

In *Christ and Chaos*, Gerald Borchert tackles a host of pressing ethical issues from a biblical perspective. Always irenic and focused on the love of God for humans and humans' love for one another, Borchert sees ethics as dealing with the pervasive chaos prevalent in the world, including contemporary culture. The topics he addresses—from equality to eternity to divorce and remarriage to what it means to be a Christian—are relevant and handled with the care of an expert surgeon. This engaging and lively book deserves to be read and studied by anyone who wants to know and live by what the Bible teaches about life in the twenty-first century.

Eric W. Bolger

*Vice President for Academic Affairs
Dean and Professor of Philosophy-Religion
College of the Ozarks*

I truly like the concept of this book. “Change is inevitable. You either change or you become irrelevant.” This statement has increasingly come to represent contemporary thinking. But how do Christians and the Christian church with its time-honored truths respond to this milieu? Borchert understands what we are all facing and the confusion and chaos that have resulted from too much change—and such rapid change at that! Many long-held values, traditions, practices, and beliefs are under increasing attack. There is a desperate need for guidance from trusted and experienced thinkers who understand the Bible and its message. As a leader in the Christian community for many years, Borchert is the ideal person to help us grapple with issues that perplex us all and he does so by leading us to understand that grace, not dogmatism, enables us to be “children of light” amidst the darkness that surrounds us. Every topic in this book is of utmost relevance to being a Christian in today’s world, but the issues are presented in a warm and caring manner that seeks the leading of the Spirit rather than confrontation and controversy. For that reason alone, this book is a must read.

Harry H. Hiller

*Director, Cities and the Olympics Project
Faculty Professor of Urban Sociology
University of Calgary*

In this extraordinary volume, “Dr. B” Borchert provides us with a wise pastoral response to the questions that churches ask pastors and our culture asks Christians. He approaches difficult issues in a way that combines his love for the Lord, his wit as a teacher, his deep knowledge of the Bible, and his role as a parent. He explains difficult topics conversationally—like a father to a son and a pastor to his friends. Dr. B courageously addresses complex topics the way the book of Proverbs equips future generations—from parent to child. He avoids clichés and sound bites and provides biblical truth for pastors and believers to use whether they are at the Lord’s table or at the kitchen table. He addresses cultural and political issues the way Jesus dealt with argumentative Pharisees—with story, grace, humor, and insight. He probes us with questions of which we had not thought until we read the book, and we learn even more

about his remarkable journey as a follower of Jesus. *Christ and Chaos* calms the stormy waters of Christian conflict by providing helpful conversation starters that allow us to listen, grow, and reconcile others to Christ.

William D. Shiell
President
Professor of Pastoral Theology
Northern Baptist Theological Seminary

Christ and Chaos is a bold book that does not view the person and work of Jesus Christ as distinctly isolated from the chaos of our twenty-first-century world. Thankfully, author Gerald Borchert places them together where they belong. Christ is not afraid of chaos, and chaos continually confronts Christ. This is the realization that can speak volumes in our broken world. Borchert does not offer easy answers, but insightful questions that, in turn, lead the reader to deeper understanding and faithful living. His brilliance as a world-class New Testament scholar combined with the love of a spiritual father is a rare combination that makes this book stand apart. I recommend it to anyone desiring to face courageously the ethical issues of this generation with both human intelligence and Christian grace.

Constance M. Cherry
Professor of Worship and Pastoral Ministry
School of Theology and Ministry
Indiana Wesleyan University

I give the chapter on homosexuality very high marks. Borchert is highly respectful of Scripture and tradition; keenly aware of ongoing discoveries in human makeup; kindly insistent on a gracious orthopraxy calling believers to treat all persons lovingly, as Jesus would; prudently subtle, yet unmistakably Jesus-like in his approach to the issue and response to the vulnerable in our midst. History will smile kindly on the fair treatment of a difficult matter. Superb work!

Randall O'Brien
President
Professor of Old Testament
Carson-Newman University

Gerald Borchert has a long history of writing books relevant to the church in the current generation. *Christ and Chaos* is no different. Through a series of letters to his pastor sons and “friends,” Borchert takes up a whole host of ethical questions that contemporary Christians and non-Christians are asking today, from equality to marriage and divorce to homosexuality to Christians and government among others. Drawing upon decades of Scripture study, teaching in theological schools, participation in church and society, and his legal training, Borchert has crafted a book of questions and answers that show a great deal of wisdom, humility, and faithfulness to Scripture. Some of the “answers” are tentative, leading the reader into further

questions, but Borchert desires for his readers to engage the questions, the Christian Scriptures, and people in dialogue, to move toward a faithful and ethical approach to life and the chaos that face us every day.

*R. Jackson Painter
Professor of New Testament
Simpson University*

Christ and Chaos is a very insightful book, addressing many current issues that confront Christians. Focused around a series of questions addressed to his two sons and his readers identified as “friends,” Borchert’s responses are based on a lifetime of personal, pastoral, and teaching experiences that are steeped in biblical analysis and understanding. He is candid and transparent concerning the thorny issues to which he calls Christians as we seek understanding and the “transforming power of God that overcomes pettiness, selfishness, and conflict.” His responses on how to apply biblical principles to our divisive political situations provide pertinent, practical advice on the way Christians should interact with current circumstances and how to apply biblical principles to our thoughts and actions. Employing both Old Testament and New Testament teachings, he explains how to approach the stigma often associated with divorce from a biblically informed position. He also supplies a well-reasoned and cautionary way to deal with the highly controversial issue of homosexuality. Throughout the work his questions are insightful and his thoughtful responses are perceptive and well-reasoned. He is eminently fair-minded, biblical, and Christlike in his explanations, while challenging readers to think through their own views on the issues confronting contemporary society.

*Charles W. Weber
Emeritus Professor of History
Wheaton College*

Some of the greatest scholars in history, from Socrates to Aquinas and beyond, have used pressing questions as the source and even architecture of their work. Asking questions and seeking answers is the foundation of sound critical thinking, the scientific method, even fruitful political discourse. Renowned biblical scholar Gerald L. Borchert employs this time-tested method to wrestle with complex ethical and moral questions facing our world today. Written as a father to his sons and friends, Borchert takes a compassionate, thoughtful, and principled pastoral approach, stimulating the reader to ask more questions about the issues he raises. He looks for biblically rooted responses that provide guidance, some practical and concrete, but some requiring an appropriate sacrificial commitment to following Jesus in the paths of righteousness, peace, joy, and love of God and humankind. This kind of discipleship and formation into Christlikeness is at the heart of worship renewal.

*James H. Hart
President
Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies*

Christ and Chaos reveals Gerald Borchert's heart for God and his desire for the church to be a place that exhibits the love of God. His conclusions sparked in me conversations about the nature of faith, the redemptive work of Christ, and the role we as followers of Christ play in God's mission. Borchert is one of those scholars who can connect the study of God's Word to the pastoral work of walking alongside others. Given the chaos around us, entering into a conversation about Christ in the midst of that chaos is something for which each of us should yearn! Dr. Borchert is a good conversation partner to have on the journey.

*Greg Henson
President
Sioux Falls Seminary*

Christ and Chaos offers concise responses to a host of ethical and philosophical questions that arise in discussions among contemporary Christians. As a veteran New Testament scholar and master teacher, Borchert draws on serious scholarship and experienced dialogue with both beginning and advanced students to formulate his interaction with the questions selected for this work. Encounter with its contents will greatly deepen the conversation.

*Charles Scalise
Senior Professor of Church History
Fuller Theological Seminary*

Using his "teaching handle," Dr. B shares his life-learning in the style of personal letters to his sons and friends. Unlike how C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape* gives advice to his young protégé Wormwood, Dr. Borchert's approach in *Christ and Chaos* is, among other things, biblically founded, critically reflective, pastorally focused, carefully nuanced, socially relevant, and respectful of diverse viewpoints. Although containing many delicious appetizers, there is here a plethora of compact yet dense meals that satisfy one's appetite for understanding how best to live a Christ-like life in a world of chaos and conflict. This is solid food, not fast food. It is founded on the solid meat of the Word, providing well-aged analyses that derive from a lifetime of preparation and application. Humbly sharing wisdom, his style equips believers to engage others respectfully and knowledgeably through dialogue, not diatribe, in hopes of building greater societal peace, security, and order.

*Ralph Korner
Dean and Associate Professor of Biblical Studies
Taylor Seminary*

Gerald L. Borchert

CHRIST

and

CHAOS

Biblical Keys to Ethical Questions

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All translations of the biblical texts in this work have been rendered from the Hebrew and Greek texts by the author, although he readily admits his thought processes have been influenced considerably by a combination of the King James and Revised Standard versions of the Bible. The nuances and his understandings, however, are his.



Webber Institute Books

Webber Institute Books (WIB) serves as the publishing arm of the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies (IWS). The Institute was founded by the late Robert E. Webber for the purpose of forming servant leaders in worship renewal with the perspective that “the way to the future necessarily runs through the past.” IWS is the only school in North America dedicated solely to graduate education in biblical foundations, historical development, theological reflection, and cultural analysis of worship. Its vision emphasizes that its graduates will “participate intentionally in the story of the Triune God” in order to “bring renewal in the local and global church by shaping life and ministry according to that story.” In scope it is “gospel-centered in nature and ecumenical in outlook, embracing and serving the whole church in its many expressions and variations.” Those interested in obtaining further information concerning the Institute should consult www.iws.edu.

Webber Institute books are published by agreement with Nurturing Faith (www.nurturingfaith.net) to provide a means for disseminating to the general public varying and differing views concerning the many aspects of worship and Christian life. The ideas expressed in these published materials wholly remain the views of the authors themselves and are not necessarily those of IWS or the publisher.

It is the prayerful concern of both IWS and WIB that the information contained in these works will stimulate further reflection and discussion. The results of such exchange of ideas hopefully will enhance worship renewal within the various segments of the Christian church. Moreover, in keeping with the hopes and dreams of founder Bob Webber, may all that is done through this publishing enterprise enable Christians to reject the narcissistic patterns prevalent in contemporary society and give the glory to God who sent Jesus, the Christ, to provide for human transformation and in concert provided humans with the divine triune presence through the Holy Spirit.

Robert Myers
General Editor

Gerald L. Borchert
Founding Editor

James Hart
President, IWS

Other Works by Gerald L. Borchert

- Today's Model Church*
(Roger Williams Press, 1971)
- Dynamics of Evangelism*
(Word Books, 1976)
- Paul and His Interpreters, TSF-IBR*
(InterVarsity, 1985)
- Spiritual Dimensions of Pastoral Care*
(Westminster Press, 1985)
- Discovering Thesalonians*
(Guideposts, 1986)
- Assurance and Warning*
(Broadman Press, 1986;
Word N Works, 2006)
- The Crisis of Fear*
(Broadman Press, 1988)
- "John" in *Mercer Commentary on the Bible*
(Mercer University Press, 1995, 1996)
- "John 1-11," "John 12-21"
in *New American Commentary*
(Broadman & Holman, 1996, 2002)
- "Galatians" in *Romans and Galatians,*
Cornerstone Biblical Commentary
(Tyndale House, 2007)
- Worship in the New Testament:
Divine Mystery and Human Response*
(Chalice Press, 2008)
- "Revelation" in *NLT Study Bible*
(Tyndale House, 2008, 2017)
- Jesus of Nazareth:
Background, Witnesses, and Significance*
(Mercer University Press, 2011)
- Assaulted by Grief:
Finding God in Broken Places*
(Mossy Creek Press, 2011)
- The Lands of the Bible: Israel, the Palestinian
Territories, Sinai & Egypt, Jordan,
Notes on Syria and Lebanon,
Comments on the Arab-Israeli Wars and the
Palestinian Refugees, The Clash of Cultures*
(Mossy Creek Press, 2011)
- The Lands of the Bible:
In the Footsteps of Paul and John*
(Mossy Creek Press, 20012)
- Portraits of Jesus for an
Age of Biblical Illiteracy*
(Smyth & Helwys, 2016)
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(Tyndale House, 1996, 2004, etc.)

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Acknowledgments

I am sincerely indebted to my oldest son, Mark, who field-tested many of my questions and answers in his church while I had the opportunity to observe the interaction with the members in those sessions.

You will also note that I sent my writing to scholars from representative disciplines and various representative schools to ask for their responses to my work. I have attached their impressions at the beginning of this work. I am deeply indebted to them for their responses.

I prayerfully trust that you, the readers, will find my work to be stimulating and that the questions herein will push you to reflect even more on the questions concerning life that I have proposed. I welcome your responses, and I offer here a preliminary “Thank you” for any reflections you might be willing to share with me.

Of course, you will quickly recognize that I have a great indebtedness to my dear wife and companion, Doris, who has been my authentic partner in our family for many years as well as being a professor of Christian education—and I rejoice and am grateful that she continues to support me in my writing and teaching.

I also thank both of our two sons, Mark and Tim, who are the focus of my letters in this work. Both of them have constantly inspired us to be more authentic parents and they have asked innumerable questions in the course of these years. Not only have they posed their queries, but they also have genuinely helped us as parents in negotiating our answers. We watched them carefully as they sought to navigate their lives and as they have matured in their understanding of theology and life. “Thank you,” sons, for your immeasurable contributions to us as parents.

Then to our grandchildren—Elissa, Tim Jr., Seth, and Jessica—who are quickly assuming their roles in the next generation of adults, I dedicate this book to you with the prayer that each of you will continue to allow the Holy Spirit with the model of Jesus be the GPS for your decisions in life. And what I pray for the four of you, I especially pray for all young adults who have said an initial “yes” to Jesus and struggle to discover what that commitment means in the context of a world that is hurling questions at humans faster than answers seem to be available. Just remember that God’s Spirit is very much alive and desires to guide you into all truth (John 16:13).

Finally, I am grateful beyond words to both the editorial committee of Webber Institute Books for the unanimous approval of including my work in their Worship and Spirituality publications, as well as to the editors and production people at Nurturing Faith Inc. who have transformed my manuscript into a distinguished product.

A genuine “Thanks” to each of you for your kind spirit and dedicated work!

Biblical Keys to Ethical Questions¹

The Pervasiveness of Questions

Questions, Questions! Our world and our lives are filled with questions. Questions are at the heart of education. Perceptive students are filled with questions. Just try being a parent and attempting to escape being bombarded with the question, “Why?” You cannot be a person and not ask questions about the significance of your relationships. You cannot be a human and not have questions about life and its meaning. You cannot be a Christian and not have questions about God—indeed about the implications for how God works in the world and how you should live with God. Actually, questions frame our lives and motivate who we are and how we act.

Most people on earth have questions as they long for security, peace, and order. Yet this world is not a fairytale land. We may be wishing for a “live happily ever after” story to life but such a reality, the Bible says, awaits the new heaven and the new earth when the former things have passed away (Rev. 21:1). In the meantime, as we seek to live in our world where chaos and evil abound, we usually have scores of questions because genuine order to life and long-lasting tranquility are often hard to find. Even when we try to relax, our movies and television programs blast us with confusion, war, and violence—to say nothing of our daily news reports.

We may play a video clip of running water on our cell phones to calm our shattered nerves and stop those incessant questions, but we quickly thereafter awaken to the presence of chaos and confusion. It is, moreover, fascinating that our television sponsors have now come to recognize the reality of disorder that is present in most people’s lives and offer programs on how to clean up the clutter of our homes. Questions are inevitable when we seek to understand the chaos in our world and in our lives. And chaos raises the question of order and of ethical integrity.

Some readers will quickly recognize in *Christ and Chaos* that I interweave theological and ethical concerns. I would just as quickly respond that you are correct, but I would hasten to add that my main concern is not with doing traditional theology. Instead, my basic concern is with the task of living out the implications of our theology, and that is the reason I have focused this work primarily on ethical questions.

The Problem of Chaos and God's Goal of Harmony

Thus, although God has endowed humans with the gift of freedom, we seem to gravitate to chaos rather than order and to conflict rather than harmony. Families, communities, and nations that are known for harmony and integrity are often rare to find so that if and when we discover a modicum of both, they provide inspiration for our troubled world—and yes, a sound bite about such harmony and order might even make the evening news in the midst of all the troubles that are ever present.

Harmony is built upon love and caring and is sadly missing in our world today—but it is desperately needed, especially in our contemporary shattered existence. Although we may think that our current generations are more sophisticated and able to handle the challenges of life better than earlier ones, we may be more in need of psychosomatic assistance than the ancients because of our hollowness and fragmentation as humans.

So, I suggest that we ponder both the many questions I have in this little work and not dismiss too quickly the secret that lies just under the surface in the model command that Jesus gave to his disciples to love one another (John 13:34-35). There is, I suggest, much more hidden in that imperative than we may want to admit. It certainly is related to many of the issues of life that trouble us as humans. And strange as it may seem, in our narcissistic, me-centered society harmony, order, and integrity are actually regarded as “good news” because we all can sense that our current reality is badly shaken, broken, frustrated, anxious, divisive, and conflict-oriented.

Although the church of Jesus from the beginning was supposed to be known by love and what the New Testament calls *koinonia* (fellowship or community), I must sadly admit that sometimes it also models disorder and conflict while mouthing words of love and integrity. In spite of its human brokenness, the church does have a message for our chaotic world: God who made the world actually loves the world! That love is not merely a Greek virtue. Nor is that message merely a sugar coating on our fractured reality. Rather, it is the most

authentic message on this planet. In plain, unvarnished truth the message is that God actually sent his one and only Son to make a radical difference in this perplexing strife-torn world. That historical mission of God's envoy has been and continues to be genuinely transformative and actually regenerative.

Through this Son, God seeks to initiate a radical change in the perspectives of humans from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. This change is rooted in the unfathomable love that God has for humanity, and it is often mysteriously hidden or tucked among many of those members who compose Christ's body, which we call the church, and who seek diligently to model integrity in their lives as caring humans. Some of them may be poor, weak and unheralded, but they are stalwart models of ethical maturity.

The Reality of Human Frailty and the Divine Plan

In making this claim for such people in the Christian community, I admit that churches are mere human institutions and that Christians are beset with the inner turmoil and frustrations present in the wider humanity. Their members are very human in dealing with the questions about their reality. Yet I frequently discover striking examples of authentic love and order tucked in a Christian community that are born not out of human effort but out of the transforming power of God that overcomes pettiness, selfishness, and conflict. Furthermore, I firmly believe that humans do not need to live continually in a state of chaos because when they become correctly oriented to God, chaos can often mysteriously give way to the initiation of more order, harmony, and community. That is the reason I have sought here to publish some of my thoughts that were originally directed to my sons, Mark and Tim. I offer these thoughts now to you who are other members of God's children in Christ and to those who might just be intrigued to find out a little more about God's pattern for living above the chaos in our world.

For those who might be doubters or who think I might be in danger of presenting a rose-colored picture of the church, I would counter with: Just read my thoughts and you will soon realize that I am very much aware of the warts and wrinkles in the church. It is hardly perfect. It is indeed very human and frail. But mysteriously, when not expected, the Christian community can often surprise us at just how authentic, loving, and caring its people can be. So, when I critique the church and enumerate its weakness and participation in chaos, please recognize that I nevertheless thank God for birthing me into this marvelous company that is one of the great mysteries in the world. When

the church seems to be at its weakest, often then its people are revealed in their strength and vitality because then they become most dependent on their Master. So I welcome you to join me in pursuing the many vexing questions that confront our faith communities as we wrestle with difficult ethical (perhaps for you also theological) questions as we attempt to live authentically with Christ in the context of chaos—which surely enfolds all of us, both Christians and those who might wonder what it means to follow Christ.

The Author's Pilgrimage to Meaning and the Purpose of This Work

Concerning the authorship of this work, I should tell you briefly that I am a former lawyer and have been a pastor of both large and small churches, a seminary professor, an educational administrator, and a university professor. During nearly a decade I had the privilege of trying to answer scores of questions in a regular print forum for a Christian denomination while I was a dean in one of its seminaries. I must admit that I often brought home those questions and tried to think out my answers in our family context with my dear wife, who also has been a seminary professor, and with our two sons, both of whom have subsequently become pastors and have also occupied other roles. I usually attempted to anticipate many of their probing queries, but I was not always prepared for the depth to which they would push me in my responses. That, of course, is the joy of being a parent and seeking to answer questions.

During our sons' earlier years, we as a family read many books together so our sons were very familiar with their role of asking questions. Seeking answers to those questions has been one of the great experiences for our family, and it continues to be such when we get together or talk by phone. Please join me in considering at least some of the scores of questions I have raised in this work and that I believe can be crucial for our growth and maturing as Christians.

Some of the questions you may have already considered and answered to your satisfaction for the present. Some of them may challenge your presuppositions or your earlier conclusions and may need to be reconsidered. Some of the questions may require that you obtain further insight or information in order to be answered satisfactorily. Some of them may prove to be a little unsettling at the present time or may appear from your point of view to be very difficult to answer, and thus may have to remain tentative much longer.

Even though we are merely human and do not have complete answers in our search for meaning to these and other issues of life, wrestling with

their potential answers can lead all of us into a more authentic understanding of the ethical realities of life. And by the way, the world—especially the church—needs us to wrestle with such questions so that we can move beyond the simplistic answers that are frequently suggested by those around us. In turn, reflecting on them should help us to recognize the incredible nature of having been created by God to be responsible humans. I love to watch my students wrestle with such questions because I realize that the world and the church will be the recipients of their struggles, especially in this era when most of our answers are given to us in sound bites on television or in brief snippets in text messages on our cell phones!

With this background in mind, it should not be a great surprise to you that after having written more than a score of books and several hundred articles I continue to ask wrenching questions related to crucial ethical and theological issues in life. These questions seem to flow readily to my mind—and I trust to your mind also. So, like many teachers before me, seeking answers to questions usually brings other questions. That is the reason I have written this book and why I love teaching and trying to stimulate searching minds—especially among able younger thinkers. These younger minds simply push me beyond my previous conclusions. Accordingly, to my students throughout the years—and many others—I stand in deep gratitude for generating in me the desire to learn from them and hopefully from you too. Please feel free to contact me at gdborchert@aol.com whether you agree or disagree with me or have comments. I would be grateful to receive your questions.

The Methodology and Organization of the Book

While I am not attached to any particular method of interpretation, I have always found that the Wesleyan quadrilateral is a fairly wholesome manner of approaching questions. I take the Bible very seriously and reckon with its contextual framework, especially the pattern of Jesus in reaching understanding. Then I take seriously what tradition has to say about a matter. Moreover, I ask how reasonable is my thinking and how does my view deal authentically not only with my personal experience but also with general human experience up to the current time. Therefore, you will note that I have given you many experiences besides biblical citations in this work. If we take all of these four elements into account, our conclusions are likely to be close to the truth. Failure to neglect any one of them will likely lead to a skewed view of reality. Yet concerning any

answers we might offer, we must always remember that we are not divine—we are merely human!

You will quickly realize that in this work I have chosen to discuss a number of difficult and disputed issues that have been troubling for not a few Christians. Some issues may have been a concern for you or for those outside the Christian church. Other people may even wonder why Christians should be concerned about them. But I can assure you that they are not superficial issues. I have also added a number of questions at the end of each section to stimulate your further pondering of these issues. These additional questions can be used as thought stimulators in the context of an academic class or a dialogue group, or indeed for personal reflection. I hope you will discuss these questions seriously with others as you strive to arrive at authentically Christlike answers for life.

For convenience, I have divided my questions into fourteen segments plus a major postscript on other crucial issues that may push you into considering where our world may be heading in the foreseeable future. I trust that the questions can actually serve you as thought-provokers. I have used many of them in my various courses in biblical theology. Moreover, my elder son, Mark (who is the chair of the communications department at a university and a pastor), kindly agreed to field-test these topics and questions with a study group in his church in which I had the privilege of being mostly an observer so that I too could learn well.

I make no claim that my views in this book are the only relevant words on the subjects herein treated, but I think the questions are worthy of serious reflection. Since my focus is primarily on the questions, I have tried to avoid citing endless sources as I have done throughout my academic life. My goal has been to stimulate you, the reader, to reflect not only on the questions but also on the biblical texts cited and on my experiences. Both should stimulate you to reflect further on how you make important life decisions concerning ethical and theological issues and about how you deal with the implications that flow from those decisions. Furthermore, since I continue to address such questions to my ordained sons and their families, I have addressed these questions and answers in our familiar letter format to my two sons, Mark and Tim, but have added “Friends” to include you the readers.

I trust you will recognize that in my organization I move from chaos through multiple issues and then to the Dark Side and the recognition of the reality of evil before I deal with the terminal issues of death, heaven, and

eternity. I end with worship because I firmly believe that for a Christian—who lives on this revolving planet in the vastness of space—worship relates not merely to attending church and “worship services” or practicing various disciplines, but involves all of life. Therefore, worship is a crucial element in approaching ethical integrity.

Before I reach my conclusion and at the suggestion of a former doctoral student, I would add another issue concerning my teaching. I am a Christian theologian who is prepared to live with tension. Many Christians are uncomfortable with tension and are anxious to eliminate alternatives. They try to settle for one option and thereby tend—like all of us—to skew theological realities. I am prepared to live with tension because we are not omniscient. In theology some favor grace over faith, the divine over the human or the reverse. But I believe that the answer to understanding salvation and other matters of Christian thought and life actually lies within the tension between the human and the divine. Christian theology, ethics, and life involve both the wise, caring God and frail, sinful humans. I believe that the more we learn to build our theologies and ethics on that inherent tension, the more we will reach satisfying theological constructs.

Conclusion

Finally, I invite you to join my wife and me on our pilgrimage in which we seek, as best we can, to “walk” with the Lord as humble servants and not as authoritarian purveyors of absolute directives. We are not inerrant in our messaging, but we have lived with God for a long time and have seen a great deal of pain and hurt as well as frothy Christianity and false piety that claim to be “God-inspired” but melts in the heat of trouble, confusion, and suffering. Therefore, in this book I have sought as much as possible to be honest and forthright in communicating to you my sincere thoughts and experiences concerning some of the wrenching issues I have discussed here. I pray that God will be with you as you read and reflect on my words. And please remember: Wrestling with questions can be a fruitful path to wisdom!

Note

¹As you read this work, please bear in mind this prefatory statement: I am focusing this book on questions related to ethical issues for this generation of text-messaging readers. I am not attempting to provide full reference notes or a complete bibliography on theology and ethics. For those who desire further references, I recommend that they consult some representative academic works concerning biblical ethics and theology, for example: Ben Witherington III, *New Testament Theology and Ethics*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008); David P. Gushee and Glen H. Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016); Robertson McQuilkin and Paul Copan, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics: Walking in the Way of Wisdom*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014); Thomas Ogletree, *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2003); Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018); and Bruce C. Birch, Jacqueline E. Lapsley, et al., *Biblical Ethics in Christian Life: A New Conversation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018).