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A Reformation & Revival Journal
Interview with James I. Packer



Departments



Our regular interview feature this quarter is with the highly-esteemed theologian Dr. James I. Packer. Dr. Packer was born in Gloucester, England in 1926 and came to faith as an undergraduate at Oxford University where he received his B.A. (1948), M.A. and D.Phil. (1954). He previously taught at Tyndale Hall (Bristol) and Trinity College (Bristol). After holding a chair in theology at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia, for many years he is now a Board of Governors' Professor (emeritus faculty) at Regent, where he has taught since 1979. Dr. Packer remains a senior editor for *Christianity Today* and a busy teacher and writer.

Dr. Packer has faced several controversies during his lifetime, including a variety of theological debates among both Liberals and Evangelicals. He has engaged these debates in a manner that eschews both sectarianism and extremes. For this reason he remains a model to many who preach and teach, as well as thousands of serious lay readers the world over. He still lectures widely and writes extensively, and is the distinguished

author of numerous best-selling titles. He has been called “the best-known writing evangelical theologian in the world” for good reason. He is profoundly respected and widely loved among those who seek for a vibrant explanation of orthodox Christian faith. Dr. Packer still resides in Vancouver, British Columbia, with his wife Kit. This interview was conducted in Carol Stream, Illinois, in July 2003.

RRJ — Tell us about your conversion and early experience of faith in Christ.

JIP — I was brought up a formal Anglican, which means I was taken to church as a child. It was, I suppose, as much part of the unthinking routine of my life as cleaning my teeth; it was certainly not more. At age fifteen I played chess in the school chess club with the son of a Unitarian minister who between games tried to sell me the Unitarian bill of goods. The things he said produced no conviction. I could see straightaway that the Unitarian position held together by sheer will power rather than logic. Unitarians deny the divinity of Christ; if they deny something so central to the New Testament as this why don't they deny much more of what is in the New Testament? In the next breath they say the moral teaching of Jesus is the most wonderful thing in the world; if they are so positive about that element of the New Testament, why are they not prepared to believe more of it? Brooding on the two horns of that dilemma made me realize from the start that their position is an arbitrary one. That set me thinking for the first time about the next question: “What then is the truth in Christianity?” At that time C. S. Lewis' material, which later became *Mere Christianity*, came out in three small volumes. I read them and found that Lewis very effectively convinced me of the essential rightness of the historic Christian faith in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. I got to the place where I was prepared to argue for this and to defend it in debate at school. Because I knew that what I was maintaining was orthodoxy I thought, “For sure, I am a Christian.” However, I had a friend who, twelve months before I was due to go

to Oxford, went to Bristol University, where he was soundly converted through the InterVarsity (IV) chapter, the Christian Union as it was called, and he tried to convince me that I, too, needed to be converted. I can still remember my utter bewilderment as he told me that for all my orthodoxy I did not have faith. I really had no idea what he was talking about. Very humbly, when I was due to go up to Oxford, he said to me, “I know I haven't been able to explain this to you very well. Get in touch with the IV people in Oxford. They will be able to explain it better than I can.” I always wanted all the reality that was going, so I did this. The Oxford Christian Union sustained a weekly evangelistic service in those days at a city church. The first time I attended such a service, some twenty minutes into the message, about half-way into the sermon, a great deal began to happen. I quite suddenly realized what my friend had been trying to tell me. Indeed, I didn't have faith since I had kept Jesus Christ at bay. So I was in the position of a man standing outside a house where a party was going on. He looks through the window and sees what they are doing inside and understands it, but he isn't part of it because he has never come in. The way in involves a personal transaction with Christ which I had avoided. I hadn't realized that I was avoiding it until that moment; then it became clear to me that this is what I had been doing all along. By the end of the sermon everything had rearranged itself, and I had opened my mind, my heart and my life to the living Christ. Right at the end of the sermon we sang, “Just As I Am.” You can't have a more ordinary conversion than one that takes place while people sing “Just As I Am.” I went out of church knowing I was a Christian. The preacher said, “If you have become a Christian at this service let me give you a piece of advice. Start telling people straight away, and you who are undergraduates tell your parents before you tell anyone else.” Well, I wrote a letter home and said what had happened. I began testifying as opportunity arose and went on from there. The theology of the new birth came later, but this is how my personal relationship with Jesus Christ came about. The reality of faith became clear then and has been clear from that day to this.

R R J — Was this during your first year at university in 1944?

J I P — Yes, I was eighteen years old. It was the second Sunday of my first term.

R R J — Sometime later you began to grapple with Christian growth and spiritual formation. You went through some trials that caused you a great deal of consternation. You experienced recovery through the work of the Puritan writer, John Owen. Please talk about this period of time and what happened.

J I P — John Owen came into my life at a very important moment. I had been told, over and over again, by the people who were discipling me under the auspices of the Christian Union, that there was a secret of peace and joy and victory over temptation to sin and the unholy desires of the heart and all the nagging and distracting moods and bad habits such desires bring about. The secret, they told me, was consecration and faith. It was the teaching which at that time was associated with the Keswick Convention and was sometimes labeled “victorious life.”

R R J — Describe what you mean by the Keswick teaching.

J I P — The teaching was that subsequent to conversion every Christian needs deliverance from the self-life. I was an adolescent of eighteen, and I was a bit of an odd fish. I was awkward, tall, shy, and not comfortable at all in ordinary relationships. I had not met, nor had I known the necessary distinction between the carnal self and personal self, and I wanted, in effect, to be delivered from my temperament. The teaching I heard was that Christians who found themselves in this situation could go forward by acknowledging all their defects to the Lord and surrendering their life entirely to him. Some years later I critiqued this teaching because it implied that you had not been taught repentance when you were led to faith, for that is when the issue of total surrender to Christ ought to be raised. In fact, I myself had not been taught

repentance when I came to faith. I think this reveals one of the real weaknesses of modern evangelism because there is so little about repentance in the way we present the gospel.

Anyway, this teaching was that you surrender yourself completely to Christ, and then, as temptations and inner upsets arise, you immediately commit them to Jesus. Then they are his business and not yours any longer and he enables you to move along in peace and do the things you ought to do and want to do. And you don't live with the troubling sense of failure anymore. You have, in other words, and it was expressed in this way, “passed out of the second half of Romans 7 into the first half of Romans 8.” It sounded wonderful, but try as I would I could not find my way into it, and I now think it is a quite misleading account of the Christian's inner life.

R R J — You were eighteen years old and dealing with this kind of emphasis on living the Christian life. How old were you when your change in thinking away from this teaching transpired?

J I P — I was nearly nineteen by then. I had been a Christian for about a year. What happened to bring John Owen into my life was that a clergyman who was nearly eighty at the time (and had once been a member of the Christian Union himself, and had gone blind) gave his library to the Christian Union. By then people knew I was a bookish sort of bloke so I was appointed as the junior librarian to look after these books. One of the things I found in the library was an uncut set of the works of John Owen in the nineteenth-century Gould edition. I didn't then know who John Owen was. However, I saw the title of each volume on the spine and cut the pages of volume six, which contains the treatise on “The Mortification of Sin,” pastoral counsel addressed to the imperfectly sanctified sinner. Backing it was a treatise on “Indwelling Sin in Believers: based on verses in Romans 7. In these items Owen reached out across three centuries and spoke directly to my heart. Owen is certainly a difficult writer to read until you

have gotten into his way of using English but the task was probably easier for me than it was for some moderns, because Owen writes as if he thought in Latin and then translated it into English at the last minute, and a Latinized style was something I could handle. These treatises grabbed me. They fully diagnosed the Romans 7 situation in which moral reach exceeds moral grasp, so that while your heart desires and you aim it at perfection you're never able to achieve it. Owen explained that Romans 7 and Romans 8 belong together as part of a single exposition of the new life in Christ but you never get out of the second half of Romans 7. What happens is that you sustain yourself with the knowledge that you are in the first half of Romans 8 as well. And the practice of mortifying the ungodly habits that indwelling sin in your spiritual system generates ("deeds of the body," Romans 8:13) will further spiritual life within you. Why does this mortification thus bring life? It is because that activity is getting you, as a Christian, deeper and deeper into the life of God. That's how Owen spoke to me, telling me what I needed to hear and showing me what I needed to do. The treatise on indwelling sin confirmed all this with a fuller analysis of the way sin acts as a kind of second self, a sort of autonomous energy in one's moral and spiritual system, obstructing, distracting, discouraging and ensuring that believers *never* get beyond the second half of Romans 7.

Owen taught me to see, what my knowledge of Greek grammar should have shown me this from the start, that when Paul says in 7:26: "Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?" he doesn't put a verb into his answer. That means, according to the rules of usage, that the verb used in the previous sentence should be understood *in the same tense*. So Paul's answer to his own question is, "I thank God he will deliver me through Jesus Christ our Lord." Paul is affirming the Christian hope, the hope of glory, the hope of full conformity to the image of the Savior, with sin simply abolished from our personal being; he is not speaking of a *present* blessing at all, and when Keswick teachers taught that he was they were wrong. And that explains why it is logical for Paul to go straight on and say, "So then

(summing up what he has said in the previous dozen or so verses), with the mind I serve the law of God (I want to be absolutely perfect) but with the flesh I serve the law of sin (still, unhappily to an observable extent). The relative contrast here is expressed in a Hebrew way as an *absolute contrast*. Paul doesn't mean that as a Christian he never does anything right. He does mean that he never fully escapes the down-drag of sin in his life, and that is a part of his experience. If the Keswick teachers had been right to think that Paul was saying, "I thank God he *does* deliver me through Jesus Christ my Lord," his next statement, that with the flesh he serves the law of sin, would be a total self-contradiction.

R R J — Let me follow this up with one more question. I have heard you say over the years that this insight not only helped you spiritually but, in fact, it saved you mentally as well. You were nervously pursuing the living of the Christian life and felt yourself to be on the verge of serious crisis. Am I right in this perception?

J I P — You are quite right in that. The way this was coming to me prior to my discovery of Owen was that all these teachers whom the Christian Union brought in week-by-week, and many Christian friends of greater experience (who had been Christians much longer than I had been), seemed to have found something which I couldn't find. If you start off as a shy, introverted, and awkward young man, and you feel that those around you have something you haven't got and can't find, you have real problems. I did try the routine of surrender and of looking to Jesus to carry me through times of temptation by squelching the temptation before it had fully articulated itself in my heart. It didn't work and that was a deeply frustrating and depressing thing. It made me feel like a pariah, an outsider, and at the age of eighteen that was pretty burdensome. In fact, it was driving me crazy.

R R J — This exposure to John Owen was the beginning of what has now been a lifetime of interest in the Puritan writers

and Puritan theology. One of the things you are known for internationally is your love and mastery of English Puritan theology. Where would you advise a person to go to begin to understand the Puritans? And what are some warnings you would give to people who would use the Puritans since we have both known people who used them in ways that were not altogether helpful.

J I P — There is indeed a lot of material, but the Puritans were a single school of thought and an extraordinarily homogeneous one. For years now I have been telling people that if they want to start exploring Puritan wisdom they must read *Pilgrim's Progress*, both parts, and make sure that they understand it. (I am quite emphatic about this!) What you have in *Pilgrim's Progress* is a kind of pictorial index to all the topics relating to the Christian life that the Puritans thought about, preached about, and wrote about. All the perplexities, all the temptations, all the forms of opposition, all the encouragements, all the ups and downs of Christian living, the trials in the form of depression and the trials in the form of overconfidence, and the ways that Satan arranges to test Christians who are overconfident are all there, these pictured in a beautifully vivid form.

R R J — But people will say, "*Pilgrim's Progress* is a children's book."

J I P — They will say it, and they will be wrong. *Pilgrim's Progress* was written for adults and its theme is adult discipleship. It is, of course, an extended parable and is in itself an entertaining story. Bunyan knew that it was entertainment. There's nothing new about that. Jesus' stories also were entertaining and people loved listening to them as he told them. Bits of *Pilgrim's Progress* I recall, were presented to me as a child, namely the fight with Apollyon, and the story of Doubting Castle and Giant Despair. But it was presented to me as a children's story; nobody explained what a Christian was, or what despair was, or why despair should be pictured

as a giant, or why a key called Promise should be able to open the door of the giant's dungeon. No, *Pilgrim's Progress* really is a parable for adults, and is a pictorial presentation of the real Christian life from start to finish.

R R J — What would be a valuable resource someone could use to better understand *Pilgrim's Progress*? Perhaps the work of Alexander Whyte might be useful here.

J I P — Whyte would give you most of it, though he can be rather long-winded. Possibly the essay that I wrote for *The Devoted Life*, a book of essays edited by R. C. Gleason on the Puritan heritage that InterVarsity publishes would help as a starter.

R R J — So, you start with Bunyan—where then would you go?

J I P — A Puritan who is very easy to read, and also very helpful, is Thomas Watson. Another Puritan who is very easy to read and nourishing to the heart is Richard Sibbes. He was called "the sweet dropper," and he deserved the name. John Flavel, a third writer, is much like Sibbes in his writing style. He writes in a clear way and the things he has to say go deep into the Christian life. All these are wise and encouraging. They address both sides of the brain, that is to say pictures and analogies as well as logic. As we now know, logic is for the left side of the brain and the right side is for everything to do with the imagination. The best communication always involves both sides of the brain, picturing things and analyzing things. Jesus was a model communicator in this respect and the Puritans understood, followed in his footsteps. Of them, as of Jesus himself, it can be truly said that all their arguments are illustrations, and all their illustrations are arguments.

You might find Owen is your man, as I have found that Owen is my man. I warn you, however, he is heavy reading and he hasn't got the same flair for illustration that other Puritans have.



When I discovered the Puritans hardly anybody in the academic world was writing about them. These authors were very little read and the

modern reprints, which have made them so easily available today, simply didn't exist. But today the Puritans are being reprinted.

RRJ — One last Puritan question. Your book, *A Quest for Godliness*, was a collection of a number of things you wrote over the years on Puritans and Puritanism. The reader might say, "Where can I get more of Packer's observations about the Puritans?" Would this be the place for them to go?

JIP — That book does, in fact, tell the things I want the world to know about the Puritans. When I discovered the Puritans hardly anybody in the academic world was writing about them. These authors were very little read and the modern reprints, which have made them so easily available today, simply didn't exist. But today the Puritans are being reprinted. The *Banner of Truth* and *Soli Deo Gloria* have both done a great job, serving us well here. You can easily get hold of Puritan texts, including those I have mentioned, and there are a good number of books about the Puritans as well. But when I started studying them seriously there was very little secondary material. I did my doctoral work on one of them, Richard Baxter. Baxter is, by the way, very straightforward and motivating reading, though he can be both over-compressed and long-winded, which is why I did not mention him earlier.

The book, *A Quest for Godliness*, contains everything I want to say about the Puritans. These are things that, in many

instances, had not been written out by anyone else at the time I wrote them.

RRJ — Let's change direction here. Those who do not know you well, except through books you've authored or having heard you speak in public, would not know some of your interests in life that I think are quite interesting. I know, for example, that you have appreciated jazz music for many years. Where we sit this evening there are, around you in this hotel room, books of fiction, mystery novels, etc. Talk about the interests of Jim Packer in these other areas.

JIP — It has been said, "All work and no play make Jack a dull boy." That's the wisdom of the world. The Bible says God gives us the world to enjoy and all sorts of things can be rendered holy and enjoyed under God to his praise, if you thank him for it and acknowledge him as ultimately the giver of it. It took me some time to see that; I was three or four years into my Christian life before I became clear on what I now call "the gifts of God's common grace." By the time I graduated I can fairly say my mind was clear that I couldn't be doing academic work all the time any more than I could be praying all the time. There is a principle of work and rest built into our creation. This, the Sabbath principle, validates recreation as that which genuinely re-creates. There are plenty of activities that operate as refreshers for the serious work of life. Each to his own; but for me classic jazz and classic detective stories help do the trick.

RRJ — So how did jazz music get into this picture?

JIP — Actually it was in me, and I was in it, before I ever became a Christian. At age thirteen I was doing my homework one evening and the radio was on and I had listened to some British jazz, which was pretty poor and then they played a record as filler before the next program. I didn't properly hear the title but it sounded like "Steamboat Stomp," and so in fact it was. It was made in 1926, the year of my birth, by a band of

which Jelly Roll Morton was the leader. When the piece started "it sent me," to use an old-fashioned phrase. It turned me inside out. It did what music sometimes does to you—that is, it gives you a sense of there being a larger, brighter, livelier world beyond the visible. It somehow mediates a sense of the reality of that world. I suppose this is the kind of thing that C. S. Lewis was talking about when he spoke of the experience he called joy, which for him was a kind of exalted unfocused longing. Anyway, that was what "Steamboat Stomp" did for me. I remember getting up and going over to the radio and putting my ear against the speaker and just drinking it in. I was left gasping. My breath was literally taken away. I can analyze classic jazz now in a way that I couldn't then, but pieces like "Steamboat Stomp" still produce intense emotional reaction inside me. Incidentally, I am not the first to celebrate this music. The late Hans Rookmaaker, who was Francis Schaeffer's collaborator and, in some ways, a profounder and weightier scholar than he (and one who was very much more a theologian of culture), regarded early jazz, the kind that had found me, as the most valuable cultural product that had come out of North America in the twentieth century. When I met with Rookmaaker I found that our aesthetic evaluation of this music was quite similar: that is our rating of what was valuable in early jazz (which started when jazz first went on record and ended when the jazz language was changed by Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie in the 1940s), corresponded. Early jazz was the melodious jazz, a musical language that came partly from the blues, partly from the spirituals, partly from ragtime, partly from military band music, and partly from conventional turn-of-the-century dance music. These elements fused and there emerged the jazz band, with the trumpet as the lead instrument, the trombone down below filling in the harmony, the clarinet up above decorating what was going on and three or four rhythm instruments, piano, banjo and drums, and string bass or tuba. The banjo was later replaced by the guitar, and I must confess I think jazz was better with the banjo than when the guitar took its place. It was a very different music from modern jazz and it's only this elderly jazz (1920s until

1940s) that gives my heart joy. There are some great classical musicians whose work has also led me into this joy. I was slower to get into that but Beethoven reached out and grabbed me when I was in my late teens and I have gone on from there to Mozart, Bach, Schubert, Brahms, Wagner, and Bruckner, all of whom have given me wonderful moments and memories.

You also spoke about mystery novels. I started reading them before I became a Christian. I think I was seven years old when I got bronchitis, as I frequently did, and my grandmother took me with her for a week's holiday to Torquay, a British seaside resort to recuperate. In our room there were some books on the shelf. One of them was Agatha Christie's, *The Hound of Death*, spooky short stories which I devoured. My grandmother wondered if I wasn't too young to be reading such things, but I then went to Christie's *The Mystery of the Blue Trains*, and have been reading Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, John Dickson Carr, who also went under the name of Carter Dickson, Ellery Queen, Erle Stanley Gardner, and other such authors, ever since. These were the classic detective stories of the twentieth century. I still read mysteries. I read them as re-creational resources, just as I listen to music as a re-creational resource. Puzzle stories about crime calm my mind, as crossword puzzles do for others. At bedtime my mind is often full of theological and personal problems that would keep me awake. So when I get into bed I read a detective story for five-or-ten minutes. I know the detective story is of no great importance and it pushes out of my mind all these anxious cares. So when I switch out the light my mind is blank, and I go right to sleep. This is a good gift of God to me.

RRJ — Your wife has been a vital part of your life for many years. Tell us how you met Kit and how your life together began.

JIP — My wife, Kit, was a Welsh girl whom I met in a conference center (a camp site you would call it) at Pentecost in 1952. The conference was a get-together of the two Christian Unions of the London hospital. I was there because a friend

of mine at Wycliffe Hall, the seminary where I was studying, had double booked himself for ministry that weekend, so he gave me the hospital conference. I tell people I shouldn't have been there, because if my friend hadn't been so careless he would have been there. And Kit shouldn't have been there either because as a nurse she was rostered to be on the ward over the weekend. That commitment would have kept her away from the conference; but when she reported for duty that morning her ward sister saw that she had an inflamed eye, which might be infectious, and told her, "You must go off the ward and not come back until that eye inflammation is gone." So, with a few hours notice she packed her bag and came to the conference. There we were, and we just met. She was one of the people who welcomed me and we talked a bit. I remember walking with her on a Saturday afternoon and seeing her kick off her shoes and walk barefoot, which in a mild way, was intriguing to me. Then came Sunday afternoon, time for us all to go home, so we said good-bye and that seemed to be the end of it. But that night I couldn't sleep because I couldn't get her out of my mind. I realized something pretty drastic had happened. I can remember getting up at about 2:00 a.m. to read Proverbs 31 in the hope that it would sort me out, but I could see her in every verse. The only thing to do, therefore, was to devise a respectable and responsible reason for getting in touch with her and maintaining our acquaintance. I knew already from experience the truth of Kierkegaard's words: "Suddenness is an offense to womanhood." But I knew right away that this woman was it, and something must be done.

R R J — So was it love at first sight?

J I P — I guess the realization of it didn't come until forty-eight hours after it had happened. Call it the depth-charge effect.

R R J — You said that you had to arrange a reasonable way to see her. Tell us more.

J I P — I wrote and asked her for help in setting up a vacation in Wales with a senior friend. We used to have walking holidays, and we wanted to go to Wales for this one. I think she saw through it.

R R J — But she accepted the invitation [Laughter]?

J I P — Yes, she accepted. She answered the letter and we kept writing. Then in October, when I was back at Oxford, she came to see me for one day and then a second day, and then I went to London to spend a third day with her, and then two days before Christmas we got engaged. Our marriage is fifty years old in 2004.

R R J — You have spent your life as an evangelical theologian, both in teaching and writing, with the last twenty-five years in Canada. Recently there has been considerable upheaval in your diocese. We have readers who are Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Lutherans, etc. (i.e., they've remained, like you, in the older mainline denominations). They, like others, would be interested to know how this present crisis has impacted you personally.

J I P — The Diocese of New Westminster, which includes the city of Vancouver where I reside, has for its bishop a man named Michael Ingham. Ten years before he became bishop he was a parish clergyman in the diocese. Someone who knew him in those days said that even then he was excessively anxious to see homosexuals received and regarded in the church in a way that was totally on a par with the way heterosexual believers were received and regarded.

R R J — You mean "practicing" homosexuals, of course?

J I P — Yes, "practicing" homosexuals. Vancouver has many of them; it is the San Francisco of Canada. Eleven years ago Ingham was elected bishop. Three years ago he accepted the motion, which I am sure was put forward in the diocesan

synod with his personal encouragement, that the bishop should arrange for the blessing of same sex unions. The motion just scraped through with less than a one-percent majority. There was a further vote two years down the road and the majority slightly increased. In 2002, Michael Ingham sent a circular to the clergy saying he wished to act on the synod's two votes and institute the blessing of homosexual couples as part of the standard practice of the diocese. The Evangelicals got together and told him before the synod that this was unacceptable to us. The synod asked him to go ahead, and we Evangelicals (eight congregations and thirteen clergy, I think), having foreseen this, acted as a group. Our spokesman stood up and said that since what had been accepted by the synod and the bishop contradicted the gospel as Paul states it in 1 Corinthians 6, we were no longer in communion with the synod and the bishop and we walked out. This was our way of protesting and of telling the world that our official leadership ought to be under discipline for such a scandalous decision.

R R J — What has happened now since this statement was made publicly by the evangelical group?

J I P — When we walked out we organized ourselves as the Anglican Communion in New Westminster, a grand title for a small group, but one meant to show that it was the bishop and the diocese, not we, that were now out of step with true Anglicanism. We imposed financial sanctions. The diocese gets no money from us. We have appealed to the Episcopate of the Anglican Church of Canada and to the Anglican Episcopate all around the world. Meanwhile, the first blessing of a homosexual couple has taken place.

R R J — Was this the first such blessing in a Canadian diocese?

J I P — Yes. And it has an official status which makes it the first public blessing of a same sex union anywhere in the Anglican communion.

R R J — So you have appealed to both the Anglican Communion of Canada and to the worldwide communion as well. What has been their response to your appeal?

J I P — Of the thirty-eight provinces in the Anglican Communion, through their primates—archbishops that is—some twenty have made statements condemning Michael Ingham's action. Half a dozen of them have declared themselves out of communion with Michael Ingham and our diocese.

R R J — These are the Anglican primates from around the world?

J I P — Yes, they are. Most of them are from provinces fairly near the equator. These include the primates of the West Indies, three from Africa, and several from Asia and South America. All of them have come out in solidarity against Michael Ingham's action. In the province of which the New Westminster Diocese is a part, the province of British Columbia, two of the dioceses have declared themselves out of communion similarly with Michael Ingham and the synod and thus have lined up with us. It is a kind of stand-off situation. The bishop probably didn't anticipate that we would behave as we have done. He certainly doesn't want to appear in the history books as the man who split his diocese over insisting on blessing same sex unions, so he hasn't withdrawn the licenses of the clergy, although of course it would be open to him to do that. He has, so I believe, been told that if he attempts to withdraw our licenses a legal injunction to stop him doing that will be sought because his and the synod's action in effect changes the doctrine of the Canadian Anglican Church, which can only be lawfully changed by General Synod.

R R J — Would Canada have only one primate, and is he sympathetic to Michael Ingham or to your concern?

J I P — There is only one and he is totally sympathetic to Michael Ingham. His retirement is near.

RRJ — Hasn't Canada already legally approved same-sex marriage?

JIP — That is so. It has only happened very recently.

RRJ — My reading of this is that as recently as ten years ago the laws of Canada were pressed on this issue and there was no real support for it at all. Is that correct? This has happened in the space of less than ten years. This would interest readers in the United States since we have had a recent Supreme Court decision that potentially opens the door to further federal court revisions that will almost surely follow. Is this a fair analysis?

JIP — That is a fair analysis of Canada. A point which bears on the whole matter is something that shocked me when we got to Canada in 1979. Already Canada was giving full legal status to common law marriages. If you do that you can't really argue strongly against giving recognition to same-sex unions. Already the reality of marriage, as Scripture defines it, has been undermined.

RRJ — I would say that the same thing in the United States is true. Common law marriage is, in fact, the foundation socially and morally to this. The higher the percentage of common law marriages that exist, the more likely it is that same-sex marriages will be embraced socially and legally. The reason for this is that the whole definition to marriage has been altered.

JIP — I think that's right.

RRJ — I would like to connect this to the appointment of Rowan Williams as the archbishop of Canterbury. For the sake of those who do not know, Rowan Williams' position on this same-sex union question is much debated. He celebrated in Wales a same-sex union. Is that not true?

JIP — What he did was to ordain a man to the priesthood who he knew was a practicing homosexual. Rowan Williams' theology is liberal theology. He is a fairly conservative liberal, for sure, but he is most definitely a liberal. Liberal theologians do not regard the teaching of Scripture as decisive for us in later generations, and liberal theologians always believe that no question in theology is ever finally settled since there is always more to be said. Rowan Williams' personal position is that in light of what homosexual people are claiming these days about their own identity and fulfillment, Christians need to rethink their inherited attitude to homosexuality. But he has also said that now that he is Archbishop of Canterbury he is going to abide by the decision of the Lambeth Conference of 1998 which voted very heavily (something like 75-80 percent), for a document that ruled out homosexual lifestyles as acceptable for Christians. Williams is over a barrel really. He seems to speak out of both sides of his mind, and therefore out of both sides of his mouth. There may be a split in world Anglicanism over this issue. You can't rule that out.

RRJ — But if there is a division, and this is important for people to understand, numerically the larger part of Anglicanism, which is outside of North America and Great Britain, would still be sound on this issue. The larger part of worldwide baptized, practicing, Anglican believers would be correct on this issue and would oppose the hierarchy. Again, we are talking about south of the equator. I think this is striking, and very encouraging. Because of the success of the missionary enterprise of the nineteenth and early twentieth century and because of the work of the Spirit of God in revival these mission churches have become the citadels of orthodoxy in worldwide Anglicanism in the later twentieth century and early twenty-first century.

JIP — That is quite correct, and it is thus something for which to thank God.

RRJ — I would like to pursue the question of your continued involvement in the Anglican church because you have been concerned over the years about separatism and sectarianism. You have written quite a bit about issues that relate to these matters and the tendency of evangelical theology to produce these harmful ways of thought and practice. You have retained a Reformed and evangelical theology and you have stayed in the Anglican church. This communion might face a division, yet you do not see yourself as being part of the cause of that division at all. Rather you are standing for historic Anglican orthodoxy. In principle you are not a sectarian. Talk to me about what that means for you in practice as a non-separatist Evangelical who relates to the whole Christian church and tradition.

JIP — I want to say first that, as an Anglican, I maintain that the heritage of the Anglican church has in it more truth and wisdom than the heritage of any other denominational body or tradition in Christendom. That is the first reason why I have stayed with it for as long as I have. If people ask me, "Why do you remain in the Anglican church worldwide when there is so much turmoil and trouble?" I respond that I remain an Anglican today for the sake of what the Anglican church might be tomorrow if people like me bear a faithful testimony and pray as Christians should when the church is in low-water.

RRJ — Then you really do believe in reformation and revival, don't you?

JIP — I very definitely believe in reformation and revival. I am heartened to reflect on the way the Anglican church worldwide has been a mother of revivals ever since the eighteenth century. There has been a whole series of them, but they have often been disowned by Anglican authorities so that they have not had the publicity and recognition of their significance which they deserve. But that is what has happened. As an Evangelical, however, I am a beneficiary and a trustee of



If people ask me, "Why do you remain in the Anglican church worldwide when there is so much turmoil and trouble?" I respond that I remain an Anglican today for the sake of what the Anglican church might be tomorrow if people like me bear a faithful testimony and pray as Christians should when the church is in low-water.

the gospel of Jesus Christ as set forth in the New Testament and everyone in the world who shares this same faith is my brother in the Lord. My concern, my range of vision here, attempts to be worldwide—it is the church of Christ in this present world of which I am part and which I seek to serve. And it is the case, therefore, that wherever there are Evangelicals, I recognize them as my brothers and sisters in the closest sense. They are the people with whom I have the closest fellowship, closer fellowship than I have with a lot of Anglicans I would have to confess. And when I think about church alignments and relationships with parachurch groups and particular causes, I certainly try to avoid that narrowing of interest which is the essence of sectarianism. Sectarianism says, "Within the professing church of Christ there are only a limited number of people or a limited number of causes that I am interested in. I don't bother with the rest. That is the spirit of sectarian separation even if it isn't acted out in terms of formally withdrawing from a larger denomination.

RRJ — It borders on becoming a "special interest" kind of Christianity, doesn't it?

J I P — Oh yes, all sectarianism is most definitely “special interest” thinking and living. It is a narrowing of focus which you can’t justify from the New Testament. The Lord Jesus is the Savior of all Christian people and his concern is for the whole of his church, and mine must be also. To compromise the truth of the gospel would dishonor him and it would be in every way scandalous. I hope I never do that. I certainly labor to keep a clear conscience at that point. When one is rubbing shoulders with Christians in the same denomination who have, as it appears, compromised the truth—liberals and such—one can’t have much fellowship with them. Indeed, you have to tell them frankly that you can’t have fellowship with them as they are. I have sought to do that over the years by what I say in public and by things that I’ve written. But this painful state of affairs doesn’t alter the fact that the Anglican heritage is a very rich one. I want to see it come to life again, and I work and I pray for that.

R R J — There is a sense in which your ecclesiology is rooted in the realization that the real world in which we actually live is a fallen world. It is not driven by abstract idealism for a pure church, but by a realistic longing to get beyond the evils you see. Thus you can appreciate the Puritans. They were seeking to purify the church from the evils that they saw and so to further its reformation. In the case of the Puritans they were pushed out of the church, or ejected, in one particular historical case. Then there was the development of other types of ecclesiology that emphasized the purity of a movement, the purity of this particular effort. In a way, that tended to separate the church even more. It seems to me that you want to recognize that we will always have a church that is mixed, at least to some extent, if we remain in this real world. Yet we must be faithful to the gospel within this very real world community.

J I P — There is a mainstream of orthodoxy that starts with the historic patristic creeds. Add to them the Reformation confessions and then add to them the whole corpus of Bible-based, gospel-centered, Christ-honoring theology that the

Christian church has produced through the ages. That’s the mainline of Christian development, and I seek to identify that line and stay with it. Granted, churches that adhere to this theological mainline will be mixed.

R R J — You once referred to yourself in a *Christianity Today* editorial as a theologian who understood your work to be much like that of a plumber. I’ve never forgotten that. Tell me what you meant by that and why you used that analogy.

J I P — Plumbers clear pipes and stop leaks. I don’t want the gospel to leak out of the church, so I try to stop leaks that would allow that to happen. I also want there to be a steady flow of the water of life from Scripture into the church, into the hearts of God’s people, so I clear the pipes when there are ideas around that would obstruct the flow of the truth of God which enlivens and sustains. I try to clear all such sludge out of the way. In controversy, therefore, my concern is constantly pastoral. I write about truth. I try to clear away untruth and un-wisdom so that the life of God, through the Word of God, by means of the Spirit of God, will be as full and rich a reality for the people of God as it can be.

R R J — You were deeply involved in the process that came to be known as “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” (ECT). There have since been several more developments in this process, with statements and books that followed from the ECT committee. The second document was “The Gift of Salvation,” and the third looked at Scripture and authority. (There is a further statement on the church that is coming, I believe.) You have been deeply involved in this entire process as a Protestant Evangelical. You have also been criticized by more than one Protestant for this involvement. You have also been criticized for what some see as theological compromise in this whole process. Tell us about the ECT process and why you’ve done this work, and what did you want to accomplish by it all? And, what do you think has *actually* been accomplished positively by this process?

J I P — The purpose of ECT, which is an ongoing experience, is to build as broad and solid a platform as we can, to stand side-by-side for Catholics and Evangelicals not only uphold God's standards in society, but also to evangelize and nurture, that is to bear a common shared pastoral testimony, and engage in shared pastoral ministry. You're perfectly right to say that there are some Evangelicals who can't envisage anything like that at all. They think we are off our head to be contemplating it ourselves. We, on the other hand, see plenty of reasons why at this time in the world's history and the church's development we should get together to tell the world that Jesus Christ is the Savior of everybody who believes. We also want to help those who make a commitment to Jesus Christ to get into the basics of the Christian life. I have a dream [I don't know whether it will ever come to full fruition, of a basic Christian nurture course] of a kind of catechism course in effect and substance (perhaps two years long), that would postpone the decision that both Catholics and Evangelicals will sooner or later have to make as to which church they are going to ally themselves with. I think initial nurture, postponing the question, can well be done, in a fellowship of persons who believe the Bible and know and love and worship the Lord Jesus and who know what it is to help other people along that same path of discipleship that they are taking themselves, and who recognize as Vatican II helped Roman Catholics to do, that every Christian community is the church of Christ in some form. The project goes on. No compromise is involved. Where either Roman Catholics or Protestants affirm something that the other group doesn't believe, we note that as a point to which we can't extend our platform. But we are looking for the common ground, the common convictions, which will enable us to do evangelism and pastoral work together, just as far as we can. In that sense cooperation in mission is what ECT is all about, as was said in the very first ECT statement. We haven't lost sight of that in our more recent work.

R R J — That cooperation is an informal process. This is not a church process as you have noted as well.

J I P — Yes, that is quite right. It isn't a church process but a freelance venture by individuals who share a common concern. This is similar to the functioning of charismatic fellowships, through which charismatic priests and evangelical ministers met together and encouraged one another. And it is also similar to what priests and ministers do in many other kinds of fellowships, and I applaud them for that.

R R J — I have recently been reading the work of Philip Jenkins, the author of the very important book, *The Next Christendom*. His most recent book is about anti-Catholicism. He sees anti-Catholicism as one of the last unspoken prejudices in the Christian world. I personally grew up in a cultural context that was anti-Catholic. I wonder how much of the reaction against what you and I are saying is a reflection of an anti-Catholicism that we haven't yet worked through both emotionally and theologically. We even can use the Reformed tradition to feed this anti-Catholicism if we are not careful. We can use the battles fought five centuries ago to stoke the fires for modern hostilities. As a matter of fact, those battles are different. Do you perceive this kind of anti-Catholicism?

J I P — Yes! [Laughter].

R R J — I suppose I've asked a long question and what I got was a very short answer.

J I P — Well, you've stated all the terms of the answer in the question so I don't think I have much to add.

R R J — You are aware that we have expressed some interest in the so-called "The New Perspective on Paul" in this Journal. I think we have tried to show that the written work of scholars like E. P. Sanders and James D. G. Dunn is valuable, while on the whole it is not completely profitable to Evangelicals. At the same time we have had more positive things to say, with some cautions, about the work of N. T. Wright, especially on the history of Jesus, the New Testament's credibility, and the

theology of Paul. We interviewed him several years ago and we've interacted with his work. My impression is that you would have some reservations about some of what he is saying theologically about Paul. But it would also be my impression that you would not feel this is a difference that should divide the body of Christ, at a deep level and that we ought to have this discussion in an honest and open way. Tell us what you see as the value of this discussion and then tell us what your concerns might be.

J I P — I'm going to give you a brief answer. This is a complex field of academic debate and to deal with it adequately would take quite a time. With regard to Paul's thought it boils down to this. The new view says when Paul insists Christian salvation is apart from the works of the law, and negates the claim of the law upon Christian people, he's writing to Gentile converts and making the point that Gentile and Jewish believers are on the same footing in Christ. The law of the Old Testament was the divider which marked Jews off from Gentiles and by implication, since it was the law of God, it gave the Jews a status which the Jews could not share with any other people. N. T. Wright, more than E. P. Sanders and James D. G. Dunn, recognizes that in Romans there is also the central thrust which evangelical exegetes have always found in it, namely that Paul is answering the question, "How may I find peace, new life, with God?" My starting point has to be that I recognize I am a sinner under God's wrath and judgment. I think Tom Wright goes with the new view to the extent that he sees the question of finding peace with a holy God as the second concern of Paul in Romans. He thinks the prime concern of Paul is to celebrate the *unity of Jew and Gentile* in Christ. As long as both these concerns are set side-by-side I do not think a great deal of energy need be spent arguing about which comes first, though I personally go with the older evangelical exegetes who inferred from Romans 1-5 that what is primary for Paul is the believing sinner's justification through Christ, here explained in A-B-C terms. Paul first states that the whole human race is under condemnation, and then tells us how we

may all find peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ. So, I leave the matter there. I would only be troubled by a "new view" person if they wanted to *deny* that Paul is talking about how, from the position of being under the wrath of God, a person may find peace through Christ.

R R J — If the "new view" is used to deny forensic categories altogether then it has real problems and it is dangerous. But so long as it keeps the essential issue clear it is not a threat. It seems to me that it retains it in various ways, some better than others, as you indicated. In this case one writer is not the same as the next so each must be read for what he really says.

J I P — That is true.

R R J — I think what is happening, Jim, is that there are younger Evangelicals who read these writers and who are making proper distinctions between them and borrowing what they see as good in some of them. But some of our older evangelical friends are attacking the whole "new view" enterprise as harmful and dangerous. They see it as an attack on the Reformation and then you have "good guys" and "bad guys" in a battle. I think this is a minefield that is filled with potential division, especially among Reformed Evangelicals. I want to engage the discussion but I don't want to bring about more strife. We need to be very careful here. I am concerned that on both sides of this more recent debate we have zealots who cannot hear the other side very well. We need to listen and engage such discussion yet hold on to what is central in the gospel.

J I P — I guess you are right. I realize that young scholars with good brains will feel their oats, and when they get into disputed territory they will be tempted to over-argue and vindicate their position one-sidedly. There will always be a danger, too, of differences of opinion making for alienation of affection. I think it was some Puritan who put it that way. New divisions will arise but my hope is that in this particular discussion, which is certainly on a matter of prime importance, enough of

us will keep involving ourselves in it with a unifying purpose in to prevent it from becoming an occasion of deep division.

R R J — I think readers would be advised to carefully examine the entries on *justification* and *righteousness* in *The New Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (InterVarsity Press) that is edited by you, Sinclair Ferguson and David F. Wright. These two entries are written by Bishop N. T. Wright. If readers will read these two entries carefully they will get a succinct explanation of his views and see clearly that he is not denying the essential truths of the Reformed position on the gospel.

Theology is at its best when we learn to listen to the whole church and when we carefully seek to understand the Scripture with faithful minds and hearts. There is always more to be done in every age.

Many who have read your work for years wonder, "Will you ever write a systematic theology as such?" It appears, at this point, that you may not undertake such a large project, but how do you respond to this query? And, what else will you write, God willing, in the coming days? What interests has the Lord laid upon your mind and heart with regard to this matter, and what will you yet seek to give the church through your gift of writing?

J I P — I am not going to tip my hand too far. Only a fool would do that. But as for a systematic theology, there are already quite a number of evangelical systematic theologies written by professors, presumably on the basis of their class notes for teaching students. All of them are evidently written as resources for clergy or for people studying to get their M. Div. degree in a seminary. We have as many of them as we reason and thus I see no need to add to their number because, as a mainstream Reformed thinker, I haven't anything fresh to say that these people haven't already said.

On the other hand, if I am given more time, I would like to survey the whole of Christian doctrine at what I call the "higher catechism level"—the level which one addresses thoughtful laypeople who are not technically educated in the-

ology but who want to know their faith accurately and to have a solid grounding in Christian basics. I've written two books that make me think that I may be able to help those people. Both books have addressed such people and been welcomed by them. One of them is, *Knowing God*, and the other is, *Concise Theology*. The second covers all the ground, but very, very briefly.

R R J — I would assume that those two books have sold as well as any similar books on theology written by evangelical scholars in our lifetime. *Knowing God* must have sold the best of all your books. For many of us it fits the category of a classic. I would think, *Concise Theology*, has also done quite well, though it has been out for only a few years now.

J I P — Yes, *Knowing God* has done the best. But *Concise Theology* has also sold very well.

R R J — This underscores the concern you and I both share so deeply, that is: "How do you communicate good theology to thoughtful Christians in the church so that there is a bridge between the academy and the church?"

J I P — That's exactly right. When I talk about the "higher catechism" level and when I describe myself, as I sometimes do, as a catechist that's what I am referring to. I want to speak directly to laypeople who want to be stretched a bit in understanding their faith. By all means let the clergy read what I write over their shoulders, so to speak, but most of my stuff is addressed to the maturing layperson.

R R J — This raises a very important question to me. You are a very serious theologian. You have read major academic works of theology. You have studied biblical theology, systematic theology and historical theology at the highest level and you keep a faithful interest in reading the text of the Bible very carefully. You are conversant with early church theology, medieval theology, Reformation theology, Roman Catholic

theology, evangelical theology, and even liberal and twentieth-century theology. However, you have made it your ambition to not write a new academic theology but rather to speak intentionally to the church. You seem, to me at least, to be quite comfortable with this role. You can converse with the academy, and sometimes write for the academy, but you happily write most of your work for a different audience. This is not by accident. How did you arrive at this understanding of your proper work?

J I P — When my sense of vocation to ordained ministry crystallized I was very clear that I was being called by God to be a shepherd to his people. A shepherd's first business is to see that the flock finds food. That measure of crystallizing my aim was something that happened before the year that I spent, as a very young man, teaching theology in theological college between my classics degree and my theology degree. But that activity, which I enjoyed and I think performed effectively, convinced me that, within my call to be a shepherd of God's people in general, theological education of adults and future ministers was going to be a central element. Then I became a writer by accident, simply through answering requests that I would produce articles for this and that publication. Out of one request for an article came the book, *"Fundamentalism and the Word of God"*. That was my first book and it sold twenty-thousand copies in its first year. So Packer was an arrived author overnight, and that convinced me that writing books in which I offered material for helping adult Christians mature was also going to be a constant ingredient in my ministry. I still write for the people to whom *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* was addressed. They are, essentially, maturing lay folk, rather than clergy and theologians in the professional guild. And I hope to be doing that as long as life lasts.

R R J — I was thinking, as you said this, that throughout the history of the church the greatest writing theologians were writing *from* and *to* the church. This was true for John Calvin and it was very true for the greatest writing theologian of the

twentieth century, Karl Barth, who was a pastor and who always wrote from that perspective. There is a great tradition of writing theology with an eye always upon the people of God as the sheep of Christ, isn't there?

J I P — Yes, there is, and that is one reason why I am very desirous of holding on to it in my own writing ministry. This puts me on the same wavelength, in intention if not in achievement, with people like Calvin, and Augustine, and so many other wise men before and since. That's what I feel I am called to do. In the guild of professional teachers of theology, technicalities, of one sort or another, are the constant stock and trade, and I confess I often find that wearisome.

R R J — Where did this guild lose its way? The tradition we are talking about is ancient; it is not new. What you have been trying to do has been done throughout the centuries and yet some in this guild would look at what you've done and say, "Well, you have your guild card, but you are not a major player because you've been writing for these ordinary people in the church."

J I P — The guild became a reality when seminaries became clergy factories and the professors in the seminaries were no longer expected to be anything other than professors in the seminaries. There was a time when seminary professors were people who had won their spurs in pastoral ministry before being appointed professors and they never lost their broader pastoral identity. Certainly over the past fifty years, and I limit myself to that because that is the period that I have observed first-hand. What has been happening in the world of the seminaries is that able people who have gone through university doctoral programs and have received good doctorates, have been snapped up straightaway into teaching. But the pastoral vocation passed them by, or they passed it by. They became pure academics. The loss to the church, I think, was greater than the gain.

R R J — So theology became an intellectual discipline pursued the way any other academic and intellectual discipline was but there was very little connection to the life of people who needed this theology to mature as Christians.



The older view was that theology (theologia) is a word that we should use to mean not orthodoxy in the pages of books but truth and wisdom in the heart and minds of God's people. Theologia was what the Holy Spirit produces as the intellectual aspect of his work of sanctification, and in some of us theologia is produced in a form which enables and fits and equips us to pass it on to others so that it may also become reality in them.

J I P — That's right. That theology should have become an intellectual discipline detached from the life of the church is part of the legacy of the Enlightenment and you can trace out the way that this state of affairs from the eighteenth century developed through the nineteenth into the twentieth. The older view was that theology (*theologia*) is a word that we should use to mean not orthodoxy in the pages of books but truth and wisdom in the heart and minds of God's people. *Theologia* was what the Holy Spirit produces as the intellectual aspect of his work of sanctification, and in some of us *theologia* is produced in a form which enables and fits and equips us to pass it on to others so that it may also become reality in them. That is the understanding of theology that animates me; that is the Puritan understanding of theology. That is the

understanding that I hope to maintain and embody as long as I am able to go on writing.

R R J — My last question is a bit of a personal one. For twenty-one years I served three local churches as a pastor, the last sixteen in the same congregation. Over the course of my pastoral life I think the first time I heard your name was through your books. Then I had the opportunity in the setting of several conferences to meet you. As I recall, somewhere along the line, about twenty years ago, I invited you into my local congregation to speak, which you graciously did. You not only accepted the invitation to preach but along the way you also spent time in our home and later you corresponded with me, showing me great respect, honor and encouragement. As a result of all of that, when it came time for me to transition from being a settled pastor to being the president of Reformation & Revival Ministries and ministering to pastors and people much more widely, in a way that aimed to build the bridges for the very theology we have been talking about here, you were there again. You were coming to the Wheaton area to speak on a Sunday evening at Windsor Park, a senior-living village nearby, at the invitation of our mutual friend, Wendell Hawley. But I had written you and told you that I was going to have a commissioning service on a Sunday afternoon, and to my utter surprise, you wrote back and said that you might be able to attend that service. You did come and you spoke and gave a charge and laid hands on me, along with many other ministers who were my friends. Thus, from the very beginning of this ministry, and even long before it formally began, you were part of the development of what God was doing in my life and labors. Right down to the present you have been a friend to me and to this ministry. My simple question, against this background, is: "Why have you done this?" Maybe you do this for many others, but why? What is behind this kind of action? What has motivated you?

J I P — Well, the fact is that anything one is given to see is for sharing, and our friendship has developed because the things

that animate and excite you and me are essentially the same. I was delighted to have the privilege of commending you for the work that you are engaged in now, the work of seeking reformation and revival together in the church as a simple project. You and I both agree that you can't have either deeply or healthily without the other. Right from the start I liked the way you were shaping up the project and I certainly wanted to be there and have the opportunity of "commissioning you," which is the Christian word, or what the secular would call "giving you a good sendoff," I think. And I rejoice at the way God has blessed your work over the years.

R R J — Well, my dear friend, you have once again honored me by spending time with me discussing these various questions. You have also honored and encouraged our many readers as well. Thanks for all you've given to me, to this ministry, and to our readers by way of this very enlightening and encouraging interview.