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The Case for God: can Western Civilisation be sustained without belief?

I would like to acknowledge my friend Karl Schmude. Nobody helped me more with this book. *God is Good for You* than Karl did. And I want you to know if there's anything you don't like in the book or indeed anything I say tonight, which is particularly stupid, even by normal journalistic standards, please take it up with Karl. He'll lie. It is such an honour to be in the presence of Mr. Howard.

I do think my book is about Christianity. I'm going to get onto the topic in a minute, but I do think the journey of this book was a joy. It took me back through a lot of medieval Christianity and connected me with the doctrine of indulgences, which is a doctrine you should all like because it means that for suffering endured on earth, you get time off in purgatory. Think of the remission you will earn by being here tonight.

I did try in my book, which is called *God is Good for You*; a defence of Christianity in troubled times to be very nondenominational. I was looking for what C S Lewis called the mere Christianity consensus, the things which all Christians who can recite meaningfully the apostle's creed would agree on. But I must say I did become very attached to the doctrine of purgatory which is predominantly a Catholic doctrine, so my apologies to my non-Catholic Christian friends. To my atheist friends, I make no apologies because you disagree with the whole lot anyway, it doesn't matter. But purgatory is a terrifically attractive doctrine for a journalist, if you're a journalist with an aspiration for heaven, you are a bit like a very seedy minor party seeking parliament in a half Senate election. You're very unlikely to get a quota in your own right, but if there's a double dissolution and the numbers fall just right and the preferences go perfectly and there's a recount and somebody else drops out, you might scrape into a casual vacant into the last place in purgatory. Purgatory is a doctrine that I hold very dear, which nobody can take away from me.

The last personal note before properly addressing the subject, Christian belief has never been problematic for me at all. I accept Simon's distinction entirely. that reason is reason and faith is faith, but of course it's my assertion that faith is entirely reasonable. Almost everything we believe in life is based on faith because faith is predominantly a question of who we believe rather than what we believe. I believe I'm my parents' son. I've never proved it, you know, they've told me, they might have been lying. Who knows? But I choose to believe it and I think it's probably right. It's rational, but it's not proven and it is a belief of faith. I've never had the slightest problem with Christian belief.

What I've had enormous difficulty with is living up to even the most elementary standards of Christian behaviour, which is why I chose a life in journalism. Which is where the most elementary standards of Christian behaviour are not really at issue. I don't mean to defame all my fellow journalists in this way. These comments only apply to me. The question is, can western civilization be sustained without belief? Let me go straight to the headline. The answer is no, I don't think it can. Let me wish you one other throat clearing caveat before I get into telling you why I think the answer is no. When I talk about Western civilization, I'm not disparaging other civilizations.

Much of my professional life has been spent in Asia and 20 years ago I wrote a book called *Asian Values; Western Dreams*, which among other things, examined the question of how Asian traditions and Asian cultures get to questions of human rights and democracy, modern civic identity and so forth. When I celebrate and enjoy and love Western civilization, any nice thing I say about it, any bad thing I say about it, I don't really think it's a question of saying, is it better than Chinese civilization or is it better than Islamic civilization or whatever. I just don't see the point in those comparisons. We however, live in a western society, so we are concerned with the West. Now the idea that we can have the ethical and social fruits of Christianity without believing is a very beguiling idea, especially for conservatives.

So genuine post-moderns and radicals think everything about Christianity is bad, so they don't want to have the ethical fruits. But lots of conservatives would like to have the ethical fruits but can't bring themselves to believe and recognize that broadly belief is in radical decline across society. There are wonderful green shoots, signs of new life, but broadly belief is in radical decline in western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States and Canada, not in the rest of the world. Religious belief is on fire in China and across Asia and in Africa and in the Middle East and in most parts of the world, in Latin America too. But in the west, belief is in radical decline. Douglas Murray in his marvellous book *The Strange Death of Europe* addresses this question to some extent. He's a fellow by his own admission who doesn't have religious faith, but he thinks Europe is dying because it has no identity anymore and the reason it has no civic identity and no civic purpose is because it has lost all belief. He wants people to be inspired by the belief, but at the same time, he believes the belief is a pack of lies. I think even for a writer as good as Murray, that's a very hard case to sell. We want you to believe in this, but we believe that it's all untrue. That's a very hard case to sell

It's been a process I think for the last two or three hundred years where the vividness of belief has been draining out of western culture and yet the forms of belief have stayed there. It seems as though we've lost belief in a minute and, in a sense, we have but the process has been quite slow. People have been reflecting on it for a long time. The French writer Ernest Renan remarked, we are trying to live off the scent of an empty vase. In a different context, my favourite newspaper columnist and, you can tell that this is a true compliment from me because he doesn't work for News Corporation, so my favourite newspaper columnist in the world, Ross Douhat remarked, if you don't like the religious right, wait until you meet the post religious

right and Douglas Murray, Renan, Douthat - they are all trying to come to grips with the same thing.

What does the loss of belief really mean for our social and civic identity? Before I get to my argument about why it will be so hard to live without Christianity, for Western society to remain recognizably western for Western civilization to remain recognizably Western civilization without Christian belief, before I consider that, let me just sketch my view of what we owe in a civic sense to Christianity. Now in so far as there is any common sort of 19th century liberal view of Christian history or maybe even 20th century liberal view of Christian history, it goes like this. Jesus was a very nice guy, the kind of Mahatma Gandhi of the ancient world. A very good social worker, would have believed in fully paid maternity leave if that had been on the agenda in Herod's time, was very generous, very kind. His first followers were sincere and tried to live out their lives according to his ethics. They were persecuted.

Then along came Emperor Constantine in the fourth century and turn Christianity into a state religion and nothing good happened after that for a thousand years. You had a thousand years of dark ages ruled by priests, superstition, wickedness, obscurantism, everything was terrible, nothing good happened until you got to the renaissance when happily people started eating smashed avocados, going to art galleries, looking at nude statues and saying yippee" and returning to a concern with the ancient pre-Christian civilizations of Greece and Rome. Then, things ran a bit better with the reformation, which invented capitalism. Then we got the wars of religion which showed that Protestants and Catholics were equally as bad as each other and had nothing positive to contribute to the world. Then you've got to the enlightenment, which was great because it last mankind turned away from God, turned away from religion, turned away from superstition, and then you got those harbingers of joy, Marx, Freud, Darwin and all the other rock and roll team of modernity and hasn't life been grand ever since. Now of course our education is now so dire that even the Disneyland liberal view of history will only be available to 0.01% of the population.

We'll make sure our school students never hear of anything of that. Even in that, as I would regard it, antichristian view. But I think that Disneyland view is interesting because it is actually wrong in every one of its particulars. It is actually the reverse of the truth in all things. As I say, if you're a newspaper columnist, you paid to have opinions. It's pretty lame to pay your \$2 50 or whatever it is for the Australian and then find the columnists sitting on the fence. I'll give you my opinion and sometimes the opinion is wrong. I can remember writing a column saying, well, it's all over. Donald Trump has lost that. you can take this to the bank, Hillary Clinton has got that won. The next day I had to write a front-page column saying, well boy, did I get that wrong?

But we are paid to make fools of ourselves. So, we've got to stump up with an opinion. Now I'll give you my opinion about all these things. I believe Christianity is true and in all respects, the Disneyland history of Christianity that I've just outlined is the reverse of the truth, For a start, there is nothing in the gospels or the other

writings of the new testament or the experience of the early Christian Church, which allows the interpretation that Jesus was essentially a nice guy and a social worker who preached peace and harmony and didn't plan to found a new religion, didn't think of himself as God. Jesus was terribly explicit about all this in the Gospels. Magnificent statements, even modern biblical translations can't detract from the drama of the statements of Christ about these matters. "I watched Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Christ says, talking about his own divinity. "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am." All through the New Testament there are statements of Christ's divinity from his own lips, from the lips of the writers of the Gospels, and of course from St Paul, the earliest writings of the new testament date from maybe 10 or 20 years after the death of Christ and they are, of course, the writings of Paul. Paul is terribly straightforward about the resurrection of Christ and the divinity of Christ. This is what all the early Christians believed, including all the people who knew Christ personally. There is simply no interpretation, it's quite reasonable to say that Christianity is all baloney, you can't really say it's just a nice kumbaya kind of a social work message and forget about the divine stuff. But also, everything we actually like in western civic life, including liberalism, is a direct outcrop, outgrowing and realization of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Now, Judaism and Christianity are different traditions, they're not identical in their ethical outlook and so forth, but they are so interlinked, they share so much source material. They've been in such constant dialog with each other all the time that it makes perfect sense, I think, to talk of the Judeo-Christian tradition. We didn't repudiate Christianity to find liberalism. Liberalism did not involve the repudiation of Christianity. Rather, we arrived at liberalism by embracing Christianity. Let me offer you just a few examples? In the ancient world, the most radical and the first great statement in favour of universal human rights comes in the first book of Genesis where it is declared that God created human beings in the image and likeness of God. That was not the view of the ancient world about human nature. That was not the view of the status of slaves, of women, of childless widows, of younger sons, of people who didn't own property. Genesis was not really a myth, it was a polemic against myth as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks argues and the rationality of Genesis is the magnificent element of it and the universality of its statement of human rights.

The first statement really of secularism comes in the Gospels "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and render unto God that which is God's". The insistence on universalism is all the way through the Old Testament and even more explicit in the new testament. Like most good Catholics, of course, I'd hadn't read anything of Scriptures, especially the old testament before I started on this book and it was great fun to make the acquaintance of the Old Testament. One of the best books is the book of Jonah, a fantastic story like a Mel Brooks comedy, really a rollicking fabulous tale. God sends Jonah out to preach to the Ninevites. Jonah doesn't want to preach to the Ninevites, he hates the Ninevites, he wants the Ninevites to meet the proper punishment. Like a journalist being sent on a disagreeable foreign assignment by an unfriendly editor-in-chief, Jonah does what all journalists would do, he takes a cruise instead and God acting like a good editor-in-chief, cuts off Jonah's expenses organises a lot of bad weather on the cruise, flings Jonah into a whale for a few

days. All very unpleasant for Jonah, all stratagems very familiar to News Corporation editors, let me tell you, and poor old Jonah comes back and says, all right, all right, all right, I'll go to Nineveh now. He preaches in Nineveh, he doesn't want the Ninevites to repent. He's like the character in the Mel Brooks comedy, "*The Comedians*", who wants to create a musical, which is going to fail, so he, he writes a musical about Nazis and it's a success. Jonah hates, the fact that the Ninevites repent and are spared their terrible punishment. Jonah goes off and has a terrifically good sulk and is very uncooperative, just like a journalist back from an assignment really. But the message in the book of Jonah, of course, is God is the god of everyone.

He's the god of the Ninevites as much as the god of the Israelites. And this message is even more explicit in the New Testament, the great passage of St Paul, where he says, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*" And that universalism is distinctive in the Jewish scriptures and it's distinctive in the Christian scriptures. Now you will be pleased to hear that I'm not going to run through 2000 years of Christian history, but let's just alight on a couple of episodes. Western civilization uniquely discovered experimental science. Why was this so? This was so because of the Christian view of nature, that nature embodied God's order and the search for God's order in nature was a virtuous thing. It was a holy thing. It was a search for the personality of God, but also nature was natural.

It was not divine. It was not full of capricious warring spirits. It was not unpredictable. It would be ordered. You just had to find the order. Similarly, the fact of redemption and salvation meant that you had to think of history as linear rather than circular. This freed people from determinism and fatalism and meant that they looked for progress and experimental science came from the search for order in the universe and the sense that the universe was both rational but also natural, not inhabited by maligned spirits. Now, the greatest book in the last 20 years on the debt that Western liberalism owes to Christianity is the Oxford scholar Larry Siedentop magisterial book *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism*. I think I'm right, I don't want to misrepresent Larry Siedentop, but I don't think Larry Siedentop is a believing Christian or anything.

This is just a magnificent work of scholarship about the development of liberalism in western consciousness. Siedentop traces, from ancient times to modern times, the development of liberalism and he traces the long dialogue which Christian civilization had, or Christian's had, from the time of Christ onwards. An early question for a Pope to decide was, "Do infidels have souls?" Yes, you'll be happy to know, the Pope decided infidels have souls and therefore they have human rights as well. You can't steal their property even if they're infidels. What about slavery? Long complex story about Christianity's interaction with slavery, but from the very earliest there were denunciations of slavery from Christian sources, from popes and bishops and leaders and elders. The bias always was in favour of the slave. The early Christians, of course, had no power to abolish slavery. But how did they treat slaves?

Paul says, when he's returning a slave, you must treat this man as your brother. You must welcome him as though you are welcoming me. The slave was always conceived as having the same immortal relationship with God that everybody else had. So the outworking of this had to be opposition to slavery. Siedentop outlines how the development of central governance in the papacy pioneered the idea of central governance in states. And this was a revolutionary injection of liberty for normal human beings because suddenly they had an authority other than the head of their family, other than their local Lord or other than their national king. There was a universal authority that they could appeal to beyond this local despotism. Moreover, the idea of papal governance led to the idea of national governments. Siedentop also argues that the birth of the individual came about organically because of the Christian emphasis of the individual's relationship with God. In ancient times, people were seen primarily as an element of their family unit. I've just forgotten his name, but when the Greek philosopher said, man is the measure of all things, he wasn't talking about women and he wasn't talking about all men, he certainly wasn't talking about slaves, he was talking about male property owners. But in Christianity, every individual had a relationship with the living God and that the working out of this individual relationship set limits on all the other forms of authority in human life and setting those limits was the organic beginning of liberalism.

The sexual revolution of Christianity introduced was the best thing for women and girls that the human race had ever seen. Infanticide was very widely practiced in the ancient world. And I owe this not so much to Siedentop, but to Rodney Stark, the sociologist of religious history. Infanticide, very widely practiced, girl babies were killed in very large numbers. Christians didn't practice infanticide, so they had many more daughters than other families and as a result their families were much happier. And as a result, lots of non-Christian blokes married Christian women and sensibly, they did as their wives told them, and converted to Christianity. There were huge numbers of conversions and Christian families were much happier because they had more women in them. Nothing would be more horrible than a society just full of blokes. Imagine how ghastly that would be. And Christian families were much less like that than other families.

Also, the imposition of sexual morality before Christian morality came along, slave owners could do whatever they liked with their slaves. They couldn't do that after Christianity came along. This was a pro-slave innovation, protected the rights of women and girls who were slaves as well as other women and girls. This was, in Stark's view, the central sociological innovation, which led to the rapid spread of Christianity in its early decades and early centuries.

Let me digress into another innovation of Christianity's, which particularly appeals to me, which was monasticism. In the sixth century, Saint Benedict comes along. There had always been a tradition of extreme ascetic Christians who, the anchorites, who lived in caves and devoted their lives to the contemplation of God. Benedict was more moderate than this. He comes along and founds western monasticism. This in itself was a tremendous step towards modern liberalism because the monastery embodied most of the elements of what we understand of modern liberalism.

First, it was a place that people came to by choice, so it was a lifetime's vocation and decision which somebody made independent of their parents or their king or their Lord or whoever. Second, it very quickly became open to women as to men. Religious institutions were founded that were exclusively female which matched the ones that were exclusively male. And historically, of course, they had much larger numbers. The monastery was also the first truly democratic society that humanity had come up with. The monks elected their Abbott. After that, they were obedient to their Abbott, but they elected their Abbott. Monasteries were also radically egalitarian. Everybody wore the same habit, whether you came from a rich family or indeed, whether you were a slave and this is in *Benedict's Rule*, you can buy *Benedict's Rule* still in print all these centuries later and it says very explicitly whether you are of noble birth or whether you were a slave, you are all the same in the monastery.

Nobody has any property, everybody wears the same habit. Also, long before Max Weber, the monks embraced hard work. The most superior people didn't do manual work in hierarchical societies. The monks were living, clearly, the holiest lives of anyone in their society and they were labouring hard in their fields several hours every day, several hours they were involved in contemplative prayer and several hours a day they were labouring in their fields. This endeared them to normal people who saw that good virtuous people living the most virtuous life were involved in manual labour. They also had an explicit concern for the poor and indeed another Christian innovation was to make concern for the poor an object of state policy. In the ancient world was concern for the king, the royal court, for the power of the empire and for creations of great works of art. In Christianity concern for the poor became a key object of state policy and indeed of monastic policy and the welcome to the poor, which again is very explicit in *Benedict's Rule* was an early form of social welfare policy. The monks also had a very rational view of agriculture. There were great scientific advances in farming and raising of crops and cattle and all the rest of it, because the monks were completely rational and Christianity of course was always the friend of reason, always the friend of science. This had an enormous influence in the development of Western civic culture. There was a long debate throughout that culture of trying to distinguish sin from crime. This is again quite a central civic concept in our society. What were the legitimate things for the state to be concerned with? What were the legitimate things for the church to be concerned with?

What was the legitimate provenance of conscience? This is not something we invented five minutes ago in an episode of *The Drum*. It has actually been there for centuries and centuries and centuries. Both Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, oddly enough thought for example, that prostitution should not be illegal because they thought it was inevitable, they thought it was sinful, but they thought it was inevitable and making it illegal did more harm than good and it wasn't the role of the state to enforce every aspect of morality. This was a distinction which Augustine could make in the third century and Aquinas in the high middle ages. Aquinas put great store by human conscience. He thought that if a Muslim converted to Christianity under threat of the sword and outraged his conscience, this would be the

wrong thing for him to do. Better that he not convert to Christianity, than that he converted to Christianity and outrage is conscience.

The church in all these centuries was finding its own space independent of secular rulers and therefore creating space for its followers. Now Siedentop, whose book really is the most majestic book of history I've ever read, concludes one of his sections on this by saying "the Christian conception of God provided the foundation for what became an unprecedented form of human society, Christian moral teachings and beliefs emerge as the ultimate source of the social revolution that has made the west what it is". I think Siedentop is expressing a profound reality there. So everything that we like from the enlightenment onwards used the moral categories which centuries of Christian dialectic had formed. Indeed, Siedentop argues that everything we like about modern liberalism was well thought through by the latter part of the Middle Ages. Centuries before the enlightenment.

It's a very convincing argument that he makes. Why though then do I believe that the West today cannot recognize recognizably survive as the west without Christian beliefs. After all, you might say, you could simply take all these consensus virtues, cut them off from their Christian sources and just have them as free-floating civic virtues. I think that's impossible. Liberalism in the 19th and 20th century was strong and self-confident and predominantly Christian. It argued for an end to race, for an end to racial preference. It argued that society like God should be colour blind. That the least interesting thing about any human being is their race and that nobody is guilty because of their father or their race or their ethnicity and nobody is privileged for that reason either. It argued for equality for all and human dignity for all. It was tremendously self-confident.

Contrast that with liberalism today. In my view, liberalism is going mad today. It's running down these crazy foxholes one after another. Right now, it's identity politics and extreme vituperation. Identity politics is the opposite of liberalism. Whereas the task, the historic task of liberalism was to abolish race, identity politics wants to make race the centre of everything and if not race then gender. The whole arc of human history bending towards liberalism was to establish the moral autonomy of the individual, the majesty of free will and instead of which liberalism today is consigning us back into a determinist circumstance in which features that we're simply born with, our race or our gender or whatever are determinants of our politics, our virtue, our vice, whatever.

So why is liberalism going so mad? I believe it is because society is rapidly losing belief. Now, in my view, if we lose Christianity, we lose the very possibility of truth itself. There is no reason to believe Christianity unless it's true. You cannot sell Christianity on the basis that it's socially useful, although it is socially useful. Secular sociologists are perplexed by the constant findings that the happiest people in the world, across all the variables are people who have religious belief and attend a church or a synagogue or a mosque or a temple or a Gurdwara once a week or more often. It's astonishing how strongly this correlation is present.

But there's no reason to believe it if it's not true, nonetheless. Now if we lose belief in Christianity, I think we lose the ability to tell truth from falsehood. The most radical thing you could say at a contemporary university today is that the truth is true. Allan Bloom famously said that the one thing you can rely on in every college, by which he meant university in America, is the assertion which everyone will share, that truth is relative. The truth is not relative. Truth is true. Nobody lives their lives on the basis that truth is relative. I have a close relative of my own who is in the police force. Truth is not relative for the police. The guy is either going to shoot you in the head or he is not. You can't have a postmodern argument about it. Engineers can't build bridges or hospitals on the basis that truth is relevant.

The bridge is either going to stand up or it's going to collapse. It's one or the other. It's a binary reality. The reason that if you don't believe in God, it's very hard as a society to believe in truth is because God is absolute truth and without an absolute truth to grab on to you are all at sea. The absolute truth underwrites all the more modest truths. If in the end there is no absolute truth, then my truth is as good as your truth. Your truth is as good as my truth. You might believe that Martians are about to invade us. How can I tell you that it's not true? You are entitled to your truth. As I say, you can't operate that way in a courtroom. You can't say, well, the prosecution feels that you committed the murder. The defence feels that you didn't commit the murder. Therefore, I as the judge would say for you, you committed the murder for you, he didn't commit the murder and take your choice. Nobody operates that way in reality, but we can't get there philosophically. We can't have a solid bedrock, we can't have a basis for truth, if we lose belief in God. Without God too, we lose purpose. Life simply becomes an ocean cruise in which you tried to distract yourself until death. Try not to think about death if you possibly can and you distract yourself. And as time goes on there becomes a panic in this distraction and society becomes either enervated or manic as there is a constant search for distraction. And we know that this endless search for distraction also ends up in an endless search for ever greater intensity.

And we know that human beings untethered searching for intensity and distraction end up in terrible places. Without Christianity, we lose our civic culture. As I've outlined, everything that we like about our civic culture ultimately goes down the drain. We lose morality. I certainly don't mean by this sexual morality. Of course, for journalists to talk about morality, you've got to admit God is very broad minded to allow this to happen at all. Milovan Djilas, the Great Yugoslav anti-communist dissonant once remarked that the beginning of everything is moral outrage. He was talking about politics really. The beginning of everything is moral outrage. But if there is no god, then there is no absolute morality. What is there to be outraged about it? You might feel outrage, but who cares, that's just your feeling. The next guy might have a completely opposite feeling of outrage. If there is no absolute morality and even Richard Dawkins acknowledges that without God, there is no absolute standard of morality. If there is no absolute morality, then the message, is simply follow your own dream. That seems very liberal and Kumbaya - follow your own dream. But what if your own dream is that you'd like to have sex with 6 year olds or that you'd like to kill a couple of hundred people at a music festival or indeed that you'd like to

kill 6 million people? Well, you might say, “well, I don't mean follow your own dream if that's your own dream”. But you say that to that person and he says, “well, that's okay, why should I listen to you? You have no more authority than me. My dream is to kill a few million paper. Your dream is not, bad luck for you.” The only thing that counts is power.

I also believe that if we lose God, we lose both the universality and the distinctiveness of the human condition. The ultimate status of human rights, of human dignity always comes back in the end to the eternal relationship between the human individual and God. A very useful modern philosopher, Peter Singer. I have a great respect and admiration for Peter Singer, he's a very fine human being and a good person. He's a very useful philosopher because he thinks ideas through to their logical conclusion. Now, Peter Singer argues that handicapped newborn babies who are not wanted by their parents, should be just left to die or killed. He argues that there is more utility in sentient animals, pigs, dogs, apes, what have you than human beings who are suffering severe handicapped, mental problems or incapacity or whatever.

He's very uncomfortable for people on both sides of the abortion debate because he says to the pro abortionists why are you so against killing a baby just after it is born because five minutes before, just before it was born you were perfectly happy to kill him. And this is an argument which neither side of the abortion debate likes to hear very much. I had a debate with Peter Singer on Q&A a year or two ago, and we were arguing the toss about this, and he said to me, quite perplexed, “Greg, you really mean human beings should be kept alive just because they're members of our species, not for any other reason.” And I said, “Yes, that's exactly right, Peter. Being a human being is radically different from being a member of any other species”. And the reason is, although I didn't say this on Q&A, because God has guaranteed the status of every human being. And so, every human being demands our solidarity. But Peter Singer is a perfectly logical representation of where atheism leads us in terms of morality. We lose, if we lose God, the wisdom of Judaism and Christianity. Of course, the society so abundantly and obviously blessed with so much wisdom as ours today can easily afford to dispense with the best of human thought over the last 3000 years.

And finally. we lose meaning Viktor Frankl who survived Nazi concentration camps, there's some controversy over about how long you spent in Auschwitz and how long he was in a work camp as opposed to a death camp, but let me tell you none of them was a holiday camp. He describes in his beautiful book, *Man's Search for Meaning* that the concentration camps were in a sense his laboratory for humanity and he saw there, magnificent action. He saw there that humanity cannot be robbed of moral choice, that finally whatever happens, that the Nazis were trying to degrade the people in the concentration camps and indeed turn them into beasts. But in the end, every human being is the master of how they react to any given situation. In my own book, I talk about the Frankl witnessing the eloquence of God in those people who walked through the death camps, sharing their last piece of food with a friend. Frankl also was in a different camp from his wife and he found consolation in the

contemplation of his wife who died in another camp and he understood perhaps, he said for the first time, what the Bible means when it talks about the angels spending their eternity in divine contemplation because just contemplating his wife was all that he wanted to do.

That's all that he wanted to do in that camp. And Frankl's conclusion out of this extreme laboratory that he was a witness to what was that what humanity needs, what men and women need more than anything else is meaning, they need meaning in their lives. I think if we lose God, we lose the chance of meaning. The French sociologist, Jean Baudrillard commented that the five qualities that postmodernism lacks are depth, coherence, meaning, authenticity and originality. I think our culture is going mad and one reason it is going mad, the main reason it is going mad is because it has lost belief. Of course, I have an Irish disposition, you know, situation desperate - advance on all fronts. It's what you'd call a target rich environment. But I would leave you with a thought of a much wiser man than I. Everything that I've said to you is no counsel of despair. However, leave aside it's foolishness or whatever, but if you agree with any of it, it is no counsel of despair because there's a wiser man than I observed, Christians in the end are always optimistic for they follow a God who knows his way out of the grave. Thank you.