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On Being Us: Who Are We, and What is This Book About? - Chapter 1 of "Being at Home in the World: A New Christian Apologetic"

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On Being Us: Who Are We, and What is This Book About?

Synopsis: This chapter introduces the authors and explains why we have written a book of Christian apologetics. It is important that the authors introduce themselves, because our apologetic procedure is personal. We do not offer a cool, detached, objective argument; instead, we extend an invitation.

First weekend of the semester and you're buying books. Or, like many students these days, you checked out the required reading list ahead of time and you're looking for used versions in on-line bookstores. You come to Being at Home in the World. What's it about? After all, where else can a person live, other than in the world? And who are these authors who think they can tell you something about being where you already are?

We are Phil Smith and Mark McLeod-Harrison, philosophy professors at George Fox University. Each of us has been teaching college students for more than twenty years, and we think we have some insight into our students' mindsets, particularly on questions of worldview—ideas and beliefs about reality, knowledge and value.¹ We teach a broad

¹. What is a “worldview”? A worldview is a person's general approach to living in the world. Sometimes worldviews are carefully considered philosophies, but for some people they consist of rough and ready ideas. A person's worldview almost always contains answers to the main questions of philosophy: What is real? How do I know? What is valuable? Every person has a worldview, almost always learned from the people around him or her.
range of students, not just those majoring in philosophy. GFU requires all its students to take a class called Christian Foundations, so students from every discipline take the course. Experience teaching Christian Foundations—we both teach multiple sections most years—has led us to prepare this little book.

We fondly hope *Being at Home in the World* will be useful not just to Christian Foundations students or college students generally, but to a wide population of readers. So if you're not one of the students envisioned in the first paragraph, we welcome you too.

Loosely speaking, this is a book of “apologetics.” In philosophy and theology, apologetics is the discipline of giving rational arguments for Christian beliefs. The field is called apologetics because it gives arguments in defense of Christianity. In a similar way, Plato's *Apology* is really the account of Socrates's defense presented to an Athenian court.

Apologetics has a long and honorable history, including such Christian thinkers as Justin Martyr in the second century, Anselm of Canterbury in the eleventh century, and C.S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, and Marilyn McCord Adams in the twentieth century. But this book differs significantly from the work of many contemporary Christian apologists, which is why we say it is apologetics “loosely speaking.”

With a little effort on the internet, students can find dozens of websites and scores of books devoted to a rational defense of Christianity. As with just about everything on the Internet, the intellectual quality of these websites and books varies greatly. This book will probably provoke interest in some of these authors; we hope you will read carefully and critically. If you do, you will discover some really fine resources. We provide some recommendations in our appendix.

This book differs from most contemporary apologetics because we do not aim to give a rationally compelling argument for the truth of Christian doctrine. You may have heard the phrase, “a knock-down argument.” We don't want to knock anybody down, literally or figuratively. We want to open a door and extend an invitation.

We want to be clear: We think there are, in fact, very good arguments for the truth of Christian beliefs. Yet to many people, these arguments are not very persuasive. Notice the difference: A good argument is not necessarily a persuasive argument. A *good* argument is one that is logically acceptable (either deductively valid or inductively strong) and based on acceptable premises (believed to be true for good reasons). In
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logic courses, students learn to distinguish good arguments from bad ones. A persuasive argument is an argument that persuades at least one person to believe something or change his mind. Obviously, some arguments persuade people without being good arguments. (Think how effective advertisements are.)
Lots of writers would lecture you at this point. You really ought to be persuaded only by good arguments, they would say. The subject matter of the argument doesn't matter. Whether it's about buying cars, believing in extraterrestrials, or voting for measure M, you should discipline yourself to be rational. Be like Mr. Spock in Star Trek.
Many Christian apologists argue on those lines; they try to give tight rationalistic arguments for the truth of Christian beliefs. We don't think the rationalistic arguments offered by contemporary apologists—and here we mean the good ones—are very persuasive to the kinds of students we encounter in our classrooms. As we go along, we will explain why such arguments fail to persuade people.
We observe students who apparently understand certain arguments, valid arguments using good evidence—who go away from class and simply disbelieve the conclusions of those arguments. This is true not only about arguments pertaining to religion; students are able to discount or ignore well-supported conclusions in other fields as well. Or they “believe” the conclusion of the argument on one level but completely disregard that belief when it comes to their behavior.
Please do not misinterpret what we just said. We do not think our students are stupid or particularly wicked. We think that our description of our students’ thinking is also true about many people in our society. Such people seem to live “compartmentalized” lives. It’s as if our students play different roles at different times in the day; in the classroom they play the role of intellectuals who render scholarly judgments, while at the mall they play the role of consumers who delight in buying whatever the advertisers tell them to desire, and at their computer consoles they play fantasy roles of many kinds. From what we observe, for many students these various roles simply exist side-by-side—jumbled, confused, and unintegrated. We will talk more about this in chapter 2 and also in chapter 7. You don't have to take our word as gospel; we ask you, the reader, to check our observations against your own experiences.
If our observations are accurate, Christian apologetics needs something more than good evidence and crystal clear reasoning. Apologetics
needs to help students (and others) make connections between the various parts of their lives. Perhaps at a more basic level, it needs to infect people with a desire for integrated, whole lives. We worry that many individuals are apparently untroubled by intellectual and moral contradictions in their lives. In such cases apologetics needs to awaken readers' imaginations so that they might begin to dream of something better.

The “something better” to which we invite you is what we call “being at home in the world.” Maybe you wonder why Christian professors would use such a phrase. Aren’t Christians supposed to think of this world as temporary? An old song says: “This world is not my home; I’m just a-passing through.” Why should Christians want to be at home in the world? As a first answer: When God created the world, God said that it was good. Therefore, we live in a good world. We’ll say more about being at home in the world as we go along.

Before we talk further, in chapter 2, about what we see in our students, we need to say more about ourselves. If we’re going to invite students to consider far-reaching and deeply personal aspects of their lives, it is only fair that we reveal something of our inner selves. But it’s more than that. We object, philosophically, to a certain understanding of the human person, a very influential conception of what it means to be a good thinker. The view we reject is pretty familiar to most people; it is the image of the “pure thinker,” the intellect who has somehow walled off her thinking self from all “distractions,” such as bodily needs, emotions, and social connections. We object to the image of the purely rational, completely objective, isolated, disinterested mind. Even though famous philosophers such as Plato and Descartes praised such a mind, we do not. None of us really thinks that way, and we deceive ourselves if we think we do. God did not create us to think that way; we disapprove of the “pure thinker” even as an ideal.

Notice that a “pure thinker” is not at home in the world. Pure thinkers are uncomfortable with their bodies. Like Socrates and his friends in Phaedo, they think they will be better off the sooner they can rid themselves of their bodies and become pure souls, pure minds. Like Immanuel Kant and Jean Jacques Rousseau, they imagine that pure reason is the same for every pure thinker—and, therefore, the truly rational thinker doesn’t really need other minds. After all, other pure thinkers will only think what I think anyway, right?
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We repeat our point: God did not make us to be pure thinkers.
When human beings believe and know, they do so as embodied people
with emotions and social relationships. Therefore, since in this book we
are going to talk about some of our most important beliefs, we have to
explain a little about our history.

PHIL SMITH

I was raised in a devout Christian family. We attended church services
at East Wenatchee Friends Church on Sunday morning and evening
and prayer meeting on Wednesday evening. We lived about forty min­
utes' driving time away from the church, but the distance did not deter
my parents. Even when my father's factory shift required him to work
Sunday mornings he drove the family to Wenatchee at four o'clock in
the morning to drop us at my older sister's house. That way she could
take the rest of us to church, and Dad would pick us up after working
his shift.

The name tells you our church was a Quaker church. It doesn't tell
you that this particular church, like many other Friends churches in the
western United States, had been influenced by the holiness movement.
"Holiness" names a theological movement among some Protestant
churches, such as Nazarenes, Free Methodists, Wesleyans, and the
Salvation Army. These are relatively new denominations, forming in
the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Holiness churches emphasize
the work of the Holy Spirit in Christians' lives. Of course, all orthodox
(Trinitarian) Christian churches affirm belief in the Holy Spirit. But
preachers in the holiness movement proclaimed a bold message of per­
personal transformation by means of the Spirit's work—think of Salvation
Army "officers" (really, ordinary members of the church) working with
poor people in London's slums in the 1890s, or Nazarene preachers
proclaiming freedom from sin (including alcoholism) in the cities and
towns of the western U.S. in the 1930s. Now, the Salvation Army and the
Nazarene church are not terribly large, so maybe you're not familiar with
these examples. The point is that the holiness movement preached that
the Holy Spirit would make a dramatic difference in the way believers
live.

Sadly, sometimes the holiness movement slipped into legalism.
The mark of the Spirit's work in a person's life became conformity to a
list of rules: no movies, no alcohol, no tobacco, no gambling, etc. As a
young person growing up in a church marked by this tradition, I imbibed some of its legalistic attitudes. For instance, as a trombone player in high school, I was invited to play in a jazz band (a permitted activity), but I felt great reluctance when the band was invited to play for an Elks Club dance (dancing was not okay, so how could I play for a dance?). At the same time, I had a sense that there was something deeper and truer in holiness theology, something better than legalistic rule-keeping. Decades later, I still appreciate the spiritual sensitivity of the holiness movement and its enthusiasm for personal transformation, even though I think many of its rules were wrong-headed.

I enrolled at George Fox College in 1973. Here I learned more about Quaker beliefs and practices. Quaker ideas had not been denied at East Wenatchee Friends, but they hadn't been emphasized either. I learned that prayer includes listening to God, rather than only asking or thanking God. I learned that the Bible supports equality between men and women, both in family life and in the church (even though many Bible-loving Christians deny this). I learned that Christians ought to be peacemakers—and they actually can be peacemakers, not just reluctant warriors. And I learned that Christians should care about social justice issues, especially overcoming racism.

There is a link between the holiness theology of my youth and the Quaker beliefs of my adulthood. Both movements emphasize that believers can experience God now. Religion ought to be experiential; it ought to connect to real life. It should not be a matter of beliefs alone, nor yet beliefs plus a rigorous set of moral expectations. Both movements say that God's work in our lives is gracious and loving.

College also exposed me to the almost overwhelming challenges to Christian faith of the modern era. I studied at a Christian college where professors and friends were eager to support my faith, so I suppose other young Christians who went to state universities or explicitly secular colleges might have faced harder challenges. Maybe. Or maybe the difference lies mostly in the student and not so much in the school. In any case, my struggles with belief in God began in college and continued for many years afterward.

In my experience, religious doubt created anxiety and unhappiness. At many times I was aware that I wanted to believe in God, and I worried that my desire to believe in God might lead me astray. Maybe my belief
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in God was only a matter of wish fulfillment. My worry was a classic
example of a modern challenge to faith.
In philosophy, we date the modern period from René Descartes,
who lived from 1596–1650. So when I speak of the “almost overwhelm-
ing challenges of the modern era,” I am talking about a long period of
time and a great many ideas that have come together to produce chal-
ges to Christian faith. The idea that troubled me so much in my col-
lege years is an example of a general category of problems, a category I
will call “suspicion.”
There are different versions of suspicion. Karl Marx said that people
often believe things because those beliefs support their economic inter-
ests. Friedrich Nietzsche said people often believe things as an expres-
sion of their will to power. Sigmund Freud said that people often believe
things in order to repress unacceptable desires. Do you see the point?
Each of these influential thinkers said, in effect: “People hold certain
beliefs, and they think they have good reasons for these beliefs, but in
reality their beliefs are caused by something else (by their economic
self-interest, by desire for self-assertion, or by unconscious drives and
ishes).”
These apostles of suspicion did not give good arguments for their
conclusions. They hardly gave arguments at all. Instead, they merely as-
serted their position. Nevertheless, the suspicions they planted were very
effective. Many people in the twentieth century found themselves pulled
away from their political, aesthetic, moral, or religious beliefs because of
Marx, Nietzsche, or Freud.
Each brand of suspicion has impacted many people in our society
in the last hundred years. I think the Freudian version bothered me most
when I was in college. How can I believe in God when I want to believe
in God? How can I be sure that I am not just deceiving myself? Is it
possible that my “religious experiences” are really nothing more than
projections of my desires?
We will say more about suspicion in chapter 3, but we will turn
suspicion against a different target. But for now, it is enough to see

2. Many late twentieth century philosophers claimed that the modern era ended
sometime in the twentieth century. Most college students are familiar with the claim
that we live in a “postmodern” age. In lectures, I’ve often used 1650–1950 as a con-
venient time frame for the modern period. But I think it’s too early to be sure of such
historical judgments. The women and men who write the history of philosophy texts in
coming centuries will be able to make a better call.
that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud—each with his own doctrine—undermined many people’s beliefs about politics, social relationships, religion, art, and many other things. Gradually the outlines of a modern worldview emerged, a worldview that is widely assumed to be true, though it is not often explicitly stated. The main feature of the modern worldview is that it is *closed to mystery*. The philosopher Gabriel Marcel has pointed out that the modern worldview has lots of room for problems, but no room for mystery. Problems are questions to which we don’t have the answer—yet. How much food can we grow without polluting the environment? What is the optimum tax rate if the goal is maximizing tax revenue? How many craters are there on the moon? But *mystery* has to do with deeper questions. Mystery touches something fundamental to the human person. Why are some things so beautiful that they make you cry? How is it possible that some people torture and murder other people? What can we hope for in life? Why are we here?

In chapter 3 we will turn suspicion against the modern worldview. We will invite our readers to *open* themselves to mystery. We will give arguments to back up our invitation—after all, we’re philosophers and that’s what philosophers do. But if we really are in a postmodern age, we expect the invitation will be more persuasive than the arguments.

Back to my story. After college I still believed in God, though my beliefs coexisted with painful doubts. It took me many years to realize that *doubts are part of faith*. I can live a faithful life, I can grow in my love for God, and I can recognize the grace of God in my life and *still experience periods of doubt*. God intends for us to become mature spiritual beings, so he doesn’t always give us feelings of certainty and light. He “withdraws” for a while (only in the sense that we don’t feel him; in reality, God is everywhere always) so we can walk “on our own,” so to speak. I have continued to believe in God, and I have made many important life decisions based on my belief in God, but I still have doubts.

I attended Fuller Seminary, and I served as pastor for two Friends churches in the 1980s. Then I did graduate work at the University of Oregon, finishing my PhD in Philosophy in 1991. I began teaching part-time at George Fox in 1982, and I’ve been full-time since 1992. So most of my career has centered on teaching. Along the way, I have written some philosophy books and lots of conference papers and articles. I wrote a fantasy-adventure novel called *The Heart of the Sea*, and I’m
w siècle, Marx, Nietzsche, and many people's beliefs in God, religion, art, and many other things. The modern worldview emerged, a worldview that is not often explicitly stated. The modern worldview is that it is closed to mystery. The modern worldview is that it is closed to mystery. The modern worldview is that it is closed to mystery.

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I pointed out that the modern worldview is closed to mystery. Problems are not the answer—yet. How much food can environment? How many craters are there to do with deeper questions. Mystery is all to the human person. Why are some people like you cry? How is it possible that some people? What can we hope for in life?

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2, and I've been full-time since 1992. So on teaching. Along the way, I have written lots of conference papers and articles. The Heart of the Sea, and I'm working on a murder mystery story. But I still love teaching most of all. I like explaining ideas to students and seeing them come alive to the implications of ideas.

I want to think my life is like a well-woven blanket. My teaching, my philosophical writings, my sermons and devotional writings, my novels, and other things I haven't talked about here (family life, local politics, etc.) are all tied together by Jesus Christ. Now, if Jesus is not the Son of God, as I believe he is, then I am deeply deceived about my life. If Jesus is merely some dead guy from two thousand years ago, my life is a bundle of rags that don't match or fit together.

You can see that I am speaking very frankly now. I am revealing my heart. The topic of this book is burningly important to me. The coherence of the life I have lived depends on the things we discuss in this book. This is, I think, as it should be. Our religious beliefs are not just a matter of cool, rational debate. Our deepest fears, hopes, and passions are wrapped up in our religious beliefs.

MARK MCLEOD-HARRISON

In 1967, I was eleven years old. July 1 of that year was the one hundredth anniversary of Canada's confederation. Orillia, Ontario, my hometown, was coincidentally celebrating its first hundred years as well. Celebrations abounded—parades, shows of old farm equipment, and fairs remembering the past. The World's Fair, Expo '67, was held in Montreal. My whole family, including my grandparents, visited Expo '67—a rare adventure for us. Back home, I dressed for a parade in a tie, elastic armbands, and a barbershop quartet hat, clothes of a by-gone era. In such times of remembrance, many elderly people were interviewed about the old days, when horses still ruled the roads, the telephone was a novel invention, and only the very wealthy enjoyed indoor plumbing. My great-grandmother was in her seventies, my grandparents in their middle fifties, and my parents in their thirties. Excluding my great-grandmother, none of the rest of us would have counted as a potential interviewee. I don't remember her being interviewed, but I suppose she was old enough. I do, however, recall the announcement of the first successful heart transplant which took place in December 1967. I remember thinking, given all the new advances in medicine, that perhaps when Canada celebrated its bicentennial in 2067 I would be one of the elderly people being interviewed about life in the old days in Orillia.
I'm not sure now that I want to live to be one hundred and eleven years old, and I haven't lived in Orillia for thirty-five years. Yet I'm more convinced than ever that with age comes the possibility of wisdom—but only the possibility. Wisdom does not, I've discovered, fall out of the sky on its own. It does, however, come to those who seek it. Looking back at the mere fifty-plus years of my life, I hope I've reached some wisdom. I know, however, that any I've reached, I've not reached alone. I also know that a good deal of any wisdom I've garnered has come through my faith in Jesus. I also know that my faith in Jesus was often, although not always, tied to questions and doubts through which I often agonized and wept.

I might say, as an aside, that there are different kinds of doubt, depending on the thing you doubt and the place of that thing in your life. I'll talk more about this in chapter 6.

Wisdom evolves in community through history. My parents, grandparents, and great-grandmother all contributed to whatever understanding of life I have. So did other larger communities, especially the various church communities in which I've attempted to live out my Christian commitments. I was raised in a Baptist church. Our family went to church every Sunday, my parents were involved in youth ministry, and my father once received a call to pastor a church, though he declined the invitation. My mother taught Sunday school and worked in the nursery for many years; she's still active there. My father died in 1993, and though my grandfather and great grandmother also passed on, my grandmother still sits in her care home, thinking of the old days. She is ninety-nine. Each of these persons was or is a Christian.

The year 1967 was important not just for Canada and Orillia, but also for my spiritual life, for that was the year I committed myself to being a follower of Jesus. My church taught that the Bible was God's word to humans and it could be trusted. Jesus, as described in the Scriptures, was alive and real and with us. I recall being given a Gideon New Testament at the public school. (Canada doesn't have the same understanding of the separation of Church and state as the United States does.) Many of my friends quickly wrote their name in the front, as did I. But at the back was a place to sign when and if you had "given your heart" to Jesus. I knew, from Sunday school, that I had not. But later that year, I knelt by my bed and committed my life to following Jesus.
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That conversion experience was very important, one of many turn-
ing points for me. As a Baptist, I'd been raised to understand that becom-
ing a Christian was something a person decided to do. I had never been
told that other people were born into faith and grew into it by a sort of
osmosis. My Episcopalian and Roman Catholic friends, of course, were
baptized as babies. Followed up by confirmation by the bishop later,
for them the process of becoming a Christian stretched out over a long
period of time. For some it stuck; for others it did not. Yet the same is
true for many Baptists. Going forward at an altar call or praying the "sinner's prayer" does not always mean that someone takes on the Christian
life and all its commitments. But my 1967 prayer did stick. Of course,
I had my times when I doubted. In fact, many times. I would describe
a good deal of my life into my thirties as the life of a skeptical believer.
Modernism had done its work well. Sometimes, too, I deliberately and
consciously went against my own Christian commitments. Yet overall, I
couldn't get away from the deep sense—a personal sort of quiet, experi-
mental knowledge—that if I was going to live my life well, I would have to
confront my questions about Jesus and ultimately live my life in relation
to Jesus himself. So I began my long, stretched-out journey toward Jesus
by questioning his reality.

As a teenager, during what was often called the "Jesus People"
or "Jesus Freak" movement, several of us formed a Bible-study and
evangelism group under the influence of Campus Crusade for Christ's
"Explo '72." Explo '72 was a massive youth rally held in Dallas, Texas to
which a number of my friends traveled to hear Johnny Cash and Kris
Kristofferson perform and Billy Graham preach. That small gathering
of teenagers grew over the next year to be a regular weekly meeting of
about fifty to seventy youth from many different churches in our area.
We had monthly outreaches featuring Christian rock bands; these grew,
at their peak, to around three hundred people. Our oldest member,
who became our leader, was in his early twenties. Those were exciting
times for the young Christians of Orillia and deeply formative in my
spiritual growth. I came to know not only Baptist but also Presbyterian,
Episcopal, Pentecostal, Assemblies of God, Brethren, Mennonite, and
Roman Catholic Christians. I have to admit, however, that most of us still
thought of Roman Catholic Christians as needing "salvation" Baptist-
sty le (and no doubt, they thought we needed to take the Eucharist!).
What I learned, perhaps most profoundly, was that Christianity is diverse
and wonderfully so. It took me many years, however, to understand how Jesus could be so differently understood while at the same time be the same Jesus.

During the summer of 1973, a young Brethren woman from our interdenominational youth group, whom I happened to be dating, began to speak in tongues at some meeting she had attended. As a Baptist, I had been taught that speaking in tongues was not something available to present-day Christians. Yet I was having really deep questions about the truth of Christianity at the time. My emotional and spiritual life was all over the place, like a car on a slippery, winding mountain road. I went with her and several other friends to a Pentecostal meeting where I was urged to pray for the gift of tongues. But when I prayed to receive the gift, nothing happened. I wasn't feeling very spiritual or particularly open to God. So in a very dramatic (to me at least) and pretty arrogant manner, I marched up the central aisle, through the doors, out of the church and away from God. My friend came to speak with me later and wisely counseled that not everyone receives all the spiritual gifts. But in that moment when I left the building, I felt I had left God behind.

Before I rejected God, I had applied to a Bible college. For one reason or another, admission to the college was delayed. Several weeks after leaving God behind, the letter of acceptance arrived. It dawned on me that if I was serious about knowing the truth about God (if only to more knowledgably reject God), I had better know something about the Bible. So, later that summer I packed up and left home for what was then a quite strict Bible college. Long hair for men was not permitted, dating was very limited and monitored quite closely, lights went out by eleven o'clock at night, and every student was expected at breakfast as well as daily chapel. My parents worried about such strictness, but the discipline was good for me. I took to it like a salmon to a Northwest river. Yet I had arrived on the steps of a Bible college not really believing the Bible and certainly not trusting God! Nevertheless, I learned a good deal of Bible content, and after a few weeks, I became convinced that my feelings of faith might come and go but the Faith did not. Jesus was still the same, even if I wasn't. So I grew spiritually by reading Scripture and being involved in a great deal of Christian service—everything from hosp-

3. Some Christian groups teach that at some point in believers' lives the Holy Spirit will "fill" them. The mark of the Holy Spirit's filling people is "speaking in tongues." Believers speak words to God or to other people in languages unknown to them.
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tal and elder-care visitation to teaching Sunday school, preaching, and

mission work overseas. Although there were moments when I confused

the more or less rote discipline of the school with spiritual discipline, I

still managed to fall in love with the Bible—but more importantly, with

Jesus. It was at Bible college that I first learned about the development

of the canon of Scripture and some of the challenges of Biblical studies.

But it was also there that I first encountered a philosophy class. My faith

took a decidedly intellectual turn. I wanted so much to be able to prove

that Christianity was true. I was fired up by apologetics—the defense of

the faith—and wanted to show everyone how true Christianity was. I

ow think that I wanted to prove it to myself. Even though Jesus wasn’t

leaving me, I still was fundamentally a skeptical believer.

Philosophy, I thought, held the keys to dealing with my doubt.

After Bible college, I headed off to a Christian liberal arts college in the

United States (never, as it turned out, to live in Canada again except for

a few weeks at a stretch). There I took up philosophy with a vengeance.

I earned a BA in philosophy, then an MA in philosophy of religion from

an evangelical seminary, and finally an MA and a PhD in philosophy

from a secular university in California. I fell in love with philosophy but

understanding Christianity and showing it was true were never far from

my mind. By the end of my doctoral studies, however, I had shifted from

trying to show that Christianity was true to attempting to show how it

could be rational to be a Christian, a more modest and reachable goal.

While in my doctoral studies and then later when I taught at the

evangelical Christian college up the street, I attended an Evangelical

Covenant church pastored by a very thoughtful friend from whom I

learned a great deal. His commitment as a Christian was deep, and it

showed in his wisdom in dealing with various church challenges and the

guidance he gave in my life. I was also part of a men’s Bible study—early

morning, every Wednesday before work—with a diverse set of members.

There was an architect, a retired English professor, a computer wizard, a

biology professor, some business professionals, a truck driver, a libra-

rian, and others. The various insights from these friends helped me to see

God at work in a variety of ways of living out one’s faith in Jesus.

Then my family and I moved to Texas, which, for me, was like the

Israelites’ desert wandering. My (late) wife became very ill during our

time there (later, she died of complications of the illness), and we couldn’t

find a church where we felt at home. Still a Christian, I was driven more
and more into skepticism at the evils in my life and the deep loneliness we felt in our time there. But one of my students invited us to attend a healing service at an Episcopal church—St. Andrew’s. I went, but reluctantly, since I had long before rejected the “splashier” spiritual gifts such as divine healing and tongues-speaking—remember my arrogant response to not receiving the gift of speaking in tongues? Yet something marvelous happened at that first healing service. As the priest prayed for us, I sensed in a very powerful way that Jesus was in—no, that Jesus was—the priest. We went back week after week, found a place where the spiritual gifts were alive and well and, in a good Episcopalian manner, orderly. It was a great time of healing for me spiritually, and it eventually led to my sense of call into the priesthood. I found the daily prayer book readings and prayers immensely rich and helpful, and various sorts of meditational practices nurtured my soul. I began to read all sorts of literature on mysticism, spiritual disciplines, and prayer. It was all thoroughly Christian even though far from my Baptist roots. I discovered, again, the diversity of ways in which Jesus is real.

After a few years, I received a job offer at George Fox University where I currently teach. During my time there, I met my wife Susan. She, too, has been a deep influence on my spiritual growth. In particular, she has helped me see more clearly that my social interactions with people are not always generous, that various sorts of anger from my childhood and former painful experiences need not continue, and that the Gospel is as much about helping the poor and doing social justice as it is about heavenly salvation. I’ve come to see more truly that marriage is a sacrament, a means through which the grace of God can be made more present.

There are literally dozens of other important events and people who do not show up in this short version of my spiritual life. Yet I hope this gives a lively sense of the importance of people and the pursuit of Jesus in my life. The important thing, though, is not my life but the fact that Jesus is rooted in history and in various communities. In my case, those communities are primarily Baptist, Evangelical Covenant, and Episcopalian. But I’ve learned too from Quakers, Mennonites, Charismatics, and Roman Catholics, among others. The amazing thing is that Jesus is alive and well in all these communities. Jesus is the Rabbi, the King of Kings, the Cosmic Christ, the Son of Man, Christ Crucified, the Monk who Rules the World, the Bridegroom of the Soul, the True Image, the Liberator, and the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Yet Jesus is the same yester-

4. See Pelikan, Jesus through the Centuries for a wonderful study of various ways
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PREVIEW: THE REST OF THIS BOOK
In this book we invite our readers to recognize the deep mystery of human life, a mystery that we will never fully understand. We think that God, as revealed in Jesus, is the center of mystery. God has created human beings in such a way that we find our true selves as we journey deeper and deeper into God’s love. True human happiness—what philosophers call “flourishing”—comes into human lives that are integrated by God’s call.

The italicized words in the last paragraph indicate the main themes of our book: invitation, mystery, flourishing, and God’s call. We are not going to give forceful arguments that compel anyone to do anything. We are not going to answer every question. But we are going to invite you to something wonderful.

Here’s an outline of the book. First, in chapter 2, we will talk a little about you; in particular, we’ll describe philosophical currents that probably have influenced you. We’ll recount some history of philoso­

Today, today, and forever. The Jesus who lived, died, and was resurrected
two thousand years ago is alive and well and living in my household, in
my community, as he is alive and well and living in many millions of
other households and thousands of other communities.

My experience of Jesus has always been embedded in a community, whether the small community of my family, the larger community of a
local church, or the even larger community of a particular denomina­
tion. My love of Jesus has been through a great deal of doubting and a
generous amount of evil and suffering. Yet Jesus has never left me, even
when I often times wanted to leave him. I see him in Susan and in my
sons, Ian and Micah. I see him in my colleagues at George Fox, and in
any number of people in the Church. I see Jesus in the poor, in those
against whom injustice is done, and in those who have stood against
those injustices. I see Jesus in the beauty of little bean sprouts poking
their heads through my sandy garden soil, in the small wild-flower gar­
den Susan planted, and in the beauty of a well-written novel or a pot
thrown by my potter friend. My Jesus is alive on the pages of Scripture
but also in the prayer book, the love of my little boy for vacuum cleaners,
and the thoughts of my hometown where I first knew love. And Jesus, I
trust, is alive in me.
phy in order to explain our current modern/postmodern situation. In chapter 3, we begin our “apology” for Christian faith by examining and criticizing modern naturalism, a prominent worldview that excludes all religious belief. We do not intend to refute modern naturalism, but we do offer strong reasons to doubt its truth. If modern naturalism is not satisfying, people are free to re-examine religion. Before we discuss the world’s religions, in chapter 4 we talk about how to think about religion in general. In chapter 5, we explain why we prefer Christianity to the other great religions, even though we find very good features in each of them. (For instance, they are all preferable to modern naturalism.) Chapter 6 turns personal; each author explains why he is a Christian. Given our overall philosophical position (that human beings are created to be at home in the world), it follows that our reasons for faith must be personal. Finally, in chapter 7, we explain the idea of an integrated life, and we invite readers to join us in finding integration in the community of faith.