficult to come to a consensus because the doctrinal positions are so intertwined because they seem to take on the color of their surrounding influences. In some places they are Lutheran Methodists, at other places Baptist Methodists, etc. But, having worked at an almost elite Methodist house of study, the Wesley House, in Cambridge, Methodists know I am an Anglican Methodist Theologian, even if my students don't. Methodism has a real possibility of understanding other religions.

JAY: How interesting.

KENNETH: Now, there are two other things I would like to tell you about. I grew up between the ages of 1939 and 1945, that is from the time I was 5 to the time I was about 10. By the time I was 10, I was aware that something terrible was happening in the world. My mother and father protected me well and I was not fearful, but they must have been petrified. I took it as life, people react differently, some get bummed, some don't.

JAY: You were in London?

KENNETH: Yes, we were very near a Royal Air Force fighter squadron base which received much attention from the Germans. Often when they bombed the base, they would miss and it would hit somewhere nearby.

JAY: Your neighborhood.

KENNETH: I can remember it well, but as it became clear what had happened in Germany in 1945, graven on my memory forever, is a picture of bulldozers pushing corpses into mass graves in one of those dreadful concentration camps. I was deeply affected by that. That should never happen again. They were all human beings. It was a real motivating factor in my life.

JAY: Absolutely.

KENNETH: Supporting that was the fact that I knew many Jews well. I had Jewish friends with whom I wanted to go to synagogue with them and find out what their religion was about. I have always been intrigued by how others worship. Anyway, I went to Oxford for my education. While I did have some sort of training, I normally repudiate the designation of "Oxford educated," because I really educated myself. I did what I want to do. I got sent to a seminary by the Methodist church to Richmond College in London. We didn't have any choice as to which seminary we were to attend. Well, that was one of the stupidest experiences of my life because the educational system was crass and foolish. The professors largely didn't know what they were talking about. I was awkward with them as I had been with my pastor back home when I was referred to as a naughty teenager.

JAY: You were 17 or 18?

KENNETH: No, I was older than that. I had been already to college; 1954 to '57, I was at Oxford; '57 to '59, I was at Richmond, two years. I got out of there as fast as I could. They had no idea how to teach me. They were shocking.

JAY: Were they hands off?

KENNETH: They were obscure, distant and by and large incompetent.

JAY: So at the time you were 23?

KENNETH: Yes, 23 to 25.

JAY: So you are saying that your early theological lessons were incoherent?

KENNETH: Yes. I felt early on that if I could change the ways that theology was taught that I would do it.

JAY: You knew early on that it did not make sense. I also knew from a very early age that what I was learning was confused and full of inconsistency. What made it worse that many who are hearing the sermons and receiving the same information looked compliant. Personally, I rebelled. In my mind, they did not really wonder about it the way that I did and it seems that you did. Speak to that.

KENNETH: Unlike your experience, I did find certain credibility and affirmation offered by my peer group and fellowship. I got that at Oxford as well. I always knew that church was a good thing but that the structure was a bad thing. At Richmond, it was a more "believe it because I said so mentality," but I took the freedom to engage people about all forms of theological questions. I was in the company of sixty men at



Richmond and we had ample opportunity for discussing readings and questions. Many of them were on the same page as me. Many of them are now distinguished theologians who are still my friends. I can't begin to list the things that were wrong with the manners in which pastoral care was being taught. Those early professors at Richmond could not have taught pastoral things because they did not know it existed. They were all incompetent.

JAY: And that opinion remains.

KENNETH: It was my judgment then and I still find it accurate. I wondered if the church would ever ask me to do anything. I felt out of sorts.

JAY: What were they doing? Reading the Book of Discipline to you?

KENNETH: Much worse than that. One professor read us great chunks of his useless doctoral thesis.

JAY: I had a professor who would read the notes of his church history classes from Vanderbilt in Nashville.

KENNETH: That idiotic performance needed to be corrected. It has motivated me and it was formative in my development of my teaching goals and style.

JAY: Do you consider that idealistic? Has there been changes?

KENNETH: Well, the very fact that the British Methodist Committee on Theological Education invited me to Wesley House at Cambridge says a lot. In that early interview with the secretary of that committee, I remember listing in detail the ways I differed and disagreed and disapproved of what was happening at Wesley House. Plus, I was

divorced and I did not consider myself to be a hearty role model. He responded that all those reasons were why they wanted me to be. That was the license to bring about change. Harold Roberts believed that I would not last as a Methodist minister. I don't think he thought I would last six weeks. One thing he did was to be singularly unhelpful assisting me in going to Union Seminary in New York to study with Paul Tillich. He would not even countenance the thought. He didn't want any of his men to be "existentialist."

JAY: When I think of existentialist, I don't think of Paul Tillich.

KENNETH: He said many things that were not sensible.

JAY: What was his position?

KENNETH: He was Principal at Richmond. So, when I went to Wesley House I imagined the remains of Harold Roberts rotating in his grave.

JAY: (laughing) So you went directly to Wesley House from Richmond?

KENNETH: Oh no. I went to Africa after Richmond. I had asked if I could serve overseas. A board I attended at London required that I first be a minister in England. I served in Lincolnshire in a rural setting. It was very good.

JAY: You had one church?

KENNETH: No, I started with five but the superintendent was psychological damaged. He decided that he was going to die. He had been a minister at a very big church and decided to come to the countryside because it was going to be easier. He found that rural church has as many struggles.

JAY: People are still people, in or out of the woods.

KENNETH: That is true. Eventually he became queerer and queerer. We would show for a church meeting and he wouldn't show in the pulpit; and we couldn't find him. He only visited people with heart conditions so he could talk about his own problems.

JAY: (laughing) Sounds like Friar Tuck of Robin Hood fame!

KENNETH: My leadership decided that he was malingering and, of course, he then died. "There, I told you I was ill." (Chuckling) A friend remarked, "Well, you know what psycho-somatic means now!"

JAY: So, you were given responsibility for all of the churches?

KENNETH: Yes, I ended up with eleven congregations. They had all turned to this 24 year old probationer minister. I had the whole lot.

JAY: Probationer?

KENNETH: Probationer Assistant is not ordained. Certainly, a minister but no ordained. I could do everything but the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. Baptism I could do, but Holy Communion could only be presided over by an elder. The gave me special dispensation, being a full minister earning 90 pounds sterling a quarter. There were all sorts of perks but not very much money. Anyway, we made it through that experience and I headed off to Nigeria where I learned about theology in a real sense. My head was full of academic theology..

JAY: And so, you were off to Africa!

KENNETH: Yes, my real lesson was the real presence of God in other religious systems. I began to write an immensely tedious dissertation on a section of the fourth gospel in the fourth century AD. I could not finish from boredom and started taking on the task of finding God in all religion. The alleged PhD I was working on I never did and turned my attentions to other missionaries who had found God in other places. You will find that in Justice, Courtesy and Love. Others had found this before me; the material was immense.

JAY: You wrote it after the African experience and was honored for it by Oxford.

KENNETH: We only invented the PhD in England because American students needed it to teach over here. It was not on the agenda in England and many of our scholars do not have one. In fact, in the 1950s, it had a lowly status. Why would you write a PhD dissertation when you could write a book?

JAY: You are preaching to the choir.

KENNETH: It was invaluable. I actually formulated it by way of teaching outlines and put it together for a book. I spoke to a friend, the Regis Professor Keith Ward about submitting it for a BD and Keith agreed to give it to me.

JAY: What is it called?

KENNETH: It is a BD as offered by Oxford. It is given for writing a theologically important text. I am not a doctor. I let people call me that because that is what they know, but I am real proud of it, and my proper academic title, "Mister."

JAY: There are many who have no problem calling you "Doctor."

KENNETH: It is trivial, I have a terminal degree. I don't feel any reason to stop them.

JAY: You feel completely fulfilled in your academic career.

KENNETH: Yes.

JAY: Let me backtrack. Both of your grandmothers died early on. Both of your grandfathers lived as widowers? They never remarried?

KENNETH: No.

JAY: Tell me more about your parents.

KENNETH: My mother and father were good people in the best sense of the word. My father was a model of generosity and helpfulness. I was embarrassed sometimes to walk in town with him, because everyone knew him. He would talk and listen. He was a very fine example of Christian laymen living, always in church. He was supportive, but very interestingly, he was not an intellectual. To read a book was painful to him, but he knew enough to pass tests and become a member of the insurance fraternity, but I never saw him read books. I was embarrassed by offering him one of a book at my hand and he could not make sense of it. I realized I was asking an impossible thing for him. He left school at 14. He understood structures and principles of insurance.

JAY: He sold insurance? He could read, but,...

KENNETH: But it was unkind to give him a book and expect him to understand it.

JAY: That is a remarkable testimony. To show rather than tell. Well, where did you get your academic bent?

KENNETH: From my grandfather Sutton.

JAY: Tell me about your mother.

KENNETH: It was much the same. She did read voraciously, she was an avid reader but it was casual reading. Always popular literature; we never had scholastic books.

JAY: Did your Dad serve in the military?

KENNETH: He was stationed in Oxfordshire in the middle of England and he served on air bases, which were shared by the Royal Air Force and the American Air Force. He came home on Fridays, it was Monday through Friday. He was in his late thirties. He was too old to be a combatant. He was a sergeant. He was an outstanding sportsman and athlete; those genes never made it through to me. Some of the most boring times was watching sport with him. Anyway, he worked with the American forces to ensure that they had access to British life. He had lots of American friends. I don't remember meeting many of them, but every Friday he came home with the Saturday Evening Post which was not accessible to the general public. I was able to read about refrigerators and all the stuff available in other parts.

JAY: How did you keep your food?

KENNETH: Well, it wasn't necessary except in the summer.

JAY: So, you would characterize your early life as poor, but you did not know it?

KENNETH: Oh, I knew I couldn't have lots of things because we did not have money. My mother was at home, and I don't think they knew what to do with their clever son. It afforded me time to read and read and read.

JAY: And you had a younger brother?

KENNETH: By the time he was born, he was privileged because the war was almost over. Prosperity returned to England. His life experience is quite different from mine.

JAY: Do you stay in contact with him?

KENNETH: Off and on. He is divorced and remarried and his current wife does not like us, and we find it easy to reciprocate. Her antipathy is profound, particularly in regard to Susan. So we hardly see them any more.

JAY: So it is mutual.

KENNETH: Families are like that.

JAY: Let's back up to 1958, you left Richmond School and went to Lincolnshire.

KENNETH: Yes. My first child was born on the fifth of May. Penny is now 46. Then two years later on in Leeds, Sarah was born. Oh, yea, we went from Lincolnshire to Leeds for further "missionary preparation" to be a qualified educationalist. They sent me to the University of Leeds to do what we now call an MA in education. It was bizarre, but when people talk to me about educational mumbo jumbo I can say that I have been there and done that. It is jibberish.

JAY: (laughing) You can't BS a BSer!

KENNETH: Absolutely. One professor, William Walsh, head of department of education impacted me in his lectures. I remember two things he said, the best teacher he ever knew had no lesson plans, no visual aids and no eye contact, talked really to the chalkboard but was brilliant; he had a power in him called "fertility in analogy."

JAY: Fertility in analogy?

KENNETH: It is a splendid phrase that may say something about my ideal. You know this, but it is like this,... Jesus was a spectacular user of this form. Walsh said that we either have it or we don't, but your giving simile and metaphor is the most useful way of teaching. It is the way that good teaching is performed.

JAY: The real issue of teaching is to help others understanding what is meant. You are not teaching unless it is relevant. We have to draw pictures to pass on truth. Sometimes we have to model it and at other times we have to say it four or five different ways. Learning is the point.

KENNETH: So, your lunatic professor which read notes is absolutely cretinous, useless.

JAY: He is a highly esteemed historian but in the classroom, he was horrible, but far too many professors spend their time chasing footnotes and are afraid of interaction. My complaint with the Ivory Tower is that many theological teachers are "do what I say and not as I do," which is the beauty and value of learning about goodness from your father. He knew how to live it. That is an unbelievable sermon.

KENNETH: Absolutely. If you don't know where your students are, you can't teach them. I had one engineering teacher in Loughborough actually say that what he has in his notes is going into our notes without passing through either of our minds! What he was saying was that the formula is to be memorized. That is not true for theology.

JAY: Sounds like your Richmond experience. We just puke it back out.



KENNETH: I don't think they spent a moment thinking about how to teach.

JAY: And that may be giving them the benefit of the doubt.

KENNETH: Back to Walsh. This educationist at Leeds, he said the whole of education can be summed up by this: "Bright students can be dim and dim students can be bright." I have always remembered that. If I can get on their wave length, they can be bright. One of the greatest compliments I received is one less able student who said, "you lifted up my head."

JAY: That speaks to self esteem and self worth.

KENNETH: As far as I can remember, I have not put any students down. Sometimes, students have reported feelings of grief or sadness, because of something I said; but I did not do it intentionally.

JAY: That is my experience. You are not the only professor I have found to be sympatico, but it is remarkable that when asked who are the most important people, it is the one's who stopped and listened. The academic world can be far too impersonal. I have been in the academy many years, and some have lost my respect because of their aloofness.

KENNETH: Sure.

JAY: Tell me about your second daughter.

KENNETH: She is a judge in England. The youngest is a highly qualified teacher of special needs children. That is basically psychology, she also teaches pre-university classes in high school psychology.

JAY: They are all in England and you get to see them annually?

KENNETH: Not this year, but they will all be there in Vermont for Christmas.

JAY: Grandchildren?

KENNETH: Six of them. They will all be in Vermont for Christmas.

JAY: So, I guess you are looking forward to that.

KENNETH: Of course.

JAY: So they were all part of the Africa experience?

KENNETH: Yes, and I would have stayed longer but there was a civil war in Biafra that went on and on so I stayed in England. I was employed and had a salary from the Missionary Society. A small church in Lestershire found itself without a minister. He was a friend from seminary who had a heart attack and died. It was a great shame. I did not commit substantially, because I wanted to go back to Africa. I later became minister in the same circles for a church in Loughborough, a city with about a 20% Asian population, so I began my second missionary stint. I never really thought of conversion or evangelism as being critical. I could never get my head around that, it just didn't make sense to me. I could only speak the truth as I saw it and if they accepted it fine. I did not like the notion of manipulating people into the gospel. Anyway, I engaged this Asian community of newcomers; they were doing the jobs that Hispanics do here. They were very marginal and I became the chairman of the community relations council that was concerned about these things. So I suddenly became the interfaith person that I am now. So, I was there for a number of years,

then the British Council of Churches (BCC) wanted somebody who would lead the British community in this direction. I was approached and appointed as the secretary for relations with people of other faiths for the BCC. I held this position for ten years and traveled all around the globe.

JAY: How did this idea come about?

KENNETH: The BCC began its work in relations with people of other faiths in 1978 as a result of the massive influx of aliens into the British Commonwealth. I lived in an area with many different kinds of people: Hindus, Sikhs, Moslems. Many other parts of England had folks from the Caribbean. Racism has had a strong hold in England. It is endemic to British society. You could see it everywhere : “No coloreds allowed here.” A lot of our purpose was to combat racism.

JAY: We certainly are familiar with that across the pond.

KENNETH: We wanted to bring many churches together. The BCC had many sections: community relations, secular interaction, world mission, global intent, etc. We had to find a way to keep the peace in England. As they needed some expert guidance to teach us of how others understood life and the world. I just took the step upwards of what I had done in Lester, I did at the national level with leaders of differing faiths. I began to help and serve these whole communities. I soon became well known. I became friends with them all and enemies to none of them.

JAY: It was very natural for you. It fit.

KENNETH: Absolutely, I have always been concerned about justice. One of the first things that I did,... One of my colleagues in the BCC brought forth a news item from the London paper stated that the city of the Westminster was to impose full property taxes on the Regent Park mosque. I wrote to the Imam and asked if it was fair, it is fair, but if it was unjust, count on the British council to stand alongside. He immediately responded and entertained me. We talked the problem through. He had photocopied my letter and sent it to all the Imams around the country. Of course, it was totally ignorant, bigoted and unjust.

JAY: Of course it was.

KENNETH: The people of the city came with me and they toured the mosque. I told them that they should impose a tax on Westminster Abbey if they were to impose it here. It was all handled through negotiation and justice prevailed peacefully.

JAY: In our next conversation, we will discuss ramifications of what we believe. But the need to be “right” seems to be a prevalent motivating force for humans.

KENNETH: As I traveled, the biggest obstacles was not the principles involved, but the ignorance of the people and the pastors. They were traditional religious klutzes who found comfort in old staid ways. First of all, I had gotten to know the very great John Hick, who was a social activist.

JAY: Where was John Hick?

KENNETH: Birmingham, the biggest interracial city. He came over to Lefbro to help with this British Council initiative. He said to me, we have a bit of money together, I

think we ought to employ a theological student to go around all the theological seminaries to ask what is done to be done about multiracial and multifaith education. A young lady went around asking the questions that John and I had loaded up to ask what people knew of other religions and social interaction in England. We found that most people believed utter nonsense. People thought that there were to be rivers of blood and the whole of England was to be swamped by foreigners.

JAY: There was a lot of rabble rousing.

KENNETH: Yes, we asked what portion of the population of immigrants had black faces. Far too many thought it was twenty percent; one actually thought it to be forty percent! These are people who were in training to preach! The fact is that, at the time, it was between three and four percent.

JAY: Whites are now a minority I think, but that is putting everybody else together. The threat is ignorance and folly in power.

KENNETH: That's right. We published a small tract, we named it "Blind Leaders for the Blind." A cartoonist portrayed blindfolded shepherds ambling about a flock of sheep.

JAY: I bet the scholars liked that.

KENNETH: Right. We also published a series of essays in 1986, called Theology on Full Alert. We proposed that all theological experts had to be taught in a different way. Everything, history, ethics, everything had to be taught taking Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic philosophy, theology, ethics and interests in a global context. Interfaith

dialogue had to become prevalent. If we teach church history without mentioning the failings and meanderings of interfaith relations, both good and bad, we are all doing a great disservice to the current global economy.

JAY: It is a social reality. To teach a theology of Hell and Satan without understanding that those concepts actually came to the Jewish faith through the Babylonian exile is ignorant. Religions have been in dialogue.

KENNETH: Life after death is Zoroastrian.

JAY: Of course, that does not devalue or invalidate it. God can and does work through all these forms. There are lots of criteria to determine truth without using religious prejudice.

KENNETH: So, I was confronted by some who had become aware of my talking and hinting about theological studies. They told me to go and do it. I was tired of traveling. If I never see the interior of another airplane, I shall be happy.

JAY: My personal Cambridge experience involved much argument and debate, Irish especially.

KENNETH: That's right, but I was able to serve to reform education at Cambridge. One of the most successful things I did was to think outside the box and continue to help bring several teaching schools together in spite of their five hundred years of elitism and differentiation. Over much opposition from Cambridge University, we approached the Anglia Polytechnic University, to come up with an MA in pastoral theology. (We don't have an ATS, etc.) All British education is validated by

universities. Lo and Behold, they agreed to do it at an ecumenical level. Many of the students you met there, would not have had access to that course without this early effort. I am very proud of it. It was needed and flourishes. I think that is a monument to my ability to construct and manufacture something valuable to the church.

JAY: It's a biggie.

KENNETH: Cambridge did not do it because they did not see pastoral education as a discipline. We just did it another way. I was the president of the Cambridge Theological Federation for many years running. No one else would do it, and I really wanted to do it. I did not idolize Cambridge, and I had this hermeneutic of suspicion built into me from Sunday School. Why is this "bastard" telling me lies?

JAY: (laughing) That's funny.

KENNETH: This is the first you actually have to do in administration. That is to wonder why someone has adopted the line that they have adopted. It is usually some form of a lie.

JAY: Do you think they actually believe it?

KENNETH: Maybe, but that doesn't make it true. So, I thought, why are you telling me this today? I never fought the argument straight on, I always considered why this set of circumstances was happening. My colleagues would say that the head honchos, or Dr. So and so would say whatever. And I would smile and wonder why you believed his line. I wondered why things could not be done and would never accept the first lie. Far too often, the people I dealt with were far too loyal to the institution.

JAY: It is just too unfortunate that I know what you are talking about. Service to God, carries with it a heavier burden than being in some other professional career.

Theology is not a playground that should be formed by politics and false allegiances. I do believe in a God that wants us to be faithful. I wonder sometimes how some can actually pretend that they can do nothing, call it effective and sleep at night.

KENNETH: Sure, I agree. I am a half time full professor as opposed to the full time half professors. And I am grateful to teach what I want to teach without a significant weight of politics. I can name the name of most of the students.

JAY: How young are you?

KENNETH: I will be 71 in June.

JAY: What do you call people from Vermont?

KENNETH: Vermonter.

JAY: I prefer to call you a Vermontonian.

KENNETH: That's fine. Just call me from time to time.



## Dialogue on Personal Theology and Teaching Method

Friday, April 7, 2006

JAY: Two major points that I understand that connected with you was the inability of your youth leader to describe God's place in the world and then you later ended up in Nigeria with the Ibo tribe and they already knew God.

KENNETH: That's absolutely right. That is a good way to connect the dots. It does resonate with me that we can observe the reality of fulfillment in people who do not see it the way that we do. If you already know the answers and look down your nose at others religiously, you will have no use for me. I am a threat and since I don't want to threaten others, I prefer to not be engaged. If you are a settled bigot and you already know the answers, I am of no use to you and am a profound threat. I just don't like to challenge people.

JAY: I am amazed at the story of Gethsemane, when Peter cut Malchus' ear off; Jesus put it back on! It had not been ten minutes when they had all been bowled over by some JRR Tolkien power blast. The guards, in the story, seemed to disregard both of those ridiculous circumstances. How can people live a life of guarded ignorance, especially when we are talking about their most obvious primal need, to be in union with God. Why would people be in places that are obviously not connected with God and seem to be OK with that? It is rather frustrating. Do they get away with it? Why

do I have to do all that I have done to make sense of it all. It just doesn't seem right.

How do I deal with the tension and the distinction of doctrinal differences within my committed community of faith with everything between creed and worship styles alongside the notion that religious others are OK regardless of what they believe?

KENNETH: Important. There are two important issues laying around here: one is trust. I do not yet think that people of all the different faith commitments there are belong in the same household of faith. That is they are not in a position to hear any criticism I would want to make because they don't trust me; they become immediately defensive. We are not in the same ball park, yet. Occasionally, momentarily, sometimes, for maybe five minutes, you can actually say, yea, but to a Jew, Hindu or a Sikh, yeah, but, Maybe even a Hell no. What you are doing is not accordance, in any sense, to my sense of justice or truth. But that is so rare because we do not belong to the same household of faith. That is not the purpose or function.

JAY: There are two different agendas, one is social and the other might be considered spiritual?

KENNETH: That's right. True dialogue has specific boundaries. Hypothetically, in a church family we have unity of faith, say as Methodists. I feel obliged or responsible for peacefully speaking my mind or opinion about matters with which I disagree. It is my role and place as a member of the body of faith. I can live with disagreement and go to meetings and say so. I can say that hanging and flogging homosexuals is not

Methodist. Parading around saying that God hates fags is not consistent with Jesus, it is not of the gospel, it is appalling.

JAY: What about other Christian faith groups? Aren't some rather harsh on sexuality?

KENNETH: Yes, but that is not my business. I am not arguing about the moral positions of the Roman Catholic church or anyone else. It is my business to worry about what the Methodists are up to. That is the distinction, there may not be enough love and trust within the Methodist church for us to have dialogue, but one can treat it as it might be so, but with other religions, that is not accessible. You can't even fake it, it is not there.

JAY: When I am speaking to interfaith fellow travelers, the agenda is social or cultural. We are dealing in the realm of getting along with one another. When I am doing pastoral care giving, I am talking about your children's food and your family's social welfare.

KENNETH: But, it is a matter sometimes of life and death for both. If we can't talk we won't get to the Truth. We won't fully experience God. There are many ways in which both conversations share mutuality. We need to deal with people better.

JAY: I am not sure that I can answer this question for my own calling, but why has the issue of Dialogue been such a huge drive for you?

KENNETH: I have a close Catholic friend. We met when I was the university minister. We are very close. He was a student counselor at University. We had wonderful arguments at the top of our lungs regarding who, the Protestant or Catholic

church was better at using guilt as a motivator. He remains a devout Catholic and I am what I am. He was asked at a conference, "By what right do you interfere in the lives of others? And a quite loud voice in the back shouted out, "Because we f----ing love them." (laughing)

JAY: How funny.

KENNETH: It is true that in a sense I have never met a person of another faith that I have not loved. If I have a choice, I will always go to talk to people who are different from me.

JAY: Most people gravitate to like kind. I struggle with being weird. It seems that you have embraced it!

KENNETH: That's right.

JAY: That's good. To be sure, your emphasis is not that of pluralism. The word itself is a non sequitur. You are not saying that there are many ways, instead you are saying there is one way that can be accessed through many mediums, right.

KENNETH: That's exactly right.

JAY: That being said, your focus is not necessarily on doctrinal agreement or handling theological distinctions between faiths or denominations, your primary concern is the table of dialogue.

KENNETH: That is right. The notion of tolerance is more social than religious, but that may only be done through religion. Of course, we may never fully know God or

truth if we don't listen to the others. While they may seem incompatible, it is more likely the both/ and not the either or.

JAY: It is clear that paradox is a spiritual reality, which can be difficult to teach, speak to the phrasing again of "fertility in analogy."

KENNETH: Because we are so different, all of us, we must find a multiplicity of ways to help others understand. We have to use metaphor and simile, analogies and allegory.

JAY: To a fault, that is the way that I read text.

KENNETH: It is essential to bring truth into our modern world. For teaching, fertility in analogy means to bring truth to the world. This skill is essential in dialogue.

JAY: There is a verse in 1 Corinthians, chapter 1 verse ten that speaks to a need for all the faithful to be in unison. What does Paul, and I think Jesus is on board with that thought, mean? What does it look like to be unified? Not just the local church, but me and the Pope and the Pope and the Dalai Lama. What does unity of the faith mean?

KENNETH: It is always unity of faith, no article. But it means to know God.

JAY: The prayer of John 17 says that.

KENNETH: Of course, but the fourth gospel operates from the logos theology. It is the Logos speaking.

JAY: Of course.

KENNETH: The Greek pisteuo doesn't mean believe, it is a verb. "To faith" something.

JAY: dikaos is the same way. To righteous, we just don't have those words in English. So, when I speak to unity of faith, you hear that an affirmation of Hindu or B'ahai faith.

KENNETH: I can do that with Benedict XVI, but I am concerned with what they faith. What would they die for. I am concerned with their integrated personality truth that says that the Catholic system is right. To faith is not a systematized hierarchy of belief. It is an attitudinal thing, which is pure Wilfred Cantrell Smith.

JAY: I am so pleased with this entire process. My own journey has been so affirmed. Let's get specific on differing ways of seeing the Universe. For Hindus, Nirvana is a cooling down, it is a cessation of consciousness. We finally are liberated through moksha; karma has been fulfilled and we join Chi. That is the goal of Hinduism. For Christianity, it seems that the Christian understanding of the afterlife in Heaven is conscious and eternal existence. Those two concepts are incompatible.

Transmigration is incompatible; a differentiated soul is incompatible. Brahmin is unknowable! The LORD of the Bible is revealed. These are major differences in religious theology. Did Gandhi go to heaven?

KENNETH: Do you want me to answer that question?

JAY: Well, speak to the different ways that theology affects our faithing in life?

KENNETH: Well, if Gandhi experienced God in this life, he is experiencing God now. There are two theologians in the history of things that I have read more than anyone else, not Augustine, Luther nor writers of the New Testament. John Wesley

and Frederick Dennison Maurice. Both of them ceased to think that going to Heaven was any kind of theological question. I never tire of speaking of Wesley to Methodist audiences. Salvation is not as the vulgar think, using the 19th century term, the popular or ordinary. Salvation is a present circumstance. Get out of your heads that there is something in the afterlife that it will be all right. If it is not right now, it won't be right then. FD Maurice, in 1953, made it very clear that he understood the New Testament teaching on eternal life is not there, but here; a present situation. If you don't know it now, you won't know it then.

JAY: You won't be surprised in the afterlife. I have no concerns about the afterlife; not out of ignorance because I presently experiencing God, like many others who do not share the same religious framework. Is that the essence of salvation?

KENNETH: We will go on experiencing God. Wesley said that salvation was holy tempers. That is what salvation is,.. it is the fruits of the spirit in Galatians. If you fall away from patience, etc., all I have to do is climb back on. Hell is selfishness and self loving, angry, bitter, that is hell. Boy is that hell, isn't it? It is miserable, so when we reach out to people we reach out because we know they are already in hell. So to know God through Christ is to be at peace. It is to know love and belonging. Salvation is a present possession, which is what Wesley says, just like that.

JAY: I think that the greatest influence on me and wields the greatest impact on Basic Progress is the doctrine of sanctification. Did you ever do much reading from Horace Bushnell? Mid 19th century? He spoke about the perfection of the saints, very

powerful knowing of faith. Luther said that we could be perfect five minutes after we die. Calvin said that we could be perfected five minutes before we die and Wesley came along and said that we are perfected in the verb sense of sanctification; being sanctified as we breath,... When you speak of the holy tempers or getting back on the salvation pony of the fruit of the spirit, patience, kindness and loving-kindness, where is God in all that? What is God's role in our "salvation" as we are speaking of it?

KENNETH: God is ubiquitous. God is everywhere at work bringing people into this freshness of life, this newness of life. That is what God is for. The fact that so many people can't hear or don't hear is not God's fault really. They can't hear because of their circumstances or terrible upbringings full of abuse and misery or their religious quacks have told them that God is hate. They can't hear him because of the church's portrayal of God or because of their own self centeredness. God is portrayed terribly in some sectors of all religion, Islam, whatever, whether in demonstration, modeling or bad teaching.

JAY: The portrayal of God by the church, synagogue, mosque or whatever religious structure may inhibit people's capacity to know God?

KENNETH: No wonder people can't hear God or perceive or experience God, except that they do of Course. That is all the fourth gospel means when it says that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it.

JAY: Logos theology.



KENNETH: Don't put me down as being naive. But the light does shine in the darkness.

JAY: For many years, I consciously defined myself religiously as an atheist. I could not see God in any way. Apparently, there was something within me, that pulled me scratching and clawing out of my hell. God did for me what I refused to believe. The logos of God saved me without my permission!

KENNETH: Sure, my wife would give a splendid lecture whereby she brought our dog, Fred, both at Cambridge and here, to the classroom and asked "Is Fred a sacrament?" (chuckling) Of course, he was because he mediated love and acceptance and all the things that God does. You can see God everywhere because God is everywhere.

JAY: I don't want to depersonalize God and turn it into karma.

KENNETH: That is a mistake, because, CS Lewis wrote about that. God isn't personal like you are personal, but God is not impersonal like a tree is impersonal. God is beyond personality and after little discussion God becomes ineffable. God is light, wisdom, joy all those things and we reflect them when we are made in the image of God.

JAY: Was the world created in six days?

KENNETH: (laughter)

JAY: I apologize, that was my inner child. ... I want to ask about your teaching method. Please speak boldly. If you asked me, I sure would; please, speak freely. What have you brought to the table that you are most proud about?

KENNETH: Affirmation of every student that I have ever had to deal with, in the first instance. That is true affirmation. That is my I am ill disposed to give anybody less than a B. I very rarely do. Everyone is trying; they are all there, there, voluntarily there. They are working hard. If they are there, they are there. They may even be sitting in the back row being a nuisance, but that is still valid and necessary. That is the first thing. Second thing is that slogan that I worked out in my own head, "They ask; what do you bring them?"

JAY: They ask; what do you bring them?

KENNETH: Yes. What do you bring us? What gift are you offering us? And, it better be a gift! Huh? It better not be something second hand and tawdry or second rate. It better be a gift. It better be something that is yours that you want them to have.

JAY: That is powerful. That is a convicting platform; it puts everything into perspective. I don't have it all, but I do have something. It is important to know what I do have to bring.

KENNETH: That's right, see, in the failed Cracknell, which there is a great deal. I mean all this flattery that you offer me is OK, but I don't drink it in. I don't inhale.

JAY: I appreciate that. From my perspective, it is not flattery; it is a blessing. Of course, if I followed you around I probably would not think so highly of you!

(laughing)

KENNETH: That's what I know. I live with me all day long. From my point of view and cannot internalize because I have much more self doubt than a few words of praise can overcome. On the other hand, of course, I am affirmed, that's nice. But, I don't inhale. The failing Cracknell, which still exists, but the very failed early Cracknell whose early theology was dumbed down and second rate with second hand information, it did not belong to me. My old congregation would have said boring, inauthentic. I felt when I finished speaking or teaching that I had not offered those people anything. I wasted their time. I regret that. I try not to do that. If that inauthentic meter that is in head goes off, you may have observed, I will just stop, make a joke, or not even a segue and move on without further elaboration. Straight on because it is not even worth discussing why it was useless. It is nothing, wasted space, wasted time. It is not even worth trying to make sense of it. I hate to be inauthentic. I try not to do that.

JAY: Where does prayer fit into that?

KENNETH: Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees.

JAY: (laughing) That was inauthentic!

KENNETH: Absolutely inauthentic.

JAY: Do we move on to something else? (laughing)

KENNETH: I don't waste my time talking about Satan. He trembles when he sees the weakest saint, but he never sees me on my knees.

JAY: That is funny. Posture is not important. Do you pray before sessions? A quick God help me, anything? I am getting personal.

KENNETH: I don't know if you should document this, but I try to pray all the time.

JAY: That is the faith verb.

KENNETH: When I am chatting with someone, sitting in study or in a meeting whatever. I am consciously aware of God as much as possible. I don't say God help me or where or you God, that sounds silly,... but it is considered reflective stuff going on all the time.

JAY: That is really the goal of faith. To be OK in my own skin, and the only way to do that is to be conscientiously aware of God's presence. The salvation thing.

KENNETH: Sure. You have been present when I have led a public prayer spontaneously before class. When that happens, it is me just putting into words what I think at that time. It is not from a book, it's not liturgy nor rehearsed. It is what I think it is about I do the same sometimes prior to meals or wherever. Sure I will, but God has not heard me formally in a couple of weeks, but I am always thinking God. God has heard me.

JAY: For those who might misunderstand, I still have to be me. I have to be faithful.

KENNETH: I never respond to requests to teach prayer. I do not know how to verbalize what I am talking about: practicing of the Presence.

JAY: Brother Lawrence.

KENNETH: But he thought that there is a person present. I do not think of God as a person in the room with me independently of anywhere else. Bonhoeffer said, "A god that there is, there isn't." A God showing up from time to time doesn't exist. It is in him that we live and breath and have our being. In prayer, we are not invoking God's presence, we are just reminded that in him we live and have our being.

JAY: I have this delightful graph that incorporates human personality, Mental, Emotional, Behavior and Relational merged with the standard ways of thinking of God, the Transcendent, Immanent, Hidden and Revealed to demonstrate why differing forms of worship and faith systems would natural emerge as humans interact. The presumption is that God intervenes. I have to teach it originally that way because that is the way God is taught in orthodox Sunday School. I later pull the table cloth out and demonstrate that it is in fact fear, pride, racism, bigotry, and sin that intervenes that destroys the peace. It is a huge distinction. God is everywhere.

KENNETH: That is right. And that is what we are saved from.

JAY: Let me go back and ask you again. What is it that you brought, when the students asked, what is he bringing me?

KENNETH: It is so simple. The theological superstructures are fascinating, and from time to time it is right.

JAY: Even a blind squirrel can find a nut?

KENNETH: (laughing) It is OK. Whatever, but at the end of the day, I think I bring to people a paradox. I bring these pure simple verities, simple truths: God is universal love. God is by grace only. Not any doctrinal edifices or credal superstructures. You know what I think. Let me say it boringly again. You are loved. You are a child of God. You are who you are and you cannot do anything about it. God loves you. When the story is told to you about much God loves you, all you have to do is go, Hmmm... That's it. And that is the beginning of repentance and the whole process that Wesley refers to as growing in grace and going on. I know of these great theological terms, sanctification, perfection, redemption, etc. But you are supposed to be what you are supposed to be and that is personally interpreted. Be "you" perfectly as your father in Heaven is perfect. Which is what the guys were in the old Testament. They were TAM. That is what Job was; he was a man of integrity.

JAY: They were what?

KENNETH: TAM. The Hebrew word means that they were what they were. They did not make silly stupid mistakes because they were pretending to be something they weren't. They were themselves, and most of the saints were similar. It is simple.

JAY: TAM. I must have skipped that class..

KENNETH: The greatest compliment and highest praise I received when leaving a ministry or a community of faith is that Kenneth never worked with guilt. I think all this stuff about the wrath of God and penal substitution is drivel.

JAY: The whole blood of Jesus thing didn't make sense to me at the age of twelve.

Who is God paying off? I didn't ask to be alive, was found in a situation I did not ask for and then I am condemned because I don't like it?

KENNETH: That's right. It is a travesty, it seems. There are those who know immediately that I don't hold with guilt, sin, negative superstructures whatever and others don't. Those that do respond and I just go on like that. When rebuked, I sit on the bar stool and smile. (laughing)

JAY: I so appreciate your attitude about teaching. You have been a blessing.

KENNETH: I never really taught anybody anything, I just put into words things that they already knew to be true.

JAY: I believe God put me in your class so that my path could be affirmed.

KENNETH: OK. Jay, have fun. It is a terrifying thought to spend this much time over me.

JAY: My dear professor, I appreciate it. You may now get back to your yard work.

## CHAPTER 4

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## CHAPTER 4

### IMPLICATIONS OF A LIFE EMBEDDED WITH DIALOGUE

“Be you perfectly as your Creator is God perfectly...”

Those who participated in this project are real fans of Professor Kenneth Cracknell. They each came to the classroom seeking instruction and guidance referent to their chosen career path of ministry. What these people found was a comfortable environment to seek God. No one left their faith behind; not one of these former Cracknell students deviated from their original goal of being present in ministry representing their Creator. Without exception, every single interviewee was lifted up in faith and given integrity and dignity to know God better. This is the pervasive testimony of everyone I conversed with on this task. I am sure that there are plenty who consider my dear professor a crackpot. I think that is a safe assumption.

It is notable that beneath the calm of conversion, there were those who have had an inner anger at or deep disappointment with the Christian institutional church. The task of dialogue is not solely for the purpose of living with religious others. In some ways, that frustration and skepticism was alleviated by the teachings of Kenneth Cracknell. At least, they seemed to know how to better cope within a community of faith that, at times, can be condescending and far too judgmental. That is more about people than about God or church. Christianity certainly does not have a monopoly on self centered bigotry, prejudice, manipulation and fear. There is plenty of that for all.

While, we did discuss theology and world view, as well as other grandiose propositions, a global solution for peace is not engaged effectively by finding doctrinal loopholes in religious tradition to offer heaven to them. That is actually a ridiculous proposition which will take no more of my reader's time. Instead, each of us, from his or her own perspective, should investigate our own beliefs and ask why it is so intimidating to be with people who are different. The answer is not "the God within." In fact, all religions espouse the Golden Rule of "conduct yourself with others in the manner you would appreciate from them." The real task is just getting people to do and be what they claim to be and do. Of course, God's been trying to get us to do that since Moses broke those two sacred chalkboards. Teaching others how to get along is really not a bad ideal to strive for. Kenneth Cracknell has been a divine prophet speaking those very truths to anyone that would listen in the ways that they could understand. His teaching method was about communicating the outlandish notion of loving your neighbor as yourself. He is rather lucky; Jesus got killed for saying the same thing!

The message is simple, but the audience is real complex. Humans are social creatures whose good is inextricably linked to the good of others. It is not just a matter of economy and ecology, we are each not fully transparent to one's own person. We need each other to grow and become. We have to nurture our ability to talk about common interests in common good ways. We are social creatures that require much care to develop in ways that do not frustrate our flourishing both as

individuals and groups; “rights” only make sense alongside responsibilities and the well being of any of us is tied up with the well being of others. Very few have the capacity to teach all this. Professor Cracknell, in his sincere and vulnerable manner, engages others in ways that has the effect of giving this social urgency to his students. Whether recognized in the moment or not, it happens below the surface. Living the reality of togetherness offers a wonderful smorgasbord of divine interaction with people of all kinds.

Although it was purely accidental, the response to the inquiry for dialogue with former Cracknell students received a balanced gender response. Both males and females have been touched equally by a theology that accepts the dignity God has already given to people. All superficial distinctions between people are trivialized while deeper identities are celebrated. It is the practice of faith that intersects the lives of people in the context of justice, love and peace. For real results, an inclusive theology has to effect change in the lives of people. If theology betrays the ability to see the capacity to love in all of them, regardless of tradition, race, gender or any other superficial criteria, it has failed. It is a affirmation to the writer of this research project that the initial inquiry and request for personal investment was met with praise and enthusiasm by all who could take the time to reflect.

Reflection is what the participants engaged in. What Kenneth Cracknell taught, described, demonstrated and tried to develop is not a non reflective dialogue between rational monads, but an encounter of faithful interaction that serves to teach

each participant the whole truth about oneself to the end of learning how to be effective working with others. Unfortunately, the whole business of religion has been tainted. People are so imbedded in theology and thinking that we neglect the skillful imagination necessary to “think outside the box.” We need others who are radically different from us to show us our own peculiarities, cracks, potentialities, and innate injustices. We’re linked in ways few people appreciate and we are complicit in oppressions that seem a world away and that we tend to forget. We need to expose those relationships, reveal what we have done to them, and restore those relationships with truth and justice. Justice is the restoration of right relations between us and God and one another. Dialogue is a grand forum for that occurrence.

Christians, by definition, must have a special concern for the marginalized and the oppressed. Only by being with, listening to, and acting alongside these people can any of us hope to know the truth about ourselves, our society, and our values. That is not to say that the poor carry the truth, but that we’ll never get to the truth without solidarity with the poor. The poor are not morally or epistemologically pure, nobody is, and the oppressed are not some homogenous unity with common interests. Only in the encounter with “the other” can we be “community.” To be an authentic Christian is to be genuinely “other centered.” We have to be exposed to radical differences and radical struggles to be what I consider to be fully realized. If we are truly communal we will reach out to the marginalized. If what we are doing does not liberate people, affirm life and dignity, and bring hope, then, what are we doing?

Christian claims to the whole truth are unfounded and often harmful. The cute little box of institutionalism can have material consequences for which theologians and their ideas must be held to account. Historical creeds and doctrine passed on intergenerationally through tradition should always be in a state of examination and reconsideration. It is the nature of the spiritual life. If it goes unchecked, it becomes toxic. This is not to say that we must discard and rebuild our creeds and confessions, only that we think carefully about the fullness of what the faithful express in them and how they fit into the circular influences of theory and practice. Professor Cracknell has offered a fresh insight into the reality of the revealed truth in Christian Scripture. He showed us that there are often multiple ways to understand meanings, some more compatible with our observed reality than what we were taught from early in life. He helped us find God in highly unexpected ways.

As practitioners of interfaith dialogue, we are not in the business of being argumentative, but we provide a mirror for each other for the ways in which you say you believe. Bring your full rationality and beliefs to the table, but be ready to listen also, and to be criticized when your positions would in principle prevent the flowering of justice in a modern, pluralistic society. We have the right to bring our ideas to the table; but the table is where we challenge one another, because we live together. Humility in faithful interactions is the hinge by which social ethics opens and shuts. Kenneth Cracknell gave us room to explore, discover and ultimately concede that none of us knows everything nor are we right about it all. We must listen and learn.

The thrust is to avoid selfish prideful arrogance that says that we know “the Truth.” We may have some view of it or a crucial insight; but the only way to know Truth more comprehensively is by engaging others who have what you don’t, who are who you are not. That is the blessing of cross cultural engagement. Together, we learn more about ourselves and the truth than we can ever learn alone in an ivory tower.

While Cracknell did charge us with attendance of worship and ceremony of other religious belief systems, I found no betrayal of self identity or forfeiture of religious confidence in participating with religious others in the way that they offer praise, worship and build their own community. The real tension comes from ignorant judgment without investigation. What those experiences did was define and refine the lenses and filters through which the variety of cultures were viewed. Encountering others is an exercise in empathic listening, it is a vulnerable listening, but there is also reciprocal conversation. To do so the students had to become self aware, know what we believe and learn how to express those personal truths. There is a huge implication of self reflection within the context of interfaith cooperation. If all parties do not or cannot share, the others involved are cheated. Dialogue in the way it is presented by Kenneth Cracknell is empowering. It demands of each party involved to be proactive, energetic and loving. All sides expect to hear from one another. What a concept!

The point of dialogue is to address our mutual problems, such as human suffering. That is the place from which the spiritual journey begins. To be aware and sensitive to our mutual strivings is the essence of mature dialogue. We don’t need to

correct people with doctrine, we need to accept them, bless them and love them. That is much harder than arguing and debating. We come to the table as equals. There is always a religious agenda, but to be intentional in our setting aside of that is for the good of the whole. We are mutual helpers. When each of the camps deny the other, they are all rendered powerless. The truth is that the different labels for theological foci are not necessarily in conflict. All theological Venn diagrams have a rather larger intersection. They all serve to inform each other of different aspects of God.

The content of Professor Cracknell's teaching is thick with meaning and dense with implication. In the classroom, our material was plain and understandable, yet not dumbed down. He gave us a gentle nudge to look again at Christian Scripture and the nature of spreading the message of what we believe is the essence of the relationship between God and humankind. It was an incredible amount of information, but he did not try to unpack it; we were to reflect on meaning. He challenged each of us, in our own way, to reconsider and rethink. In so doing, we found ourselves at a stable place on our journey. It is a place of hope and redemption. It is so liberating to know that each person can be left to their own spiritual path. It is egotistical to think otherwise.

Kenneth Cracknell helped his students to see not only the simplicity of being with others, he also commanded a respect for the need to actively pursue it as a discipline. Simply by being a speaking and conscious human being in a particular culture and age, one is part of a global dialogue. Engagement with people who are radically different will create significant change. One of two things can happen: we

either become hardened in our original position or we find cracks in our world view and self understanding begin to appear. We do not choose what culture we are born into, but we bear some responsibility to respond to that culture in productive and critical ways. Nothing good will come of things unless we do. We need to get busy.

Kenneth Cracknell made a concerted effort to comfort, if not to bless, everyone of his students. Many of us were of the strange sort that, at some level, were angry with the institution or God as we understood God. Maybe his greatest contribution is offering the gift of screaming, "wait just a minute," to those of us who could not find a peaceful home within the realms of traditional church. Patient tolerance and a nonjudgmental openness offers a real hope that there is somewhere a spiritual rest as opposed to the discipline, questioning heartache and agony one has to go through to get here. Most institutional religion does not emphasize the internal work that allows for facing the dark night of the soul in whatever form it comes to you. He exhibited a refreshing sense of curiosity about faith and religion, both within the Christian community of faith as well as in other religions. Students were surprised in finding that religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue could be grounded in strong Christian faith. When life experience with those who find us both strange to their reality, yet accomodating, we arrive at sacred intersections. It is a platform for unity, healing and wholesome coexistence with others. Kenneth Cracknell gave that to us. Whether we acknowledge it, or even know it, we are all changed for better forever.



Professor Cracknell used the board in front of the room sparingly. When something was written, it was critical. One day, "Love one another and when necessary speak," was the only thing on the board. It is all that needed to be said. Nonetheless, it is also critical to say the right things at the right time with the right emphasis. He is not pretentious. He has wisdom and is genuinely in dialogue with his students. He demonstrated a significant self critical understanding and a compliant inner strength that heard the questions without appall or prejudice.

The first fundamental hope of any interpersonal and cultural interaction is to see the goodness of other people. The virtues, then, must include alongside prudence (practical wisdom) the ability to see the whole person, potential goodness and problems together, and to respond in ways that can help us all connect with the other within; that is, to be more authentically self-aware of our limitations, gifts and relationships. Kenneth Cracknell used diversity in analogy and skillful means to synthesize a multitude of religious metaphors. We came out of it knowing God better. We left his classes knowing ourselves better. We have become better people for spending time listening and learning at the feet of Professor Kenneth Cracknell. The implications are monumental for each of us. Our collective mandate, including the reader, is to do everything within our power to never again let the world get away from us in the way that it did in the mid twentieth century. God help us.

## Conclusion

Light shines in darkness and darkness did not overcome it...

In Kenneth Cracknell, we are all blessed with a person whose practical wisdom is combined with levels of intelligence and broad experiences rare in our day. Here we have a person who can approach complex realities and truths from a variety of angles and guide students to higher levels of understanding our contemporary world than otherwise possible. He has a virtuous grasp of varied experiences in his professional career which has brought together diverse multitudes to a common and loving table.

At the same time, he was a person who strove to cross spiritual frontiers without alienating himself from his roots. He found himself in the intersection of cultures and religions. Interfaith dialogue for him was an integral part of the Christian mission of bearing witness to, and being, the channels of God's love as it was manifested especially in the life, death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Dialogue was a silent revolution to gain attitudinal change in people from all walks of a pluralistic society. He was a champion for the lost art of listening to one another with integrity. It is nothing more than the willingness to see God at work everywhere at all times everywhere. We do not determine where God is not.

Kenneth Cracknell has taught that at the heart of the great misunderstanding between religions is the lack of an intimate acquaintance with the people, traditions, texts and histories of religions and cultures other than our own. For whatever reason and however apathetic, many assume that their own familiar religious tradition is the only one worthwhile. This especially seems to be true among a class of religious peoples who, ignorant of the richness and diversity in the world, would order the universe on a principle of uniformity, patterned after the hegemonious ideas and orthodox doctrines prevalent in their own cultural environment. That is not empirically true. Nature, the Earth and humans themselves are not uniform. It is lack of communication with religious others that allows one tradition to maintain exclusivity and superiority over another. The life and work of Kenneth Cracknell has contributed enormously to overcoming this understanding in such a way so as to break such immature thought. His life mission and work has been not only to seek out and encounter people of other religious traditions and cultures through dialogue but to challenge everyone who would listen to the same goal. And that, out of genuine concern for peace and camaraderie in search of personal well being, societal transformation and mutual enrichment. It is good. Everyone wins.

In terms of the preaching, teaching and nurturing ministries of the church, theological education has to be pastorally effective. It has to enable Christians to live with others in mutual trust and respect. Professor Cracknell's theological thinking is characterized by his attempt to hold together commitment and openness, knowing that

God is always more than our limited and finite perceptions of God. It is a major source of embarrassment for him to experience the self-centered religious fence, erected by those claiming Jesus as their light, designed to keep others out. It is a heart of my dear professor that loves the Jesus that loves all the children of the world, big and small,. He saw the uniqueness of Jesus' unique ability to evoke wide ranging positive spiritual responses from people of other faiths and ideologies. Christ is not exclusive and Christianity has no fences. It is about loving one another: living for and together with others so as to experience the fullness of life as promised by God.

The path described here emanates from Professor Cracknell. He teaches openness and love while being critical and accountable. He is quick to praise the good in others and leaving them to realize their faults on their own. I have never experienced a moment with Professor Cracknell where I felt intimidated or berated. Personally, I haven 't even felt a tension that would normally exist between teacher and student, yet there has never been a minute in our relationship wherein I wasn't fully aware of his presence as spiritual guide. He has commanded my respect because he always sought out the goodness and redeemability within me. Like other students who were fortified by Kenneth Cracknell's professional demeanor, I can say, he lifted my spirits, he lifted my hopes, he lifted my head. That is the pastoral implication of being patient, kind and tolerant. People respond to a loving spirit. Those who do not are insulted by it. In either instance, success!

Professor Kenneth Cracknell's faith in and commitment to Christ led him to chart a territory that had not previously been mapped. He is a true wilderness explorer in a global frontier that needs the presence of God. This is the legacy of Kenneth Cracknell and it is his challenge to each of us to be in the service of this same mission and ministry to which all of us are called. The questions that he raised, even from the age of ten, and the insights of his life experience will continue to challenge each of his students, peers and friends that took the time to get to know him. His life will encourage us in our faith journey, theological reflection and personal resolution to contribute to a global mutual abiding and communal love for others for the remainder of our own life.

The seeds of justice, courtesy and love that he quietly plants and selflessly hands over to the spirit of God will continue to bear good fruit. May God continue to bless the good and generous soul, my dear professor and friend, Kenneth Cracknell.

## VITA

James Ray Holland Jr. (Jay) was born in Tyler, Texas, on December 23, 1958, the son of James and Corrie Holland. His youth was dominated by cross cultural encounters due to his father being a missionary representing the Churches of Christ. Being a natural bilingual and influenced strongly by the Latin American cultures in Central and South Americas as well as the Caribbean, Jay has an imbedded passion for the marginalized in North America. He worked for six years in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, prior to moving to the Dallas Fort Worth metroplex to provide pastoral care in hospital, urban and middle America settings.

Jay Holland is the founder and executive director of Basic Progress Ministries, Inc.. He has authored an extensive manual, Basic Progress, for a group environment designed to enhance the spiritual and religious focus of participants. The course contents include a large section delineating the essence of global religious traditions and openly invites the group dynamic to be nourished by the extensive theological palette of religious peoples worldwide. While, profoundly Christian, the author seeks to inform people of the vast depth and height of the Sacred Breath available to us all. His affinity to the teachings of Kenneth Cracknell are self evident.

After a life of work in the Culinary Arts, Jay determined that ministry would become his focus and shortly thereafter entered Abilene Christian University as a second semester sophomore. He majored in Psychology for his undergraduate degree;

