

BEYOND THE BOOK – BOOK EXPO CANADA

KENNEALLY: Hello, and welcome to this very special edition of Beyond the Book, taking place as part of the 2006 Book Expo Canada at the Metro Toronto Convention Center. My name is Christopher Kenneally. As Director of Author Relations for Copyright Clearance Center, it's my pleasure to host these recurring discussions about writing and the business of writing and publishing. Today our subject is an inspired one, indeed it is inspiration itself. I'm joined by a panel that understands as well as anyone across Canada the enduring appeal of stories of inspiration and redemption, even examinations of the nature of faith itself.

The challenges of writing about faith are many, but I would venture that the greatest of these must be the effort to transcend the personal, the familiar, the parochial in order to reach as many readers as possible. Sports writers, I suppose, face a similar hurdle. Writing about the home team, after all, is easy to do when it's your team – you know the players and the stats. If you've lived in town since childhood, your team's history is as much a part of you as your accent. Writing about the home side comes naturally, but the hard labor is to engage readers who may not be fans and who could even be rooting for a rival squad. When authors succeed at this challenge – and it's a fierce one – the next trick is to repeat the feat and repeat it again. This season, this Sunday, or whenever, over and over. Today we have a panel that can claim victory at least on that score. Their success in publishing books precedes them all, and I appreciate their joining us for this very special edition of Beyond the Book.

We are going to start today with Brian Stiller. Brian, welcome. Brian was raised in a minister's home on the prairies. Today he serves as President of Tyndale University College and Seminary, which is the oldest standing institution of its kind in Canada, serving some 1200 students. He is founder and former editor-in-chief of Canada's national magazine, *Faith Today*. He hosts a weekly commentary, "You've Got Mail," on the national television program *100 Huntley Street*. He's the author of ten books, of which his most recent are *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns*, *Jesus and Caesar: Christians in the Public Square*, and *What Happens When I Die?*, which came out in 2001. Brian, again, welcome indeed. And as part of the program today, I do want to look at this question of writing about your faith in the public arena, and you have a book that addresses Jesus and Caesar and the place of Christians in the public square. Why do you think – what is behind your idea that over the last century Christians particularly withdrew from the public square?

STILLER: Well, through the 20th century there was a curious move that was not only isolated in Canada, but was quite dominant in western Europe, and that was the secularization of the public square. In that increasingly matters of faith were disallowed within the conversation of public policy, public governance. Canada is a bit unique in that while the U.S. has a constitutional definition of separation of

church and state, that never happened in Canada. But then you have a reverse kind of psychological kick. In the U.S. there tends to be an openness with respect to conversations about faith in the public square, whereas in Canada where there is no constitutional definition of the separation you have a – through the 20th century, mid- to the late, an increased disallowance of matters of faith being able to – or religious language or religious conviction being expressed in public language, and often you would have in Canada a person would say, well, you can't use religious language here or invoke religious ideas here because you know we have the separation of the church and state. So we assumed it was so, and yet it was never constitutional. So we've had to try and find a way to live in a secular society, but to bring back into the conversation of policy, of governance, in a whole sphere of influence – in a whole number of spheres – bring back that bubbling up conviction of people of a variety of faiths and allowing that to impact the way we do our country.

KENNEALLY: Well, you have been writing about faith and other subjects for more than 20 years. Do you think things have changed? Has there been a shift? And is it confined to one particular faith, or is it across the board in Canada?

STILLER: No, I think it's across the board. Curiously, and I come out of the Evangelical Protestant community, in many ways the New Age movement of the '70s and '80s helped to move the pendulum of secularization back in that their message was that all of life is spiritual – everything is imbued with spirituality, therefore you can't do anything with the spiritual impulse or ideas. Then increasingly we found that there was a gradual openness. Our media tended to be much more secular and liberal so that conservative religious ideas had little presence, if it all. Liberal religious ideas had more currency. But again the pendulum has swung further and further, so I see today a renaissance of faith in the land. Interesting enough current Prime Minister is evangelical, and I haven't seen any public news story about that. A few years ago people would have thought that the sky was falling in. So I think there is an openness. Now as people of faith, we've got to find ways of speaking uniquely into the public square. As a person of the Protestant community, we've got to be careful that we don't sound like American fundamentalists, because as soon as we do or we're seen to be that, then the doors really shut. So we've got to find ways of entering that public square in meaningful – and in a way that contributes to the debate.

KENNEALLY: Right, and we're here at Canada's premier publishing event, Book Expo. And I guess I want to ask about that contrast between the American publishing experience, which comes out of what, at least the Evangelic community, is being said on the pulpits and then gets published, how that contrasts with what your experience is here in Canada. Is there a Canadian voice that's emerging in your community?

STILLER: Well, the difficulty has been that the publishers are all Americans, and so a Canadian voice is curious to them, and it takes them a while to figure out whether

they're interested in publishing us or not. And then if it's located in Canada, often an American is interested in something that's in Europe or in Africa, but Canada is too close to be different. And so we've had difficulty, and actually our authors, locating a presence within the American publishers. What that happened over the last few years is that some American publishers are opening legitimate branches in Canada where publishing is actually going on here, and also there's new Canadian publishers. So there's a rising community of authors that indeed are finding ways of getting their stuff printed.

KENNEALLY: What sells, if you will? And how do you reconcile the connection or the interaction between commerce and faith when you are writing?

STILLER: What sells? I guess what people are interested in reading. What are people interested in reading? Well, Marlene could probably better tell us that. Stories. A great story is a great story, is a great story. Undoubtedly the issues of commerce and economics is having a much more – has much more interest in understand the nature of how one manages ones personal finances and how one understands the global networking finances. So I'm not sure that there is – the two are distinct, and yet I think the two and have compelling audiences.

KENNEALLY: Well, there's something in the Bible about render unto Caesar and all that sort of thing, so there really is a separation, even back there. I wonder if you think particularly about parables as an effective way to communicate any matter of faith, regardless of which particular tradition you're coming from? Talk about parables.

STILLER: Well, again, story. Story is the compelling form. I think that parables in a post-modern age has particular currency in that if – post-modernism meaning that the scientific method or the logic of things is not necessarily the compelling – or the way in which define what's true and what's not true. And also as we live more paradoxical, we live with seeming opposites and we're more comfortable in handling that within our lives. A parable by its nature has a particular kind of idea that by way of story comes beneath the radar of our selection out of things that are too logically driven, and brings within the heart of the person an idea that is transforming. And so to a person who's a believer or a non-believer, I find particularly to the stories of Jesus to be incredibly intriguing and effective in the transforming presence.

KENNEALLY: Well, I was intrigued by your examination of the parable, that just about everybody knows, which is the Good Samaritan. Why is that such an intriguing and appealing story to you? And tell us about sort of the back story on who the Samaritans were.

STILLER: Well, I find it of great interest because people who have very definite ideas about what they believe to be true sometimes are trapped within the borders of that community who believe that truth. And the story of the Good Samaritan is within a

Hebraic context where the Samaritans, who were religious half-brothers – and we are harder on the heretics than we are on the disbelievers. And so there was tremendous antipathy towards this community of people. And so when you have the religious people, you have the high priest, you have the Levite who go by this person who is bloodied and apparently dead, walk by. Jesus employs a person completely out of the context, a person who was without favor in the community he's speaking to, and he brings that person in and shows the goodness of good God in caring for another by using a person that the community, the hearing community would have absolutely no regard for. And that shocking clash of ideas and personalities would reverberate through their community, and that as a parabolic form is a lesson-teacher for people who are deeply committed in faith, sometimes who can be very stuck and stubborn to lighten up.

KENNEALLY: Well, it seems that the view of religion today in many ways is as a divider. Religion is often used to separate communities and separate people, and that parable particularly is one that talks about bringing people together. Would you agree?

STILLER: Yes. No, I think it's deeper than that. It does bring people together, but the question is why does it bring people together? And the religious hearers didn't understand the compelling reason of their own faith, which was to love your Lord your God with all you heart, your soul, and your mind, and your neighbor, yourself. There is the dualistic intertwining into that one compelling view. And God was saying to them and to us today, you want to love God with all you heart, soul, and mind? Well, let me tell you this, that if you learn to love a neighbor who you do see, then you learn to love a God who you haven't seen. And if you claim to love a God who you haven't seen, that will be employed by you loving a neighbor who you have seen.

So the coming together isn't simply to be nice, to be pluralistic. It's driven by a particular kind of divine motivation that deep within the heart of God and therefore his transformed people is a love that's so compelling that you shatter the borders of conventionality, and you move out in to that new community, to others who you normally wouldn't have thought of, and the heart of love, inspired by your relationship with the divine, it's transforming not only to yourself, but it's transforming to the community you serve.

KENNEALLY: Well, that was a point I was trying to make, just to cross faiths regardless of the faith you had, that books and publishing is sending out messages to people you don't know. It's communicating beyond the personal, beyond your own circle of friends or family or those who you work with. You send a book out, you don't know who will read it. You don't know whether they'll find it appealing or not. In a way, is book publishing kind of parable for the human experience? Do you find that – you've written for 20 years or more now, do you find that your writing has changed over time and has changed you perhaps?

STILLER: Oh, every book changes one, at least for me. And what you're learning to think about is the nature of the community who will read your material, and in what way will this be a window into their own soul, into their own world, and how can you help facilitate those windows. So for me, I'm always looking for transformation as part of the process, but if I'm not able to access a person through a particular window that they would open to me, then the transformational process is not engaged. So yes, you are always looking for a way of speaking into a mind into a person, into a life experience that would be different from mine, and if they can see that I'm really interested in them and not simply in an ideological view, then hopefully there's a better chance that they will listen to, and maybe in the end, discard it or maybe be transformed.

So yes, you're always having to think about that person. Not to the degree that you take and change what you have to say, because otherwise why say it, but to create interest, and in a sense to fly below their radar screen which would eliminate – for example, a person from another faith who would eliminate at first blush what I have to say because of who I am. If I'm able to get them beneath that and intrigue them with an idea, with a vision or a metaphor, it might bring them a little further into the logic or the rationale or the flow of the story, and by seeing, hearing, reading, feeling, they might be more open to a nuance or something that's very different.

KENNEALLY: Well, it's very appealing to me, and I think to many people in the reading community, and than you very much Brian Stiller.

STILLER: Thank you.

KENNEALLY: I want to move now to speak with someone who has a perspective on a particular community of booksellers, and that's Marlene Coghlin, who is the executive director for Christian Booksellers Association in Canada. She also serves a founding board member for the Christian Trade Association International, the International Christian Chamber of Commerce, and the Word Guild, which is Canada's association of writers of faith. Marlene, welcome.

COGHLIN: Thank you.

KENNEALLY: Can we start by asking you to paint a picture of this very special community for booksellers, the Christian booksellers. Who are they? Where are they congregated, if you will, and just what are their aspirations as booksellers?

COGHLIN: Sure, Chris. Well, the Christian Booksellers Association is a combination of retailers and distributors that are located across Canada, from the sea-to-sea-to-sea, as it were, in our country. And these are comprised of both book sellers and distributors. Largely distributors represent the publishing houses in the United States, as Brian as already referred to earlier. And the market has been generated largely from the United States. In its beginnings, Canada was a region of the

Christian Booksellers Association in the United States. And then became autonomous in 1979. So for 35 years Canada has been developing its own industry. However, it still does have a very American flavoring.

Again, as Brian has alluded to, the industry of the Christian bookstores is a compilation of people who have vision and passion and have mostly started out with a sense of calling, and purpose, and vision to take the evangelical message – largely it's roots are evangelical, into the communities of Canada, from coast to coast. And again, for the purpose of making Jesus Christ known, and hopefully spreading that message through the retail market. And that's where it gets challenging, and that's where it gets very interesting. Canada's membership is comprised of just a little 200 Christian bookstores, the largest body of which are independently-owned. And again, as I mentioned, the mission and the vision and the passion was mostly out of a sense of calling, and a sense of wanting to serve – not unlike the Good Samaritan – and get beyond our borders that are just located in the local church. But being in a retail market, the entrepreneurial struggle is something that's having to be faced and has been faced with some measure of success over the years.

KENNEALLY: Well, I think that's what most interesting about the CBA's members, is that they are independent booksellers. When you read about the publishing, or I should say the bookselling industry, it's really almost always a story about can the individual bookseller survive, whatever is on those shelves? What are the members of the CBA trying to do to win the crusade, if I can make that bad pun, and survive in a world of giant chains and international conglomerates? How difficult is it for them to do that?

COGHLIN: Well, it's very difficult, of course, Chris. But there are some distinctives that are unique, I believe, to this market, in that it is a distinct niche market, but there's strengths in the area of product knowledge that won't be apparent in some of our larger chains or more general market bookstores. And again, this comes back to the root of passion, this root of vision and mission, in that the people that are selling this product will know Brian Stiller quite well. They'll know Denyse O'Leary. They may not know Oriah at this point, but that's not to say that they won't. And so it's not so much only it the face of the author that they'll know, but it's the heartbeat of the author and the product. So when a person's entering a Christian bookstore with a distinct need, there is a strength there.

The other strengths are rooted in customer service, and again, basically knowing this market well. The battle is immense. An independent is no different than an independent hardware store or an independent drug store, or any other independent in retail business today. And so in order to address some of those needs, several of our members have formed their own like-minded marketing groups and purchasing groups. And we have seen a development of some chains in Canada as well.

KENNEALLY: What about the Worldwide Web? How is that making a difference to booksellers, who I would imagine are not only in the cities of Canada, but out in some of the more remote regions?

COGHLIN: Well, it's here to stay,. And it's taken a few people a long time to get used to that idea, and I think that as soon as we start seeing people adjust to not only the Internet but the mass marketers, there's a shift that happens inside of the mind and the emotions I think of our retailers and that is to adjust. It's to say, they're here to stay, but so am I, so what am I going to do about it? So what we have seen happening is a lot of retailers are capitalizing on the Internet and saying, this is fantastic. This is another opportunity to get the word out there about these fantastic authors that we have. And so they're developing e-commerce and their own Websites, and getting their own name out there. We have a logo, our trademark within the association, that we would like to see gain greater awareness, and it's entitled, "What Goes into the Mind Comes out in a Life." So it's very generic, crosses over into all markets. But again, it is addressed primarily back to the membership of Christian retail stores. So the Internet is an advantage. It can't be anything but.

KENNEALLY: And does it help Canadian authors especially? Does it give them a presence where they would otherwise find it very hard to emerge? I think with the Web there's a kind of an equalizing force.

COGHLIN: Well, that depends on what you want to merge. To merge into –

KENNEALLY: No, emerge.

COGHLIN: Oh, emerge. Oh, OK.

KENNEALLY: To sort of rise out of the large –

COGHLIN: Absolutely. Again, it's a profiling. And I think what we can identify in the CBA marketplace is that one of the greatest lack is awareness. We have wonderful stores hidden out in corners of Canada that are unidentified, and the Internet can help us with that. But that's the same story for independent and individual authors. They're unknown. But the author is up against other challenges in that they – to be absorbed by a distributor or a publishing house is really a key source for them to become known because of the marketing that may go into that and the advancement, the drive that will come through the publishing house essentially will be what affects the retailer's decision as to whether that author is stocked in the store. And that's not to fault the retailer. That's a retailer who is maximized by being a business person, and is still trying to stay clear and pure to the message that they're wanting to put out, and yet there's only so much available in the form of resources and time.

KENNEALLY: And that's an interesting dilemma, I would imagine. You talked about remaining pure, sticking to their principles. After all, they have to make money and they have to stay in business. What about their interactions with authors? Is there more that authors themselves could do in order to assist the bookseller? Are there suggestions that the booksellers when they get together say, I wish authors would do more of?

COGHLIN: That's a great topic, and it's one that we've had workshops at both the Word Guild and Christian Booksellers' conventions as well. Definitely when an author gets known by a retailer, there's an intrigue, there's an interest, there's a connection, and that makes all the difference in the world. At Christian Booksellers' conventions we try to put the profile of the author before our retailers through the gracious sponsorship of our distributors and publishers. And so that is a networking, a working together, coming together. Canadian, at this time, seems to be the hot button, the name that's unknown, and that is a slow work, a pioneering work to begin digging up that ground so that Canadian authors are identified for who they really are in their words, as top-notch writers in the country and internationally.

KENNEALLY: And certainly by promoting Canadian authors it doesn't mean that American or other authors are being left off the shelves. Talk about the selection of books that is coming from the United States, and which ones are doing better than others.

COGHLIN: Well, I think overall we have a North American perspective when it comes to what is selling in Canada and what is of highest interest. And that's not unlike, again, many other industries in our country. We are very much driven by what's happening south of the border. And so the types of books that are selling in Canada don't mismatch what's selling in the United States. Again, there is a lot of marketing dollars that go behind those things so – Oprah is just as popular there as she is here, and it's going to happen that same way for the marketing that happens in Canada. Some of the highest-selling things that are happening in Canada now is fiction, and that's unique to the Christian marketplace. But that's been an interesting crossover, and I think, again, blends in with Brian's concept of the Samaritan and pulling people together, because Christian fiction can be something that isn't necessarily as much in your face, as proselytizing and telling someone they're going straight to hell by what they're reading here today if you don't make this choice. And that's quite intriguing when you see quite good sales in that market.

KENNEALLY: Well, thank you very much, Marlene –

COGHLIN: You're welcome.

KENNEALLY: – for helping us understand better the Christian Booksellers Association here in Canada. And I want to transition back to an author right now, and welcome

Denyse O’Leary, who is based in Toronto. She is a Canadian journalist, and the author of an award-winning book, *By Design or By Chance?*, which was published just last year. It’s an overview of the intelligent design controversy. She was named Recommended Author of the Year in 2005, and is co-author with Montréal neuroscience Mario Beauregard of the forthcoming *The Spiritual Brain*, which will be out next year from Harper Collins. Welcome Denyse, thank you for joining us.

When we met before the discussion, you told me about the dilemma you face, and we discussed the dilemma you face of being a journalist and a Christian, more specifically a Roman Catholic. Can you tell us what that means, and how does objectivity, or not, fit into that?

O’LEARY: Well, I’m not sure I have more of a dilemma than anybody else. Everyone works from a perspective, whether you’re a materialist, Buddhist, a Christian, a village atheist, you work from a perspective. But anytime you work from any perspective you always have to remember that the people who read what you write may be operating from a different perspective. So the challenge I have is to make sure that when I use words I make clear how I’m using them so that people are not taking away a message that I never sent. It’s the basic problem that everybody has with e-mail, right? You bang off the e-mail, and then you read in the sent mail, and you realize that the person who gets this is going to have a completely different idea of what you were trying to say, and perhaps not even a very favorable one, from what you actually intended to say. Now, fortunately, books take a lot longer to write than e-mails, so it’s not as big an issue as it could be. But I’m just saying that’s always the challenge, I think, is to – I re-read my work and ask, does this word mean to everyone what it means to me?

KENNEALLY: The other thing that you are very fervent about is independence. You mentioned that that’s important to you. You’re a blogger as well, and I believe that being an independent blogger is a critical element in the work you are doing. Tell us about that.

O’LEARY: Well, first off, most bloggers value independence. I didn’t invent the idea. The beauty of a blog is you can do it all yourself, so if you want to say something and anybody wants to hear you, you can just blog it, say it, and then get all the angry e-mails later. But actually the main thing that concerned me with respect to independence was that I found by experience that many major media operate according to formulas, and sometimes the formulas don’t fit.

KENNEALLY: Give us an example.

O’LEARY: Well, for example, the intelligent design controversy has grown very considerably over the last ten years and has now hit the Catholic church.

KENNEALLY: Maybe you can tell us, just for those who might not recognize that, intelligent design stands for what exactly?

O'LEARY: Oh, the idea that universe shows evidence of design as well as law and chance. Now, this doesn't necessarily mean you have to believe in God. Plato didn't believe in God, and he thought that the universe showed evidence of design. However, if design is real, then it's a factor in the universe. Now, the Pope basically started talking recently, including in his inaugural sermon at his first mass, about that human beings are not merely random products of evolution, which is as much as saying that he plans to get involved in the intelligent design controversy on the side of design. Now, the American media in particular responded in a very interesting way. They started quoting this obscure Vatican astronomer who was criticizing him, apparently not realizing that this person, while he has interesting ideas, and I'm glad that he was given a chance to air them, in fact has virtually no influence at the Vatican. So that's the sort of thing I mean, that because I had studied up the issue for a while I knew who's opinion would actually be important and who would be allowed to have a say, but basically just was not a voting member so to speak.

So the advantage of being independent, like I blog and I can say what I want, is that I can present things as I know them to be from my own research. I'm not going to have an editor saying, well, you can't say that because our audience isn't going to understand it. My own response is I'm going to try and make it as simple as possible because I think they should understand it, because they're not going to have a good grasp of what's happening here if they don't. But you wanted me to talk about objectivity, may I?

KENNEALLY: Surely, please.

O'LEARY: OK. I have been a journalist for nearly 35 years, and I don't believe in objectivity, but let me explain. A journalist is a subject – I'm the 'i' in identity, so are you. We're all subjects, not objects. Our readers are all subjects, they're the 'i' in identity, too. And for the most part, most of the things a journalist writes about are actually created by the activities of subjects, even if they're science topics like is the Earth heating up? You're still going to be quoting scientists who are subjects, right, who did the research. The Earth itself is not going to be interviewed.

So the problem with the idea of objectivity is there's no place for me to stand to cover a story that leaves me, the readers, or the subject out of the picture. When I write a story, I'm lending you my eyes, my ears, my mind. If it helps, it helps, if it doesn't, well, I tried. But as a journalist, I usually – well, I do. My six principles of journalism are honesty, accuracy, courage, compassion, freedom from conflict of interest, and humility.

Incidentally, if you look at the big scandals in journalism, the journalists who got into trouble for making stuff up, for the most part they fell victim to vanity, they wanted to be important. Now, I'm not saying I have achieved humility or any of

those other qualities, I am just saying those are the principles I aim for, and vanity can be a big downfall. The journalist, instead of just wanting to do good story, wants to win a Pulitzer Prize, wants to be important. There's a tendency to start making stuff up – don't do it.

KENNEALLY: Well, and I think as well, and I was a journalist for many years myself, you tend to believe your own work, and that would be a mistake of the major order, I suppose. But let me ask you about your book on faith and science, and it has a question in its subtitle, *Why Science* – I take it to be a question – *Why Science Needs Faith in the 21st Century*. So I'm going to ask you, why does science need faith today?

O'LEARY: Because most of the really controversial issues are questions of what you believe and what you value, rather than questions of fact. For example, let's suppose we could greatly improve public health in the Third World, but some animal species would have to become extinct. This isn't as unreal as it might seem, because in many Third World countries widespread use of DDT would eliminate malaria, but it would damage some animal species. Now, should we do it – shouldn't we? It's really a values question, science can't tell you whether you should do that or not. All human beings eventually die, and all animals species will eventually go extinct, so you can't do it even on the basis of intrinsic compartments. You have to decide what values do I think are more important? What is my ultimate faith?

KENNEALLY: Well, you're blogging name is Post-Darwinist. Can you explain what that means? What is a post-Darwinist, here we are – I thought we were all just post-moderns, but apparently we're post-Darwinists as well.

O'LEARY: Well, a biochemist named Michael Benton (sp?) first called himself a post-Darwinian, and I liked the idea. And so I took it over with a slight change, to Post-Darwinist, for my blog name. It just means that I don't deny that evolution happened, but I don't think Darwin had the last word on the origin or development of life. I think there has got to be more to the story. And so that's why I called it that. And I often talk about alternative theories of evolution and situations in which Darwinian evolution does not offer a good explanation.

KENNEALLY: And in fact the book discusses the question of evidence, and where you find at least Darwinian theory lacks evidence. Tell us what you mean.

O'LEARY: Well, Darwin believed that life forms change from one species to the next by a long, slow process of change governed by survival of the fittest. The trouble is while there is some evidence that that happened, there's also evidence of situations where that cannot have been what happened. For example, all or almost all of the current broad classifications of life forms, called phyla, came into existence rather suddenly about 525 million years ago. Since then a number of phyla have gone extinct, but the life forms that exist now were simply iterations of the phyla that

existed then. That is not what Darwin would have predicted to happen. He predicted that the opposite would happen. So that's the kind of thing I address sometimes on my blog.

The main reason that many scientists are so attached to Darwinism, I have to say, and it's somewhat controversial, is that it is the creation story of materialism. It's a story that explains how life forms can come into existence, how human consciousness could possibly exist, for example, without any design at all. Now, my only response is, is that true or not? What does the evidence suggest? The evidence actually isn't looking that good for Darwinism, but of course the people who were attached to it because it is part of the philosophical support for what they believe, and that includes a great number of prominent scientists, are essentially very angry that anyone would raise the issues that I do, but I'm raising them anyway.

KENNEALLY: Well has – in fact I wanted to ask you as a last question, you mentioned those six principles or your work, and courage was one. It seems to me that to ask the kind of questions you are asking, and to be aware that the response isn't going to be always, Good job, Denyse, means that you really have to be really strong-willed, courageous if you will. Have you found – have you been surprised by the reaction, and have you wondered if you have whatever it takes to go on?

O'LEARY: Well, I didn't know there were so many angry people in world, but – I mean, many of us just don't get that angry. However – if it turned out that I was wrong tomorrow, I just wouldn't get that angry – and not as some of the people who've written to me. But actually, I wouldn't compare myself with the people in the Third World, say, who live under dictatorial regimes who could actually be sent to prison or murdered or have their members of their family murdered for what they're doing. The worst that ever happens to me is I get e-mails from people either promising that I'm going to hell or telling me that I'm a menace, which I happen to think that neither of those things are true, so I'm in a reasonable position to just ignore them.

KENNEALLY: So you're pretty comfortable with it. Well, thank you very much, Denyse.

O'LEARY: You're welcome.

KENNEALLY: And finally I want to turn to Oriah and welcome her. She is the author of course the inspiration prose poem and international best-selling books, *The Invitation*, which is now in over 15 languages, *The Dance and the Call: Discovering Why You Are Here*, and her latest book, *What We Ache For: Creativity and the Unfolding of Your Soul*, which offers reflections and guidelines for finding and cultivating creative work that is not separated from spirituality. And that's, I think, a good way to wrap up this discussion here.

But I want to start by telling an uplifting story about the power of the Web. Denyse was just telling us about the Web being a way for people to communicate their anger at her, but *The Invitation* has been quite the opposite sort of thing. And if you can, tell people how it began for you personally, but then how it went out into the world via the Web and how that's changed your life and others.

ORIAH: Sure. In the spring of 1994, I went to a party. I'm not much of a partier. And it was on the anniversary – this is significant because of the writing that happened afterwards – it on the anniversary of a date when a friend of mine a year before had had a brain aneurysm burst while she was in my home. And when that kind of thing happens very close to you, it has a sense of – reminding us of our mortality and a feeling of not wanting to waste time. So I went to this party, a perfectly nice party. I'm happy to say this hostess has never figured out it was her party. And I came home disgruntled really by the kinds of questions we all ask each other at parties. What do you do for living? Where do you live? Who do you know who's here? What's your connection to the host?

And I sat down and wrote a prose poem really based on a writing exercise from poet David White, where you just keep repeating and completing the lines, “It doesn't interest me. What I really want to know...” And I started with “It doesn't interest me what you do for a living,” since all night there had been this conversation about what do you do. I want to know what you ache for. And if you dare to dream, meaning your heart's longing. And so I just keep going through all the questions we ask each other, and saying, that doesn't interest me, I want something deeper.

It happened that the next day I was sending out a newsletter by snail mail, not by e-mail, to about 600 students who over the years had come to study meditation and ceremony and things with me. And I put the poem in, I didn't edit it, I just put it in and I sent it out to them. It was on a very old computer, and so I wasn't on the Internet. And so it took me two years to get on the Internet and really see that by that time there were literally hundreds of thousands of sites with this poem on it. Those 600 people had taken it and just shared it with other people. They read it at events, but mostly they had sent it to people via e-mail or they had posted it on Websites and other people had picked it up. Sometimes changed it a little, added a little completely false biographical information about myself.

So because of that, eventually Drew Durapeau (sp?) who was an agent in Chicago got a hold of me. He was Jean Houston's agent, and she was writing a book called *Passion for the Possible* and wanted to include this poem. And he said to me, have you thought about writing a book based on this poem? He said, it's everywhere. And I said I wrote a book in 1990 called *Confessions of a Spiritual Thrill-Seeker*, and I have a lot of writing since then, but I haven't found the structure for it. And as soon as he asked me about the poem, I thought, ah, this is the structure. So I wrote the book, *The Invitation*, and continued then once I was online to begin to hear from people all over the world – Iceland, Romania, it was read at a U.N.

gathering Africa – and just people from all over the world, and of course predominantly Canada and the U.S., who had read the poem and then consequently read the book.

KENNEALLY: Well, what's interesting and I think worth exploring is what people find in this. And clearly it's even more wonderful they don't know who you were at first. They were, I think, just coming to it for themselves, right? What has been the majority of responses? People are in one situation or another. It's a leading question of sorts, but I want you to tell us who they are that are most intrigued or responsive to the work.

ORIAH: The stories that I get from people – there are two kinds really. One – because the books are really based on stories in my own life and my own struggle with how do you live a life that's centered in your spirituality with they day-to-day aggravations, just the normal stuff. And then with the not so normal stuff, the things like somebody having a brain aneurysm in your home, and one moment everything is fine and then next moment it's not. And so I hear from people who are often given the book during times of crisis, horrible times of crisis.

I was telling Marlene, before, that I hear from a woman whose daughter was in car accident, goes into a coma for five weeks, and she reads the books out loud to her, and her daughter dies. And she feels that she would not have survived if it hadn't been for the book. And initially when I would hear these stories, I was very uncomfortable because surely I would not know what to write to someone about how to survive the death of their child. As a mother, I don't even want to go there. But the nature of the books, I think, are really about how to be here, how to be present.

At the end of workshops I used to teach, I always used to say on the last day, stay here until you go, because most of us are always moving to the next thing. And in crisis, in struggle, in real suffering to learn to stay very present with your heart open and feel connected and held by something larger than yourself that's also what you're made of I think is what has appealed to people as a way to get up tomorrow and do it all again.

KENNEALLY: Well, you told me a story about a response from an unusual group of people. We would expect, sadly, that someone who was in crisis of the kind you described to need some kind of sustenance in the words, but a group of engineers from NASA, the American space agency, asked you to come to speak to them. What was it that they were responding to?

ORIAH: Well, at first I thought it was a hoax. I actually said to my assistant, do you think somebody took the letterhead and sent this letter to me? The books first came out under the name – I worked with an intertribal council of Native American elders, and so the books first came out under the name Oriah Mountain Dreamer, because that was my medicine name. And my son said to me, what are you going

to say to these scientists? He said, do they know who you are? And I said, oh no, they must have me confused with the other Oriah Mountain Dreamer, the nuclear physicist.

And as it turned out, one person who was the assistant to the director of the Goddard Space Flight Center, had read the books and somehow managed to get the director to sign having me come as a guest speaker. So here I was in a room full of about 1000 scientists and pilots, astronauts, doing what I do, which is to talk about my own journey, but also to talk about a lot of poetry. And people were incredibly enthused. This is only to say that people of course are people and everybody is struggling with their own thing, but when I had lunch with the department heads there, I talked to them a little bit about my husband, who is a scientist, an astronomer, and I said when I first met him, he was 17 and I was 15, and he had just built his first telescope, and he said to me, I want to know the night sky because when I look at the night sky I know where I am. And I knew when he said it that he didn't just mean it physically, he meant that he got a sense of his place in the universe, in reality, and also his smallness and the largeness and the awe of the universe.

And I told this story to these scientists, and they all nod – these were the people of his tribe. This is how they touched the mystery. How they touch the sacred and the divine is in this very concrete work, and a lot of it actually very imaginative work, with the universe, the physical universe.

KENNEALLY: Well, you talked about your experience in exploring a variety of faiths, particularly Native American, and the attraction you find in the ceremonies that they practice. What is it about the ceremonial that is important to you?

ORIAH: The ceremonial offers a container, a way to be still whether we feel like it or not, a way to listen very deeply. Most of the Native American ceremonies entail – are pretty basic, fasting and prayer in a natural setting. I grew up in New Liskeard so I was – in northern Ontario, so I was very comfortable and in fact felt more connected to a sense of spirit in a natural setting, and the wilderness – in this country I can say the bush and nobody looks at me like I'm crazy – sitting in the bush and really having that sense of being part of something larger. And those ceremonies gave me the opportunity to do that, and not to leave behind a connection to the physical. One of the things that appealed to me a great deal about the earth-based spirituality of Native Americans and Native Canadians is that there is not a separation between spirit and matter. And I am at heart a monist – I think it's all one thing, two ways of looking at the same thing. So the earth and all of us and everything that is is sacred.

KENNEALLY: You were talking about the need to find quiet, and in fact you told me you're in actually a moment in your life where you're looking for quiet. How hard is it to do that during this sabbatical? Have you found it harder than you thought it might be?

ORIAH: In some ways, yes. We live in a culture that doesn't particularly value stillness and quiet. I have a dear friend who said once to me, you have a very monastic personality, and that's probably true. I spend a lot of time alone, a lot of time doing my practices of prayer, contemplative mediation, contemplative writing, and I need a great deal of that. But I think we assume that because the culture really values a kind of doing and productivity and movement and action – busy, busy cell phone business – that we assume that's what makes it hard for us. And to some degree that's true, when you're driving on the 401 you move at the speed of the traffic so that you don't get mowed over. So we tend to entrain ourselves to the speed around us. But the truth is, and this is what people in my experience who have come to do ceremony with me find, the resistance to being still, to really sitting still is much more internal than external. When you sit still in a contemplative way, whatever your inner demons, your inner fears are really catch up with you, and so it takes a great deal of courage to say that you're just going to stay there with an open heart and embrace what comes and be with what comes.

KENNEALLY: And be with yourself?

ORIAH: Yes.

KENNEALLY: And so there's an implied acceptance of the individual's faults and everything that goes with being Oriah or Chris or anything like that –

ORIAH: Absolutely.

KENNEALLY: – and that that is something separate, you have found, from a lot of what the culture is trying to say.

ORIAH: Yes, whether you're talking about some religious traditions or the way they're presented or the whole kind of New Age, self-help stuff. The message there a lot of the time is, OK, this is what you have to do to change, to be who you want to be, to be somebody else. And I, myself have been aware, I've gone out to do vision quests, secretly hoping I would come back a totally different person with a different personality to work with. That's like wanting to wake up three inches taller tomorrow morning. It's just not going to happen.

So gradually I really shifted in my own experience to knowing that the task was not so much to become someone else as to unfold and become in some essential way who and what I really am. And that's a very different task. Now I'm not so much getting out the whip and looking for the discipline to do these eight things today as I am looking to find the lights of encouragement – that's a line from a Hafeezah Suki (sp?) poem that says, "How did the rose ever open its heart and give to this world all of its beauty? It felt the encouragement of light against its being. Otherwise, we're all too frightened." So there's a sense of – you begin to look for

what helps you open and open and open, which is very different than these are the things I have to do to change.

KENNEALLY: Does your writing help you to do that? Or is the pressure of being an international best-seller getting in the way of that work these days?

ORIAH: No, I would say when I sit down to write the whole will-this-sell stuff honestly doesn't cross my mind or the writing stops. For me the writing is one of the ways that I enter the place of being still, of contemplation, of meditation, and I find out what's going on with me and with my relationship to the world and my relationship to the great mystery.

KENNEALLY: Thank you very much, Oriah. Thank you all. And I want to take an opportunity to ask you if you would like to ask questions of our panel, and see if we have anybody that would like to do that. Any questions at all? Well, I want to ask a question. Oriah, when Denyse was talking about faith in science and you were perhaps, as I was, thinking about that moment with the NASA scientists, there's an assumption that NASA scientists would have to be – I don't know – well, I'll say it, atheist, right? But that wouldn't be the case at all, would it?

ORIAH: Not at all.

KENNEALLY: And so dispel us of that. Were you surprised by how many people of faith of whatever kind were scientists as well?

ORIAH: My own experience with – I did some physics courses at University of Toronto. One of them was taught by a Buddhist, another was taught by a man who had participated in ceremony with the Bloods in Alberta, so my own experience has been in fact that people who do a great deal of science are often people – the more science you do, the more awe you have about the nature of the universe.

There was a man in the audience who was a – this is at NASA – who was a pilot, an astronaut, who wrote me a wonderful letter afterwards about hearing these poems by some of the Suki (sp?) masters and whatnot, and clearly it spoke to him as much as – and there was a woman who was from the U.S. Defense Department who bought books for everyone in her department. I thought that was sort of interesting.

KENNEALLY: Brian, where you say the conflict between faith and science is playing itself out right now in the evangelical community?

STILLER: I'm not sure that there is a conflict. I think there is conflict at times trumpeted by people who may have self-interests in that. You do have a residual discomfort with the Darwinian assumption that life began happenstance in a primordial swamp without having any larger, transcendent factor within the development of humankind. Oh, you'll have the debate between a young Earth and an old Earth,

and I guess we've always had that, and that continues. But the institution that I serve, we don't get that debate, but there is this discomfort that the Darwinian assumption, what I would call Darwinian naturalism, that it happened intrinsically or it happened in a happenchance out of itself, just doesn't square with this understanding that all of life is the Lord's. And so this Christian world view that understands that there is nothing in life that is without the awareness and the influence of the Creator. Simply, it's outside of our world view.

KENNEALLY: Well, and you talked at the beginning about faith returning to the public square, and that's one of the areas where there might have been an assumption that the story was closed at one point, right? That Darwinian theory was asserted, it solved the issue. And now that there are questions being raised by books like Denyse's and others, is that an example of where people of faith have come back to the public square and feel freer, if you will, to assert their views?

STILLER: Yes, it is. The bright minds, the scientist, those who have all the pedigrees that one could imagine, for them to in an arbitrary way say, no, that's religious therefore it has no place, for us is a very curious response. And we think it's very unproductive and unhelpful. So to find a way back into that community where you have these ideas that filtrate into the common, materialistic, Darwinian, naturalistic notion we think is helpful to the whole conversation. And we think it's helpful for young people not to divide the materialistic notion from a spiritual vision. As you mentioned, we believe that there is a spirituality within all of the materialism, and as a Christian I understand that God has brought into this creational, materialistic world His own presence and life. And so we think that within the conversation in a high school or university, there should be a more openness to it that heretofore we simply haven't experienced.

KENNEALLY: Well, and it seems to me, too, that the common thread here is that in the culture we live in today of world conglomerates and global markets and everything else that people are looking for more. Regardless of where they end up finding it, they're looking for more. And I see everybody nodding their heads. Denyse, do you think that that's true? That people want more and that that's why they come to books? It's kind of a quaint notion to look for something that's missing in a book, which seems like such a kind of old technology, if you will.

O'LEARY: Well, you know what they say about gold, gold is where you find it. If you find your answer in a book, then you found it, right? If you find it on the Internet, then you've found it there. But you go to a public library and there are thousands and thousands of books. You'd never read all of them in your lifetime. So that was the original Internet, as far as I'm concerned. The only problem is they have hours and librarians. But still there's nothing to stop you finding the answer in a book.

KENNEALLY: Right. Well (inaudible), and the search engine in those days was your finger and the index I guess.

O'LEARY: And the librarian telling you not to eat in the library and to be quiet.

KENNEALLY: Well, I want to thank you all for joining me. Brian Stiller, Marlene Coghlin, Denyse O'Leary, Oriah. It's been a pleasure and I think an enlightening experience for me today to talk to everyone at Book Expo Canada.

It's clear that faith and deeply-held personal convictions powerfully shape the global experience today. Believers and non-believers among us must pray that the faithful will act for the common good, and for the improvement of the lives of everyone here in Canada and in the most remote regions of the world. Whenever the faithful gather it's common practice for – to end with a wish for God's blessing. Well, let's not fail to remember that the Almighty is always free to judge us, too, and in that judgment may somehow find us lacking. With authors such as those who've joined us here today, we could trust that we'll know ourselves a little better, and hopefully about our prospects in the world. As another author recently told me, our beliefs are only in jeopardy when we don't what they are.

My name is Chris Kenneally, thank you for joining us from Beyond the Book. Take care.

(applause)

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