

Engage360 Episode 107: Secularism and the Importance of Religious Freedom; Dr. Michael Bird

Intro [00:00:04] Welcome to Engage360, Denver Seminary's podcast. Join us as we explore the redemptive power of the gospel and the life changing truth of Scripture at work in our culture today.

Don Payne [00:00:16] Hey, friends, welcome again to Engage 360 from Denver Seminary. We are really glad you are with us. My name is Don Payne, your host. Our guest in this episode, glad to say, is the renowned and inimitable Dr. Michael Bird. Mike, welcome.

Michael Bird [00:00:34] Well, hello, Don. Hello to all your listeners and it is an absolute joy and treat to be with you.

Don Payne [00:00:40] We are so glad you could. Mike is the academic dean and lecturer in theology, what we would call a professor of theology at Ridley College in Melbourne, Australia. Originally, though, from Brisbane. How do you say that? Brisbane, Brisbane.

Michael Bird [00:00:53] Brisbane.

Don Payne [00:00:53] Brisbane. Okay. We're also joined by Dr. Joey Dodson, who's here for color commentary if he has anything colorful to say? Joey, good to have you back.

Joey Dodson [00:01:03] Thanks for having me back.

Don Payne [00:01:04] Yeah, glad to have you here. Well, your bio is extensive, and people can find this on the Ridley college website. You spent time in the Australian Army as a paratrooper.

Michael Bird [00:01:16] I certainly did. 13 years. A paratrooper, military intelligence, and then chaplain's assistant.

Don Payne [00:01:21] Yeah. Okay. In fact, you became a Christian in the Army, is that correct?

Michael Bird [00:01:27] That's correct. I did not grow up in a Christian home. We were not a churchgoing family. And the first time I went to church in my life, besides wedding and funerals was when I was 20 years old.

Don Payne [00:01:40] I remember first time I became acquainted with your background. I was kind of running the timeline and was struck with no small amount of ungodly envy because I realized you became a believer years after I graduated from seminary and had spent years in pastoral ministry, and then I found myself using your textbooks in my classes. And I thought, Lord, I need a theodicy for this. This is like not fair. A lot of our listeners, especially those who are either current students or have been our students in the last few years, will recognize Mike's name from the big evangelical theology text that is our anchor text for our theology courses, we're glad to say. Just been really pleased with that work and grateful to you for the work. Now it's in its second edition.

Michael Bird [00:02:31] Yeah, well I did my best to try to improve it from the first edition, fix up a few things, add on a few things and yeah, it's been very well-received in all parts of the world. I just found out it's being used as a textbook for a seminary program in a prison for prisoners who

have no prospect of release. So yeah, it's being used in a great number of places around the world and it's very encouraging to me. When you spend so much time and energy in a book and it gets a positive reception, you hear some of the stories of people who have had a positive encounter with the book will come away with their faith affirmed or encouraged or even challenged.

Don Payne [00:03:10] Well, I remember some years ago when your first edition was just released and we on the theology faculty were reviewing a few texts that were released at the same time to consider whether we wanted to switch our anchor text for our theology courses. And I remember reading yours and thinking a couple of things. One, I really love the way you have organized it because I teach theological method, and methodologically I think this is the way theology ought to be organized. I really appreciated that. On a lighter note, I thought to myself, this is written in a way that might actually help people not hate theology.

Michael Bird [00:03:48] Well, if that's your one goal, it's a pretty low bar. It's a pretty low bar.

Don Payne [00:03:52] Well, you know, given I mean, not everybody who comes to seminary comes in keenly interested in the subject of theology. Hopefully they are interested in it just as Christians, but not always in the academic study of theology. But I think it's served us well in that regard. We're really grateful for your work. Well, Mike, you've got just a whole raft of great publications out, in all seriousness. And I think the most recent, is this most recent, "religious freedom in a secular age?"

Michael Bird [00:04:19] It's up there. It's definitely up there. It's one of the more recent volumes.

Don Payne [00:04:22] Okay. This book seems to reach out kind of a bit beyond your typical scholarly interests. It's not theology proper, not New Testament studies. Those are your real wheelhouse. What prompted you to write this?

Michael Bird [00:04:38] Well, basically, a cultural moment. We're having huge debates about religion, religious freedom in America, the United Kingdom, Australia, other countries around the world. And I wanted to think about this theologically because at least in Australia, we are really tearing ourselves apart over this stuff. And I mean a lot of it comes down to religion versus LGBT rights in Terms of law, ethics, inclusiveness, and anti-discrimination law. But there's also just a lot of general somewhere between apathy and hostility towards religion itself in Australia. And Christians have to start thinking about this. How do we relate to a wider culture where we're not the most popular people on the planet, where we do hold unpopular opinions? And what does it mean for our political sector? What does it mean for the interface between law, religion, education, the charities, philanthropic ministries? How are we going to get on with our witness in a far more contested and adversarial context?

Don Payne [00:05:40] What's your elevator speech or the basic argument for the book?

Michael Bird [00:05:43] Basically, we have a problem because there are two good things that are being brought into conflict. Everyone agrees religious freedom in principle is a good thing, and everyone agrees to that LGBT rights in principle are good things, but what happens when they come into conflict? What is the mechanism for resolving those conflicts? Now we don't want religion to be used as a stick to batter sexual minorities, but at the same time, forcing a Muslim college to hire a gay atheist probably is going to work out either. What I argue is part of the

solution is having a really good account of secularism. Okay. Now, for some people, secularism is scary.

Don Payne [00:06:22] Dirty word.

Michael Bird [00:06:22] It's horrible, it's the thing we're up against. Secularism is about creating space for people of all faiths and none, about defining the areas where religion is allowed to matter and where it is immune from government interference and then defining the areas where religion is not allowed to matter. And that becomes the basis for a multicultural, liberal, pluralistic democracy. Secularism means you can have a mosque, a Muslim house of worship next to an LGBT advocacy center, and you can live in peace with each other. You know, you don't want to force the Muslims to change their religion to get with the program. But at the same time, you know, you don't do punitive actions against, you know, LGBT groups because you're no fan of who they are, what they do. So, it's about a way of living at peace with differences, managing differences within diversity without resorting to hatred, animosity, or in the worst case, political violence.

Don Payne [00:07:20] It sounds like in some sense you are arguing that secular, or I don't know if we would say secularism, but to be secular is a good thing, or secularism in some sense is our friend. Is that fair to say?

Michael Bird [00:07:34] Yes. And this is what I tell people. Secularism is not one thing. It's 20 different things. The secularism of the United Kingdom is very different to the secularism of the United States. I mean, because in the United Kingdom, they have, now the king, King Charles, he is technically the head of the Church of England. And the king, through the Crown, through various committees, appoints bishops and key positions in the Church of England. And yet it's a very secular, multicultural country. I mean, put it this way, you've got a Christian king, you've got a Hindu prime minister. You've got, I believe, a Buddhist secretary of the home office, and you've got a Muslim mayor of London. So, there you have a kind of, you might call it almost like a soft nationalism, but it's got a certain degree of secularity where people of a variety of faiths, you know, are able to participate in the political spectrum. I should add, you know, the opposition leader, Keir Starmer, I think he's more of an agnostic or an atheist. So, you've got everyone participating and no one's killing each other over their religion, even though you have an official state church. And then we could talk about France and what they do, and you've got the secularism of Turkey. So, there's all different ways of secularism. And there are some militant forms of secularism, like what you might find somewhere such as North Korea and maybe China. But secularism is a great tool for ensuring that everyone can practice their religion, and no one is punished because of their religion. And religion cannot be used as a tool to punish others. That sense of secularism is a good thing. We might call that a benevolent or a positive mode of secularism.

Don Payne [00:09:14] How does that compare to, was it Niebuhr, called the naked public square?

Michael Bird [00:09:21] Yeah. I mean, the idea where everyone can go in and have their say. That is something how it would be. And you can talk from a Christian perspective, a Muslim perspective, you know, agnostic, you know, gay, gothic from Georgia. You can have any perspective you like, and you're allowed to do that, though I think we are facing challenges these days because I think there is a tendency in our culture to become more post liberal. People want to shut down some of the views they don't like because they regard them as harmful. And that strikes me as a bit concerning because I remember the time where people would say things like I

disagree vehemently with what you say. I disagree very much, but I will defend your right to say it. I'm worried the second part of that, we're losing. We're losing the idea I've got to defend the speech of the people I disagree with. And I think from both the left and the right, there are some post liberal tendencies. And people want the other team, the other side, people who are different to be censored and for their own views, not just to be hegemonic, but basically to rule out or censor everything that is contrary to that.

Don Payne [00:10:28] Yeah. Joey just thankfully corrected me. The naked public square that Richard John Newhouse. In that sense, Mike, it sounds like Christians should be at the forefront of advocating for those free rights of expression on behalf of the people with whom we might most violently disagree. Violently may be the wrong word here, but most intensely disagree.

Michael Bird [00:10:54] Yeah, well, we have our own reasons or a very good self-interested reasons to making sure that Muslims, Jewish communities, Mormons, Buddhists, I don't know other great religions, Dallas Cowboys.

Joey Dodson [00:11:07] Vegans.

[00:11:08] Vegans. Vegan Dallas Cowboy supporters. That everyone has the ability to live their life according to their conscience, their way of belief. Now, obviously, there are limits. You know, it depends on the degree of detriment to others, and this is some of the debates we're having. But we would want to do that. And this is the way I anchor biblically, I say, look, you know, if you're going to love your neighbor, you must allow your neighbor to be other than you. Okay? Because if you are forcing your neighbor to become a Christian, either at the point of a sword, at the point of a gun, at the point of socio-political coercion, or saying you can't fully participate in society because you are not X or whatever it is, that's not loving your neighbor. And I think it's important for Christians that if we are going to love our neighbors, we need to recognize they have the right to be different to us.

Don Payne [00:12:05] You seem to have from various things I've read of yours, Mike, you have what to me is an impressive awareness of the American political and cultural scene. I can't imagine that Aussies in general are all that enamored of U.S. culture and politics, partly because Australians strike me as being just about as fiercely proud and independent as Americans are. But what has prompted that for you? All the awareness of American culture in political scenes?

Michael Bird [00:12:34] Oh, a number of things for me. I make, you know, between 1 to 3 trips to America a year. So, I come visit. I sell more books in America than in Australia, as you can imagine. Two thirds of my speaking invitations are somewhere in the United States. And here's the other thing, and you've got to appreciate this. Because of the English language, because of movies, because of media, because of the Internet, everything that happens in America is broadcast in the Anglophone world. So anywhere where they speak English, you get American media reporting. So, you know, say on the nightly news in Australia, we'll get our own political news, but the next thing we will get the American political news. And here's the weird thing. We have what's called the High Court of Australia. The highest court of the land. I could not name you one single justice who sits on that court, but I swear I could name more than half of the justices on the Supreme Court of the United States. And I mean, you've got to appreciate how American saturated our movies, media, and news is. And that's why a lot of people outside of America feel like they live in the 51st state of America. That's why in Melbourne, you'll have protests, you'll have like Black Lives Matters protest or Roe v Wade protests in Australia. I mean, we are literally as far from America as

you can possibly be. But because of the English language and media and some shared political cultures, we think we all participate in the same world.

Don Payne [00:14:08] What do you think American Christians have to learn from Australian Christians.

Michael Bird [00:14:13] Hmm. That's a that's a good question. I think we're a little bit further down the road in terms of the secularization of a country. So, you know, obviously you've got the rise of nones, you know, people with no religious affiliation in America. Yeah, we're further down the track on that one. And we are beginning to feel the demographic change as we go along there. There are some other differences. Australians can be fairly eclectic in the way they do theology, so they will be willing to listen to a lot of different people. But I would say the number one difference between American evangelicals, and I think evangelicals in other parts of the world, and this is pointed out to me, John Stackhouse, is that American evangelicals can sometimes give the impression that they were divinely elected to be in charge. Now, part of that's because of the heritage and the history, because there was a whole bunch of sort of disaffected Puritans who came to America to establish the New Jerusalem.

Don Payne [00:15:12] Well, there you go.

Michael Bird [00:15:12] And it seems that the wrong people are running the New Jerusalem, or some people say it's no longer the new Jerusalem. Now it's kind of like, you know, Babylon the worst, that kind of thing. And I think there is a tendency to want to recapture that, you know, we're meant to be a city on the hill. We're meant to be a new Jerusalem, and we need the right Christians in charge. That is not a thing in Australia. Australia was not founded as a neo puritan colony. It was founded as.

Don Payne [00:15:36] As a prison colony.

Michael Bird [00:15:37] It was founded as a prison colony.

Don Payne [00:15:40] I didn't know if you were going to say that or if I was going to have to.

Michael Bird [00:15:42] Yeah, I knew it was coming. I knew it was coming. And a lot of the convicts were Irish. And as part of their punishment, they were forced to worship using the Anglican style of worship, the Book of Common Prayer, that was part of their punishment, you know, so from the very get go, religion was used punitively at some point. So, I mean, we have had moments of religious revival, like the 1959 Billy Graham crusade. That did have a very big effect on Australia. But generally, we're not a country known for our religion. We're known for other things, mostly animals that can sting, kill, and eat you.

Joey Dodson [00:16:19] And kangaroos.

Michael Bird [00:16:21] And kangaroos and, you know, a few good Hollywood actors we produce ranging from Nicole Kidman, Hugh Jackman, Chris Hemsworth, that kind of thing. But the religious texture in Australia is very, very different. And even for those who are religious or devout, it can be more compartmentalized from the rest of the world. I think in America, faith really does saturate and permeate a lot more aspects of life.

Don Payne [00:16:50] Yeah, probably so, even in many parts of the country that we would think of as more secular. Because you, you compared Seattle, Portland maybe to Melbourne and from things I've heard, Melbourne's even further down the road in some respects of secularism.

Michael Bird [00:17:09] Yeah definitely. I mean the state Victoria's so progressive it makes Massachusetts look like Alabama in comparison. It's very, very progressive there in some ways in fact I find a little bit scary, I would say.

Don Payne [00:17:25] Mike, I want to talk a little bit about your scholarship. You have, as I mentioned earlier, been a very productive scholar for which many of us are deeply in your debt and you're just a really busy guy as well. You've got a lot of responsibilities at Ridley College. What advice would you give to budding scholars about how to be productive, how to get a lot done? Especially if they have a lot on their plate like you do.

Michael Bird [00:17:51] There's a number of things. I would say in terms of mapping out your career early on, focus on language learning, both primary source languages and modern languages.

Don Payne [00:18:02] Joey Dodson is having a moment over here

Joey Dodson [00:18:08] Say it louder so the people in the back can hear you.

Michael Bird [00:18:09] I wish I'd worked harder on my theological German. I wish I'd done some things like Aramaic or Coptic or Syriac, because I've got Greek and kind of bumbled my way through a bit of Hebrew. But, you know, I wish I'd done more on the languages. The other thing I tell people to do is rotate their reading between primary texts. So, you know, go through the whole library, the Apocrypha, all the pseudepigrapha, read church history, read the Church fathers. So go read some primary sources and then read some secondary. So, I try to oscillate between the two. I read, you know, like a lower volume like ancient classics. And then I'll read like a new book that's just come out.

Don Payne [00:18:50] You still keep that reading rhythm going to this day?

Michael Bird [00:18:53] I still keep that rhythm. And the difference between a good scholar is someone who knows the secondary literature, but a great scholar or a great researcher is someone who has mastered the primary sources and has a great command of them, that's the real difference between good and great. The other thing I tell people is get a good routine going, whether that's a study routine or research routine. Compartmentalize your time. You know, like for me, my primary day of research is Friday. I may have a few other hours around the time, but I try to use that one day of research really well and milk it for everything I can. And developing certain routines and rhythms like that. Routine might be a bit boring, but it means the important stuff gets done. And the other thing I tell my students is to eat the frog first, which is code for do the hardest thing first. So, if there's something you've got to do in the course of research, do the hardest thing first. You know, if you're a Ph.D. student, there's a German monograph you've got to work through. Get the hardest thing done first.

Don Payne [00:19:56] It's all downhill from there.

Michael Bird [00:19:58] Yeah. So exactly. I think that's my advice to students. And just I think faithful plugging away is a good idea with any sort of project that you're working on, whether that's a master's dissertation or you're working on a journal article or, you know, maybe you're working preparing something for a podcast, just gently plug away on a couple of different things and eventually all your ducks will be lined up and then I guess come home for Christmas, I hope.

Don Payne [00:20:25] Yeah, it's amazing how much we can get done. Just a few pages at a time.

Michael Bird [00:20:29] Exactly.

Don Payne [00:20:30] Mike, talk to us a little bit about your ministry experience. I know you are ordained as an Anglican priest. How does all that come together with your academic work?

Michael Bird [00:20:40] Well, in a number of different ways. I've been like a pastoral intern in a church. I have you know, I do a lot of preaching and teaching, being part of higher study groups. I'm an ordained Anglican priest, so I, you know, participate in the preaching life and the sacramental life at our seminary. In addition to that, I do have a role in the pastoral formation of students. It's not my primary role at college, but when we're when we're covering things in class, whether that's the exegesis of the gospel of Mark, whether that is looking at a difficult topic in ethics or exploring something like the impassability of God, you've always got to have your mind thinking about the So what, you know, what difference does this make and how does this topic that we're currently discussing in class, how is that going to resonate or play out in the churches where my students are currently serving? I mean, we were doing this just yesterday when I was in Joey's class on Romans and were talking about, you know, how do you live with differences? And you can be in a society where you've got some difficult decisions to make. And I gave the example, imagine you're a chaplain in a hospital or a hospice and you know, you have a gay couple who ask you, could you officiate our wedding? What do you do in that context? You've got a partner who's dying. You know, what do you do? Because if you don't do it, you could be in trouble with the hospital or the hospice. But if you do it, you could lose your ordination. So, it's really kind of double whammy. I mean, what do you do in that context? How do you negotiate these difficult circumstances?

Don Payne [00:22:16] Yeah, and those are not uncommon in ministry settings at all.

Michael Bird [00:22:20] Exactly. Yeah. I mean, like is filled with these moments of confrontation and moral ambiguity where you have often, you know, two things that are in conflict. And it's not just to being pragmatic. You've got to have a theological rationale, some kind of framework that's going to help you think through the issues and why you're making the decisions you're making.

Don Payne [00:22:40] That's one thing I've greatly appreciated about much of your work is helping us think theologically, not in just rote, repetitious ways, as we always have, but to think creatively and theologically for the sake of faithfulness. And that's kind of my own segue as a theologian into talking about your perspectives on theology. Because the way Christians do theology always seems to reflect the challenges that they're facing in their context and their time, or it should anyway. Do you see any shifts of emphasis that are needed for our theological work in the current age? Not different theology per se, not different content, different commitments, but you know, where the accent marks get placed over our theological emphases. And just the organization of how we're thinking about our lives and our engagement with the world theologically. Any shifts you see needed?

Michael Bird [00:23:40] I think we do need to sharpen up our anthropology, our doctrine of humanity, because a lot of the debates we're having in our culture about, you name it, you know, gay marriage, personal identity, sex, euthanasia, all these things are somehow linked to what we think about the human being. And we've got to recognize there are different ways of thinking about ethics, you know? Is it based on duty? Is it based on virtues or is it based on a dichotomy of pleasure and pain? So, I mean, different people have different way about thinking about ethics or what is human flourishing? What is the good life? Should all human desires be fulfilled or is desire in some case a bad thing? I mean, all the major religions, you know, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism. I think Hinduism as well. Many of them would say that desire is not a good thing. It can be a very bad thing that we need to master.

Don Payne [00:24:42] Yeah, it needs to be expunged from us somehow.

Michael Bird [00:24:44] Yeah, or we need to be mastered by it. I mean, like in Buddhism, you've got to get rid of desire. I think in Christianity, I mean, desire is something you've got to master, or it will master you. So, there are things like that we've got to think about as well. So, I think our doctrine of anthropology, our doctrine of humanity is very important. But also realize we're living in a world where it's post-Christian but not un-Christian. And a lot of the debates we are having are really in House Christian debates where both the left and the right are arguing according to Christian principles. But only one side of the ledger seems to be explicitly aware of it. I mean, this is something I learned from Tom Holland, not Spider-Man. I'm thinking of the British historian. He says the culture wars are basically an in-house Christendom debate, but only one side of it recognizes that they're arguing a Christian currency. So, I mean, for example, like this in our culture and this is true in Australia, and it's true in America, we have a strong emphasis on looking after people who are marginalized, protecting the victim. You know, people who have been oppressed or persecuted. And can you think of any particular religion where the central symbol of that religion is someone who was cruelly, unfairly and unjustly executed by a massive imperial power? Can you think of any religion where that is the central symbol? So, I mean, it's Christian. So, you could argue a big part of progressive values is simply accenting, highlighting, prosecuting the idea that, you know, that being the victim, being the object of sacrifice is the single greatest good. And we must always be on the side of the oppressed. We must always stand with the marginalized, those who are forgotten and lost. So, I mean, that's a Christian thing. But then on the other side, you've got this whole Christian tradition rooted in scripture about how to construct a Christian civilization, how to rid ourselves of things like desire, how we can strip away the paganisms and the idolatry of our age where sex is a good thing, but it's not to be worshiped. Sex is part of life, but it's not the goal of life. So here you have two different, you know, systems of thought coming into conflict, but they've both grown from the same flower. And that's one thing I don't think we understand that the debates we're having in America, Australia, the UK, about a variety of different things ranging from, you know, euthanasia, abortion, same sex marriage. These are in house debates. They're not happening in places like China or India or if they are, they're happening for different reasons. And they play out in a very different way. But a lot of these things are in-house Christian debates. So, we still have such a Christianized worldview. People may not understand it or recognize it, but even some of our, you know, most liberal, socialist, Marxist people ultimately just look like Cappadocian fathers with tattoos and piercings. And that's the real weird thing going on. So, I think those two things we've got to understand. We got to have a good, thick understanding of the doctrine of humanity, what it means to be a human being. And we've got to understand that we're in a moment where we're having these really strange in-house, post-Christian debates about how to be a society, how to be a civilization.

Don Payne [00:28:17] Yeah, and a lot of our conversations, we're just breathing our own exhaust, aren't we?

Michael Bird [00:28:20] Exactly.

Don Payne [00:28:22] Joey Dodson, what have you come to appreciate most about our guest, Mike Bird?

Joey Dodson [00:28:29] I appreciate about Mike what I appreciated about him when I first met him. I was in Aberdeen, and he came down from Dingwall and presented a paper and he stood his ground against some of the giants in New Testament. And he didn't just stand his ground, but he did so in a cheeky manner, in an entertaining manner. And you see that in his works as well, where it's comprehensive, but it's also catchy and it's entertaining. And so, yeah, I would ask Mike, what is his favorite footnote that you've placed that gives us a capture of that? He may be talking about the Pieces Christou debate and then he'll have a footnote of Kanye West or someone. So, what's your favorite footnote?

Michael Bird [00:29:09] Oh, I mean, there's so many funny ones. Off the top of my head, I'll quote like anything from Tim Keller tweets, you know, I'll refer to some bizarre website. Probably the best one, I think I have a footnote where I was talking about the rapture, and it turns out that there's a website called Post Rapture Pet Care. So, a bunch of Atheists have agreed that in the event of the Rapture and they are left behind, they will look after your pets in the event of the rapture.

Don Payne [00:29:49] This is good to know.

Joey Dodson [00:29:51] My dog's going with me. I'm carrying him when we go up.

Michael Bird [00:29:55] Yeah. So, I mean there's stuff like that I put in. But I mean my view is, you know, theology and biblical studies shouldn't be dull or boring. And I tell people, I tend to write the way I speak. So, I kind of want to combine, you know, some serious scholarship, but it doesn't have to be austere, dour, and dull. And I think we can invest something of our own personality, our own uniqueness in how we communicate. And from what I understand, some people find this great, refreshing, and enjoyable. Other people regard it as juvenile and grossly inappropriate. But, you know, you can't please them all. But, you know, I enjoy just making these few observations here and there. I think I did once quote a guy called Marcus Borg, a famous, very liberal Anglican scholar. And I think I had a footnote where I said, since writing this, Marcus has changed his mind on the grounds that he died two years ago. Now I find that fun and witty, and not everyone was most pleased with those observations.

Don Payne [00:31:04] Well, I think I can speak genuinely for many of us in the Denver seminary community about how we've benefited from your work and enjoyed your work. So, thank you.

Michael Bird [00:31:13] Well that is wonderful to hear.

Don Payne [00:31:15] Now I know lots of folks enjoy listening to you or watching you, and I don't know if it's a YouTube channel. You have a Michael Bird at Substack or a Substack.com. It's a subscription-based access to much of your work. Tell us about that.

Michael Bird [00:31:32] Well, it's a Substack page. It's MichaelFBird.substack.com. Most of that's free for subscribers. So, I do about three or four posts a week. Usually, two or three of the posts are just free for everyone. I do one other one for people who want to provide me with a special degree of support, but also, I run a YouTube channel called Early Christian History, where I do all sorts of things there. I kind of interview scholars about books. I do a regular chat with a wonderful lady from Maryland called Amy Bird, and we talk about Christianity, faith, gender as it plays out in the church. I also do a little program called Nazareth to Nicaea where I talk about early Christology. So that's available. And that's a place where people can acquaint themselves with more of my work.

Joey Dodson [00:32:19] Perhaps prepare the reader that he doesn't look like Hugh Jackman or Chris Hemsworth.

Don Payne [00:32:24] Not all Australians looking the same?

Michael Bird [00:32:26] I try to tell people I'm kind of a cross between the great Australian scholar Leon Morris. If you don't know if you don't know, he was a great Australian, a cross between Leon Morris and Conan O'Brien. But some people tell me they don't quite see the resemblance. Well, for a start, Conan O'Brien is about a foot taller than I am. So, there's one issue.

Don Payne [00:32:46] Yeah, he's a foot taller than just about everybody I know. Well, that may be the most unusual, but most fitting note to end on of any interview we've done. But Mike, just been a pleasure to spend time with you. So glad you could hang out here in Denver for some extra time and be here on our campus. And just a real joy to know you and to benefit from your work. And hopefully you've benefited from your time here as well.

Michael Bird [00:33:10] I'm having a great time here, Don. It's great being here with Joey and the faculty and meeting so many wonderful students at Denver Seminary.

Don Payne [00:33:17] Yeah, great. Friends, thanks again for spending some time with us. I want to thank Matt Evans and Christa Ebert, our sound engineers and editors who always do such a famous job for us. Really grateful for their effort. For Andrea Weyand, our senior director of communications, who makes all this happen from way behind the scenes, but in a crucial way. We'd love for you to contact us. If you have questions or comments, you can email us. Podcast@DenverSeminary.edu. And as I often remind you, you can find all kinds of really good resources on our website. DenverSeminary.edu. Hope you'll visit that. And if you get a chance and you've benefited from anything you've heard here, give us a rating or a review, please. Otherwise, we will look forward to speaking with you again really soon. Take care.