
Why I Am Not A Christian

Talk and Questions

Louis Burkhardt

This talk occurred a week before our final discussion group meeting (summer of 2013). As I was to host the meeting and select the topic, I found myself consolidating several years of thinking into an explanation of what, in Christianity, truly interests me. Many of the members of the discussion group had little sympathy with Christianity, which is probably one reason I chose to rid my life of unnecessary ballast. Defending what I care about is enough work for me.

Audio: <http://consider.myplaza.xyz/white/Sound1.html>

LOUIS: So I'm going to record it tonight because I'm going to say things I've never said publicly before. Actually Laura knows — I have mentioned some of this to Laura.

LAURA: Yeah, but I don't —

LOUIS: But I've never said it in public, and I think you could title my talk either — and both these are misleading as you'll learn, but they are significant to me. Either, "My Coming Out Talk," or "My Why I'm Not A Christian Talk." And, you know, they're not as dramatic as they sound, but I never have said any of this publicly, although I've thought about it, on and off, but a lot over the last two or three months. And just today I was running and it just seemed as though taking a retrospective view of this meeting and a current view of where I'm at as a human being, it just all came together. So I was pretty excited. And so let me tell you how I got to the titles.

When we started this meeting, and I don't know everyone that was involved, but of course Tim and Jamie Hanes were primary. Amy, my daughter, and Brandon, her friend, were also part of the meeting. Debbie and Gary Gibson were part of the, kind of the founding brethren and sistren or something. And I knew Tim, and I really was kind of floating in life at the moment. I think I had just moved up to Coal Creek Canyon, I'm not positive. Maybe not yet, maybe I was still house sitting with people. But I said to Tim, I said, Look, I'll be glad to be the unofficial consultant for your group.

The original plan was to present the gospel with the least amount of cultural baggage possible. And that was our goal. You know, we wanted to separate, you know, the representation of Jesus in the New Testament from what I think Tim and I both thought were gross distortions, you know, that have accrued over time. And America of course has its own special versions of the gospels and of Jesus. So we wanted to —

AUDIENCE MEMBER: The best versions.

LOUIS: So we wanted to try to extract, you know, the baby from the bathwater, so to speak. And because we knew that if you leave all the cultural baggage in, it's almost always the choir or the preacher preaching to the choir. You know, it's only — you're not really communicating much with people who have no interest or no faith. So we wanted to communicate with people that either had no interest or little interest or little knowledge, and or no faith.

That was the plan, and I think that was kind of the seed of what I want to share tonight just about my own personal position is — well, I remember one significant series Tim did was he asked the question, Is there an inside and an outside? or is there an "us" and a "them"? And he, you know Tim's approach to the discussions, he tried to keep it open-ended. And I don't think he ever imposed a[n] answer on that. But I think that also kind of helped shape my thinking because I really started wondering, Where did I get all these notions for membership? What do I really belong to in the universe, and what does that mean about how I look at people, you know, that I consider inside that division and people that are outside that division?

And it all really smelled rank to me. It all seemed like, wow there's a lot of distinctions being made here that may not be necessary and may not be healthy. So that affected me. Another element that affected me out of our lengthy discussion group, which I think's gone on about ten years, is that we did a series where we read parables from the New Testament. And those weren't the only favorite sessions we've had. I mean, like, I thought our time when we each read an episode of someone's life-after-death experience was really a cool evening. But by and large those were the kind of meetings that I liked the most: when we read the gospels.

And I really, I just loved doing it. You know. I like the diverse opinions, and I also like the focus of the discussions. Tim, as everyone knows, finally got to a point where he resigned, and Evan came forward and started leading the group. And I think he's done a great job and probably, you know, unparalleled in terms of having more than enough prepared every time you've come to prepare something.

And at the time I said, I said I'll be glad to keep going to this, but I really feel like my heart's more interested in starting something, you know, where we actually just study the Bible. And Evan said it really well, he said, I understand that — 'cause you were trying to explain it I think to Ed or someone else — he said, Louis wants a group that looks at the Bible not just as one more text that can be deconstructed, but as text that has some authority and, you know, has some measure of truthfulness that — you didn't say this but you could have — that, you know, can deconstruct us instead of us deconstructing the text. I thought that was a good distinction.

I've enjoyed a lot of our meetings. And that brings me up to where I am today. It has dawned on me that 40 years ago when I first heard about Jesus from my friends in high school, and something was really stirred up in me and I became excited. And part of that, I was really almost a nihilist. I was so excited to hear about this Jesus who was invisible but alive and had the capacity to change people's lives, to give them joy, to give them a life of love. It really meant a lot to me and excited me, and so I became involved, you know, with people who were praying and people who were reading the Bible. And it wasn't as though, you know, it totally was golden or anything. But it was really exciting and I felt very much, you know, brought alive by it.

What I didn't do at the time — and it just kind of gradually began to happen year after year — at the time I didn't sign up to join Christianity. I just signed up — I didn't sign up, actually. I just was attracted to this person, Jesus. And that was my only interest. I wasn't interested in — not that these things aren't valuable, but I wasn't interested in church tradition and churches and organizations and really all the layers of theology that are out there. I mean in its strictest sense, of course, theology, rational talk about God, is nice. But it wasn't — those weren't the things that attracted me. It was this message that this particular Jesus had risen from the dead and still could affect people's lives.

And that's what I always wanted. And over the years it just started to become assumed by me and other people that that interest was the same thing as being a Christian. That being a Christian put you in a position where you had to defend something huge that half of the things you were trying to defend you don't even know about. And you're trying to validate this big old historical phenomenon, whereas I just wanted a walk of faith that kept me in touch with this Jesus.

And that's why I have stopped calling myself a Christian, because that label means about as much to me as calling myself an American. I probably am, and people can call me American, they can call me Christian, if they want. People can call themselves Americans or Christians if they want. That's totally fine with me.

But I don't derive my identity from that. Although I used to try to derive it from being a Christian. In other words I've never woken up in the morning and thought, I'm an American, I need to live like an American today. "Proud to be an American," or however that song goes when they're sky diving. But I never have thought about in terms of American. As a Christian, I used to wake up every day or practically every day and think, Okay I need to live a Christian life. Totally did not ever help me. Totally took me away from what had attracted me to the gospels.

So here I sit. I just wanted to let you guys know that. The rest of — I have been less depressed lately just thinking about this than I had been for a long time. Because I think I was trying to be something I wasn't. Something I didn't even believe in. "Christian" can mean so many things. And it just is not, it's not meaningful to me. It just means too much. It means all sorts of historical things. And it has all this suggestions of membership, inside and outside.

And I think I owed it to you all since we've spent so many discussions together, and we've all been very, I think, respectful of each other. And I don't think I've ever tried to convert anybody to anything. Which was one of the rules that, you know, Tim laid down at the beginning. I hope I haven't come across that way. And I know no one's tried to convert me to anything —

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I've tried to convert you —

LOUIS: But it didn't work.

But I did feel like since we're going to — next week's our last formal meeting at least with Evan and Timsy here — I thought I owed it to you to come out of that particular — to distance myself from that particular generalization which years past I wouldn't have hesitated to say I'm a Christian. But the more I thought about Christianity, what does that mean to me? Is that what gets me excited every morning when I get out of bed? Huh-uh.

Thinking about Jesus. And I just listened to the book of Acts which was after he had died, so it's — 'cause it's kind of hard to relate, for me to relate to people that knew him in the physical sense. So it's after he had died, but he still very much has a presence in the book of Acts, and I love it.

Thank you.

DENNIS: So what do you call yourself?

LOUIS: Well it's kind of like Paul — what do I call myself? It's like Paul Ricoeur. Similar, he's a philosopher.

CHRIS: Is he French?

LOUIS: Probably so. R-I-C-O-E-U-R. He called himself a listener to the gospel. I don't call myself that, but I'm someone who loves Jesus. I might not know him, I might be wrong about everything, but I truly, really love Jesus. And I want to be a person who looks for him and listens for him for the rest of my life until he tells me I'm going down the wrong path, and that would be difficult for that to happen. And that's the scary thing about faith. You can't — if you have a seed of faith, what you would want is for God or for Jesus to tell you that they don't exist. "I'm only going to take it from your mouth," you know, "I'm not going to take it from other people 'cause why do they have authority to tell me whether or not you exist?" But that could never happen. So there is — I mean there is a definite risk, I think, however you decide to live there is a risk of missing the boat or misleading yourself. I just — I just want to be honest about it. And I love being set straight, times in my life when I've been disabused of an error. So I'll be happy to be disabused of my errors however that shakes out.

CAROL: Louis, with your tremendous confession of how you feel, I think you're selling yourself short about saying you're not a Christian, quote-unquote.

LOUIS: It just — yeah, and there's a kind of like a moral, ethical lifestyle, I think that you're thinking of. Or maybe, maybe not. But what makes me excited is not being a Christian. That makes me feel like a failure. That makes me feel like I've got this immense task. Christianity lets me down, I let Christianity down all the time. It's just like a zero sum game. And I said, I don't have any problem with people calling me a Christian. You can call me that whenever you want. It's not, it's not my driving force.

CAROL: Except I never think that, you know, to be a Christian, whatever, you know, you want to interpret that, is that you have to be going to a formal church or doing things in certain routines that the church says, so to say.

LOUIS: Right. Right, and I certainly don't believe that, but there's — well, let's just face it. There's all sorts of prisons that we can lock ourselves into. I might be the only person who's interested in Jesus who feels closer to him when I don't call myself a Christian. I might be the only one, but I'm one.

CAROL: Yeah.

CHRIS: I think that they're pretty common.

LOUIS: You think so?

LAURA: Most people I know.

LOUIS: Really?

LAURA: I mean not most people, lots of people.

LOUIS: I've never met any of them. I've never met any of them.

LAURA: But you know Chrissie

LOUIS: Who?

LAURA: Chrissie.

LOUIS: Chrissie?

LAURA: She thinks you're really funny.

LOUIS: Oh, well she's a good person. Invite her over.

LAURA: She lives in DC. You know, she —

LOUIS: I remember her real well.

LAURA: Yeah, she's, I mean, she's the first —

LOUIS: Okay, well good. This might show you what an enclosed life I've lived.

LAURA: I think, yeah, the problem with religion is like you said, it takes away liberty.

LOUIS: Yes. And I know religion has a lot of meanings too and can mean really positive things to people. All I can do is speak for myself. I don't want to be responsible for things I don't even understand or believe in. I don't want to answer for them. I don't want to have an external set of standards that I have to live up to, because they always fail me. I always fail them. I want faith. I certainly want faith, I don't want a lifestyle.

Now, I think the irony is: You guys, if you continue knowing me, you'll see more love and more joy in me the more I pursue this path than when I cared about having a lifestyle.

LAURA: I guess I never knew you cared.

LOUIS: Yeah, I did. But you've seen me bemoan myself, make rules, and all sorts of things.

LAURA: Yeah —

LOUIS: Yeah. But that was my focus, but I thought — but it was so hard to conform to a lifestyle where the heart of it, the essential ingredient was not my focus. Why do it? It would be like being in the army without patriotism or something.

CHRIS: That's like most the Army, isn't it?

LOUIS: Then you'd be a mercenary. But it'd be like being a mercenary and not caring about material goods.

CHRIS: Maybe you just really like fighting.

LOUIS: That would be like being a legalized criminal.

DENNIS: So how would Louis a non-Christian define Christianity?

LOUIS: It's just — it's just —

CHRIS: Try not to offend any of us.

LOUIS: Christianity is — it's the bundle of beliefs and practices and institutions and people that have in one way or another attached themselves to or counterfeited Christ. So it's a mixed bag. It's — Christianity involves all sorts of people that I would love to spend a lot of time with. And it involves a lot of worthy missions. And it involves a lot of other stuff. And that other stuff weighs me down. Makes me feel very heavy.

CHRIS: Do you like labels in general?

LOUIS: No, I don't. Take, for example —

CHRIS: See, there's your problem.

LOUIS: — yes, I know. Because abstractions a necessary feat of the mind. But it seems that with really important things, the more specific you can be, the more concrete, that the fewer misunderstandings there will be.

CHRIS: Yeah, but see I like labels partly to betray people's preconceived notions. Isn't it kind of fun to call yourself a Christian and then say you don't believe in anything they think Christians believe in?

LOUIS: It's not my style.

LAURA: What's an example for you? What do you call yourself?

CHRIS: An example for me? I call myself a Christian. I love that label.

LAURA: Oh do you call yourself a Christian?

CHRIS: Yeah.

LAURA: I didn't know that.

LOUIS: It's on Facebook. That proves it. Wasn't it? Isn't it in your profile?

CHRIS: My profile says I am religious but not spiritual. But I'll tell you what I like about the label Christian, is the kind of paradox of being a slave to Christ or in other words a slave to one who sets you free. I just like paradoxical labels.

LOUIS: That's great Chris. I think that's great. I understand that. I think that the word itself is — I mean "Christ" meant anointed one, and Christian just was the diminutive of that, "a little anointed one." And anointed meant somehow endowed with — even though I know you're not into being spiritual — somehow endowed with the presence of God. That was — I'm a little example of the presence of God. Totally fine with that. I'm totally fine, and I think a lot of Christians call themselves Christians thinking about that. I, however, find that the connection between Christian and Christianity and then Christendom — it just

balloons and, there's just too many things to keep in balance in my mind and it gets my focus off what I love. That's all.

DENNIS: Then your Jesus is Christ?

LOUIS: I am Jesus's anointed one?

AUDIENCE: No, your idea of Jesus.

DENNIS: The Jesus you swear to now.

LOUIS: The Jesus that I always read about in the New Testament.

DENNIS: Is Christ?

LOUIS: Well. He's the anointed one. He does things that average human beings don't do. I mean —

DENNIS: The anointed one is Christ?

LOUIS: Yes.

DENNIS: We're not trying to box you into a label of being a Christian.

LOUIS: No, and I thought about that —

CHRIS: You're going to wake up every morning and say, I'm a non-Christian, what should I do?

LOUIS: That is not my message. That is not my point. The reason I'm recording this is so that I can go back tomorrow and remember what I did say not what you said I said.

DENNIS: So basically, if I understand what you're saying, is that Jesus is your center now. Christianity being organized is not. Is that right?

LOUIS: Well that's always been right, academically. But I — that's too much for me to take right now. For Jesus to be the center and Christianity to be the periphery. Life's so short and I've wasted so much time focusing on so many things I really don't believe in. I'm just going to focus on what I care about.

DENNIS: How long have you focused on things you don't believe in?

LOUIS: Most of my life.

DENNIS: Really?

LOUIS: Yes.

DENNIS: Did you know you didn't believe in them when you were focusing on them?

LOUIS: I don't know what I've done with my life. It just brought me to tonight. That's all I can say.

DENNIS: Laura, tonight when we leave take all sharp objects away.

LOUIS: No, I needed them until tonight.

DENNIS: We're not done with you yet, Louis.

LOUIS: Let me give you an example — let me tell you one thing that contributed to tonight. I was speaking to a good friend last week, and we were politely in a qualified way affirming each other. You know, the polite qualified — because then it's sincere. I mean you tell someone, Oh you're, like, the best, great-

est — the sincerity factor drops with every superlative. So I told him, and a lot of you know who he is, but I'd rather not mention his name. So I told him, I said, You know the main way I've changed in relation to your thinking is when I first knew you I was just a Jeffersonian. And along with that I had a huge suspicion of government, and government efforts, government aid, government programs. And now through knowing you over the years I see a lot of — I can critique Jefferson himself now with a lot more honesty than I could have. I see a lot of the dark side of the people who are suspicious of government, and I see a lot of value to socialization. He said, Well, I don't really — it's not, don't get me wrong, it's not that I believe in the supernatural Jesus, but I do appreciate Christianity more after knowing you because of the, you know, because some of the values that it promotes such as, you know, love and mercy and things like that.

When he said that, I thought, "eek!" I have — this is really interesting because the one thing he doesn't — and it's totally his prerogative not to — the one thing he doesn't, isn't interested in is really the only thing I really care about. If Jesus isn't alive, I'm just not that interested in Christianity. And he's interested in everything but what you call the focal point. So that helped kind of crystallize my thinking, it helped me define my position. Which I didn't tell him at the time, but I will tell him.

LAURA: What do you mean by that Jesus is alive?

LOUIS: What do I mean by Jesus is alive?

CHRIS: You said the only thing you're interested in is — if Jesus is not alive then you're not interested in anything else.

LOUIS: I'm not interested in anything associated with Christianity.

LAURA: Right.

CHRIS: And Laura's saying, what do you mean by if Jesus isn't alive — what do you mean by —

LOUIS: If he is a mythological figure the way Bacchus is or some Greek, you know, hero. If he was a good teacher who died and the resurrection was, you know, hypothesized and was just symbolic. If the gospels were edited and re-edited so much that the original companions of Jesus did not get enough air time to express the fact that he did not rise from the dead. If he did not rise from the dead, I'm not interested. I only want — I certainly don't want to worship a peer of mine. If he's just another human I might respect him and look up to him, but I don't want to worship him. I certainly don't want to worship a fantastic mythological hypothetical fictional character. I only want to worship a supreme being.

LAURA: What's worship?

LOUIS: What's worship? Well, I don't know. I don't know what worship is. I only want to pay attention, give — well Kierkegaard said, Give absolute attention to absolute things and relative attention to relative things. I only want to give absolute attention — or at least bring myself to a point where I'm willing to give absolute obedience to someone who's absolutely worth obeying or absolutely worth trusting. Which means I will like all of you but I will not obey you all and I will not trust you infinitely. 'Cause you're not much better than I am, and I certainly can't do any of that for myself. I've proven that, time and time again.

DENNIS: So where are you going to find your Jesus? In what —

LOUIS: Well I'm open to more ways, but where I'm going to find Jesus is in people who have a love for him. That inspires me. Some people who don't know about him but they still exhibit, you know, his character I can get inspired by. I get really inspired by listening to the gospels and a lot of what Paul wrote and a lot of what Luke wrote in the book of Acts. Those are my main sources, and people that also rely on those sources. As unfiltered as possible.

DENNIS: So what difference — you had mentioned a couple of things, one of them is about Jesus's character. And then you said you're not interested in Christianity.

LOUIS: No.

DENNIS: But things that Christianity stands for, Jesus —

LOUIS: I'll just focus on Jesus, Dennis. That's going to be my salvation. Other people have other dispositions, temperaments, histories. There might be people that really should just spend a lot of time focusing on Christianity. I'm just not that person.

DENNIS: I don't know, from what I've observed of our little group, what you're describing is our little group.

LOUIS: Yes and no. I'm interested in — the meetings I enjoyed the most, yes. It was our little group. But this group had less of a — the focus of this group was really a lot broader than what I'm presenting.

DENNIS: Yeah. And we've strayed a lot too. I don't know if any of us have ever — at least from what I gather you think Christianity is, how you define Christianity, I haven't seen that in this group. If so we're in the most disorganized group of Christianity that walked the earth.

LOUIS: No, but I think — and Dennis I could be wrong and it's always dangerous to think what other people might be — how they might process reality, 'cause I don't even know how I process it. But I think there's a possibility that more of us in this group would love Jesus if not for a lot of the stumbling blocks that have been laid down. The assumptions and the associations that have been laid down historically by Christianity.

DENNIS: Well, I agree with you, but that's why I think we're in this group and not going on Sunday to Saint Thomas of Aquinas Church.

LOUIS: And that's good, but I think the charter that Evan has embodied is primarily intellectual inquiry wherever that leads.

EVAN: Yeah, it's not related to Christianity or Jesus.

LOUIS: Right.

EVAN: The mission of our group —

LOUIS: It's accidental. It's not that he's — like I'm not excluded from the group. I mean you guys are all — you know, I feel no hostility. But that's —

DENNIS: From this date forward we're calling you Louis the Non-Christian.

LOUIS: But that's not my point. You can call me whatever you want.

CHRIS: Used to call you the apostle. Now we call you the apostate.

LOUIS: It's what I call myself that counts.

EVAN: I'm the apostate, he can't be the apostate.

DENNIS: I'm amazed that you say — not amazed, that's not the proper way of describing it — but that you've been depressed over trying to figure out trying to be a Christian, or depressed over being a Christian.

LOUIS: Yeah. Well, and this is one respect where Evan can relate to me. Evan experienced a form of Christianity, and some of it had pretty scriptural grounding, that was so oppressive that he sought to be totally free from it. True that?

EVAN: Yes, true that.

LOUIS: I mean you've said that in the meetings on a couple of occasions. It's just amazing. I'm not trying to scapegoat Christianity, which would just be one more — I'd be creating one more prison house for myself. I'm just saying I want my focus to be the focus that got me excited for the first time in my life about something much bigger than myself. And that's the Jesus who healed people, loved people, rebuked people, and died, you know, a martyr's death, and rose again. Otherwise it's, to me, it's just a great story.

DENNIS: So, Jesus — and I'm just trying to figure out what you're saying — Jesus, is Jesus also God? The Father and the Son?

LOUIS: I have written something on my web page concerning that which I'd like to refer you to. That would be a huge distraction to what I came to share tonight.

DENNIS: But is your Jesus God?

LOUIS: I would never reduce things grammatically do that statement.

DENNIS: That's pretty big.

LOUIS: I would rather —

DENNIS: That's not a reduction —

LOUIS: I would feel as though I were doing an injustice to Jesus, to God the Father, and to the English language, and to the minds of my listeners if I used that sentence, which is a very popular sentence these days. But there's no way I'm devoting my life to a peer or to just another human being.

CHRIS: That's the Catholic Church developed the doctrine of the trinity just so they don't have to say that sentence.

DENNIS: I didn't get to the trinity yet. I'm just trying to get is Jesus God? Then I can go to the trinity.

CHRIS: Well the whole pointing of the trinity is so you never have to say the sentence "Jesus is God."

LAURA: But Jesus is divine.

CHRIS: Well you can't, I mean —

DENNIS: But if Jesus is divine —

CHRIS: It's to kind of save the grammar from such reductionist terms like that.

DENNIS: And if Jesus wasn't God? If Jesus wasn't God then what's the point? I mean then we can all just sit and say, you know he's a great healer, a great person, someone to be admired, but so was Buddha, so was Muhammad.

LOUIS: Anyway those — I'd really rather not —

DENNIS: So I'm not going to get an answer out of you?

LOUIS: As I say I've already written something. That doesn't interest me, though. Really that discussion —

DENNIS: It interests me.

LOUIS: That discussion doesn't — well, I'll send you the link, free of charge, to my article that I wrote, and you can get my opinion that way. But that doesn't interest me. That's not what excites me. The night I went to my first prayer meeting, my leading question wasn't, Is Jesus God?

DENNIS: All right, let me ask you a question.

LOUIS: I want to know if Jesus is real.

DENNIS: Who is Jesus?

LOUIS: All I can say is get on your knees, read the New Testament. That's the only answer I can give. And it's the only reason I stayed a Christian for so long. Because I was — you know I was getting a PhD in English, I was surrounded by very sophisticated forms of skepticism, you know, that weren't answered by CS Lewis who was kind of the mainstay for, you know, reading Christians for awhile. And I was surrounded by them, and I was seeing things chipped away, even if I'd hide my head in the sand I was still seeing things chipped away. But what I never felt like what I had relinquish was: I love the gospels. You know, and there are sentences that bother me the way they bother Evan. I think they bother Evan a little more, but they do bother me. And there's things I don't understand, but the general picture, I love it.

CHRIS: I think if you and I were to highlight our favorite parts of the gospels we'd have like a complementary —

LAURA: You guys should do that.

LOUIS: We could.

CHRIS: — the opposite passages.

LOUIS: No, we could. Although I bet I would highlight a lot of it.

LAURA: There'd be some overlap.

LOUIS: There'd be, yeah, that Venn diagram would, you know, those circles would overlap. But you're right. And that's — I told Chris a long time ago. When I — I used the word Christian, and I still well. I still will call myself an American when I'm going through customs. But, you know, I said to Chris, I said, you know, when I became a Christian — which now I'm just saying, when I got excited about learning about this Jesus — I left — rebellion was something I was exposed to in a very negative format. Rebellion was associated with just hatred of authorities, hatred of my parents, things like that. And so to me rebellion was something, kind of categorically negative, whereas to Chris — Chris said, actually, you were converted to rebellion, not away from rebellion. And so we just have different histories. Which probably means we read the gospels differently, too. And I can appreciate civil disobedience way more than I used to be able to. 'Cause I was so scared of bad rebellion, I just thought everyone needed to step in line mindlessly. Even the bumper sticker "question authority" used to bother me.

LAURA: I try to break one law a day.

LOUIS: Okay, see? This is — I feel like I've succeeded as a parent 'cause you try to break one law a day.

DENNIS: I don't want to to run into you at the end of the year.

DENNIS: So unrelated, and I'm not asking this question in a way that sounds like I'm challenging what you're saying, but just out of curiosity if you're looking to the gospels, the New Testament as your source, how can you quantify that? How can you — like you two guys just said you would highlight the parts that you like and throw away the rest, basically. How can you do that? Is it — how can you select certain portions of the gospel to be true and certain portions not to be true?

REBEKAH: Wasn't it Thomas Aquinas who did that?

LOUIS: No, Thomas Jefferson edited the — took the miraculous parts out. Which I've never seen a copy. Well, Dennis, I didn't say I would throw away the parts Chris highlighted. And I think by and large the gospels and the book of Acts are tremendously reliable. I have no — A) I've never felt like I needed to say I

believe every word in the Bible is inerrantly, divinely inspired. I've never felt the need to that, even though the Christianity I grew up in admonished me to do that. But I do believe that the picture that emerges from the gospels is a true picture. And parts that I don't understand or appreciate I don't discard, I'm just not going to, you know, force myself or pretend that I do appreciate them or understand them.

DENNIS: So you —

LOUIS: I am not editing the New Testament.

DENNIS: So one hundred percent of the gospel — the New Testament — is accurate and correct?

LOUIS: I do not — as I just said I have never felt the need to say that every word in the Bible or the New Testament is inerrantly inspired by God as though it's untranslated and there's no, you know, historical corruption through transmission or that the writers never winked or nodded, you know, in the process of writing it. I'm just saying that in the main it's the best thing I've ever read.

LAURA: What's the best thing you ever read?

DENNIS: *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by Goethe.

LOUIS: But when you say that —

DENNIS: It can't compare to the gospels. If you read the gospels, you're reading God. If you're reading Goethe you're reading fiction.

LOUIS: Well you're certainly reading something that claims to represent God, whereas great novels do more for my imagination. Shoot, that *Animal Farm* touched me more than the New Testament — than the crucifixion scene did — when the horse died. So things can have a much more emotional power. But I don't get out of bed thinking I've got to, you know, find Orwell or find the pigs or straighten out the pigs today.

CHRIS: Was his name Boxer?

LOUIS: Boxer, yeah. May he rest in peace.

LAURA: I wish he rose from the dead.

LOUIS: Well, there are other things you can read with all sorts of things rising from the dead.

Hey, thanks for listening. And I've — there's no one in this room I would not want to see again.

CHRIS: That's a strange thing to say.

LOUIS: But there's not. I mean, I think I'm going to see some of you less than I do, but I always want to see all of you.