

## **The 1998 Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church, and Culture**

### Growing Up Postmodern: Imitating Christ in the Age of "Whatever"

#### Introduction

Descartes is history. That's the conclusion of postmodernity. Foundational truth is out, relativity is in. Trace it to Hiroshima, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the Challenger explosion. Technology is not the panacea we thought it would be. Trace it to Watergate, liposuction, spin doctors. Truth is not an objective reality anymore. Trace it to institutional differentiation, Baskin Robbins, cable TV. Choice can paralyze as well as liberate.

Nobody knows this better than the young people whose coming of age coincides with the turn of the millennium. They live in a world where microchips are obsolete every eighteen months, information is instantaneous, and parents change on weekends. The one constant in the postmodern adolescent's experience is upheaval. Truth changes daily. The signature quality of adolescence is no longer lawlessness, but awelessness. Go ahead, youth say to the church. Impress me. When everything is true, nothing is true. Whatever.

It's true that we live in a world that considers truth too relative to specify. The comics brought us mutant "X-Men" and now "X-Women"; consumer thinking brought us X-brands and X-spouses; pop culture brought us X-Files and Generation X. The letter "X" is having a banner decade, labeling "whatever" we don't have the time or the inclination to explain.

Maybe the word "whatever" found its way into the contemporary adolescent vocabulary because "X" describes precisely the Truth they seek. In the early church, the Greek letter "X" (chi) referred to Jesus Christ. This generation of young people is neither the first nor the last in search of "X." Paul recognized this quest in the Athenians, who went as far as to erect an altar to "an unknown god":

What you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. . . The One who is Lord of heaven and earth. . . made all nations. . . so that they would search for God. . . . God will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom God has appointed, and of this we are assured because God raised him from the dead. (Acts 17:23-31)

We all seek "X," God's Truth beyond relativity. We are here because we are called to imitate and obey and proclaim this Truth to all who worship unknown gods. The Truth is out there, for young people and for us.

May you find grace to peruse the "X-Files" of your own life in the days ahead, as we grope for "X" together. Though, indeed, he is not far from each of us.

Godspeed,  
Kenda Creasy Dean  
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# Imitating Christ in a Postmodern World: Young Disciples Today

William Willimon

**T**he kids with whom we work and whom we attempt to reach with the Gospel are different from the way we are. Something different is afoot, and youth pastors are like the canary taken down into the cave — when the canary starts to die, you know that there is something wrong. Youth pastors are the advance guard for the church.

In every decade since 1960, Harvard's Arthur Levine has been doing a study of college freshmen in which he tries to capture the "metaphor" for each generation. When Levine discussed space exploration with my college generation and asked us what first came to mind, most of us said, "John Glenn" — John Glenn going up against the Russians, restoring national dignity and demonstrating scientific supremacy. But, when Levine asked freshmen in 1990 what their image of space exploration was, they replied, "A teacher getting blown up in the spaceship *Challenger*." There is a sense in which, when I look out the window, I do not see the same world a nineteen-year-old sees. We really are living in different places. It is a hard lesson for each generation to learn, but we are having to learn it, I think, in terms of modernity and postmodernity.

Where did the modern world begin? A good place to date it, Stephen Toulmin says, is with a teenager named René Descartes, who, in seventeenth-century France, like the rest of France, put his hopes in the ascendancy to the throne of Henri of Navarre. France, like Europe, had been rocked by a hundred years of conflict and so-called religious wars, and here was young Henri, an enlightened monarch, coming to the throne of France. On the way to his coronation he was assassinated, and all of France was thrown into a collective national depression, including young René Descartes. Toulmin attributes Descartes' intellectual program to this event.

Descartes, in his depression, went into an unused oven and started thinking. And how do you think? Descartes started thinking through doubting. The goal of

his doubt was to think more clearly about the world, to arrive at some base of knowledge that would be firm and secure. What do we do when the world is coming loose at its seams, when everything seems to be coming unglued? We search for some ground of certitude, and Descartes did this through doubt. Do not believe something just because your mother told you, or because the church has always taught it, or because this is the way they believed in your village. Do not accept anything on face value. Doubt. Think, “I doubt.” Looking at the world this way swept away centuries of received wisdom. *I doubt, therefore I am.* To step back from something, think about it, use reason, and be objective is modern thought.

Already in Descartes, at this early date, we see the genesis of what would become the modern way of dealing with the world. We see there the birth of the sovereign “I,” the ego, as the center of reality. The way we get reality is to start with the “I.” “I think, therefore I am.” *I think, therefore the world is.* Though we move out from the “I,” we always begin with thinking by ourselves, for ourselves; the “I” stands in sovereign judgment on the rest of the world. Again, we think about the world by detaching from our emotions, our traditions, our past. We place our great faith in objectivity, whereby we strip ourselves of all preconceptions, preconditions, and prejudices, and we think. Going into the world with a kind of intentional amnesia and without preconditions, standing apart, and thinking — that is the way to find out about the world. This is the birth of empiricism and the scientific method.

Behind this is great confidence in our ability to understand the world. Newton said, “Let there be light,” and suddenly reason opened the door to all mysteries. This is what Max Weber later called the “demythification of the world” whereby we were confident that we had within us all that we needed, right here, for thinking about, for understanding, for *grasping*, for *using* the world. This is why Francis Bacon invented the scientific method — not just for idle acquisition of knowledge but for *control*. The more we know, the more we can handle, grasp, and control in order not to be at the mercy of the mysteries like weather and illness.

Descartes also began the search for absolutely certain facts in order to lessen the conflictual nature of knowledge. Political conflict gave birth to epistemological conflict, says Toulmin, conflict over who knows what is going on. What is going on? What are the facts? You have your opinion, and we have ours, but if we could just find the facts, you see, if we could just uncover .sure, absolutely certain, nonconflicted, uncontestable knowledge, we could have the *facts*, and we could all join hands and sing “Kum Bah Yah.” There would be no trouble, because who is going to argue over a fact? Thomas Jefferson, that great Enlightenment God-hater, begins the Declaration of Independence, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal . . .” George III, if you just sit down and think about this using objective reason, it will be self-evident, no trouble. I want to say, “Well, gee Tom, how

come we had a war over it if it was so self-evident? What was the problem?" The search for facticity was a search for unconflicted, uncontestable knowledge.

The spinoffs of this way of knowing were scientism, empiricism, and universalism. We longed to find large, foundational, overarching principles that would be true everywhere. We wanted to uncover human rights that would be valid universally. A common humanity. Kant wanted to find some basic principles that would be valid in spite of culture, society, or religion. Some have said the two great products of modernity were the atom bomb and the United Nations — two rather similar inventions to organize humanity, two great totalitarian gatherings. Let's get everybody together, and matters like race, nationality, religion, and language will melt before the force of large, organizing, general, universal principles.

There is in our time a feeling among many that modernity appears to be losing its grip on our imaginations. I noticed a number of years ago that I cannot stand up in front of a Duke undergraduate class and say something like, "Science has proven that," and then act as if that is the end of the discussion. They say, "Alright, thank you, science, could we hear from something else, could we hear another point of view, another way of talking about the world?"

The other point of view has happened in my adult lifetime. This is the movement some have called "postmodern." Leonard Sweet says that if you want to know what postmodernity is, think of the Energizer Bunny. That is, you think you're watching an advertisement about real estate or something, and then here comes this bunny banging across the bottom of the screen. He keeps going and going, and you say, "Oh, gosh. I thought I knew where we were, but there is more going on here in this advertisement than I earlier believed. There is more." That longing for more, that desire for a "thicker" description of reality, I would call *postmodern*.

There is in modernity a kind of "flatness" to descriptions of the world. Part of modernity's method was reductionism — the act of taking a bubbling, confusing mass and boiling it down to some basic, universally valid, large principles: the Three Causes of the Civil War . . . the Four Reasons for the Great Depression. Modernity, through the scientific method, asserted that you understand large things by reducing them to smaller units.

Here in the late twentieth century, people complain that their lives seem fragmented, disconnected, there is no big picture. When you walk into high school biology class: "Want to understand the frog? First kill the frog, open the frog up, take out all of its vital organs, cut the organs up into tissue, get the tissue down to the cells, get the cells down to the parts of the cells, label them. We've explained the frog."

Someone says, "Yeah, but you killed a lot of frogs." There are certain by-products of this way of knowing. A lot dies. The world becomes flat. There does

seem to be a yearning among many people today for a richer, thicker description of reality. I notice this among my students. I was part of a world that said, "That is weird, let's explain it." I have found with my students more of a sense of "Gee, that is weird. Let's see if we can enjoy it, experience it, and get in on it."

I realized that these students have had their way with me when a faculty member, typically middle-aged, said to me, "You know, it bothers me in your sermons that you do not spend any time lingering over issues like these: A man has just walked on water, how could that happen? Or, somebody has just risen from the dead, how do you explain that?" When he said that, I realized that my preaching has changed, that those kinds of questions and that methodology have become less interesting.

I have a friend who is the head of the Duke Alcohol Treatment facility. He has an expansive intellect. He is a physician and a psychiatrist. He is also a Christian from India. I believe that his being a Christian from India contributes more to his intellectual creativity than his education does. For instance, he has a theory that much addiction is related to spiritual ineptitude, that people who are spiritually empty and spiritually hungry attempt to assuage those hungers in self-destructive, inadequate ways with wrong "spirits." He notes that the most effective alcohol treatment program we know is A. A., which is explicitly religious, and yet there is very little literature on that sort of thing. He has developed a spiritual inventory; he has made some correlations between this inventory and addictive behavior. Yet he has not been able to publish his studies in one medical journal because he mentions religion. To the editors he says, "We are scientists, we are supposed to be interested in everything." And they say, "No, no, we do not do religion."

He planned a conference with me on spirituality and addiction. We anticipated that maybe twenty or thirty people — doctors, nurses, counselors — would attend. One hundred thirty people showed up. My friend began, "I know less about alcoholism than I did thirty years ago. Where did we get the name 'alcoholism'? Where did we get that word? Just to use that word is to close off the discussion. We got that word from the people who gave us 'appendectomy,' 'abortion,' 'tonsillectomy.' It is the way we remove things from moral discussion.

"There is more going on in this room right now than we know. This conference means more than is printed in the brochure. What is going on between us is deeper than we could express if we tried to take the time to express it. This meeting means more and will continue to mean more even after the meeting is over.

"The room is full of radio waves, and we cannot see them. We do not have any means of receiving them, but they are still there. I do not know why somebody would rather destroy herself with alcohol than live here with us. That is a mystery, and I am frightened by it. Out of my fear, I label, I pigeonhole, and I treat."

At that moment I thought, "Well, we have crossed some kind of boundary

here. We are groping for a thicker description of something than has previously been made available to us."

I think postmodernity comes to us through cinema. *Don Juan DeMarco* comes to mind. I saw that movie with a group of clergy. The young man at first appears to be badly deranged. He thinks he is Don Juan, and then the psychiatrist, played by Marlon Brando, attempts to treat him. By the end of the movie, the psychiatrist is not sure he is the psychiatrist, but he thinks this guy might really be Don Juan.

At one point the young man says to him, "How do I know you are a psychiatrist?"

The doctor replies, "Well, look at the diploma on the wall."

The psychiatrist continues, "How do I know you are Don Juan?"

The boy replies, "Talk to the women." By the end of the movie, there is a slip-page between roles, and you realize how fragile are our identities, how wonderfully slippery is what we call reality.

My wife and I saw a movie recommended to me by my students — *Chasing Amy*. At the end of the movie, my wife said to me, "I remember a day, don't you remember a day, when gender used to be something you could count on?" You were probably a female, and you would probably stay a female. Or you were probably a male. But there is a kind of slippage today, and you realize how our terms like male/female do not make the sense we claim they make; we have to qualify them in too many ways. There is a scene in the movie where the young man, who is said to be heterosexual, says to his roommate, who has a problem with a woman, "You know, the only thing is for all three of us to have sex together. Would you have sex with me?" And the young man says, "Well, I'm free Friday." And you think, "Gee, everything is in movement here, and nobody is standing anywhere for long."

Or Ron Hanson's great novel, *Mariette in Ecstasy*, where you get a group of nuns in a convent in upstate New York, turn-of-the-century, and they're going about their daily tasks, but you have the impression that just beyond the convent there is something just bubbling out there. One day, when one of the nuns is washing, scrubbing the floors, she looks down and gasps — there is blood dripping from her arm — and she has received the stigmata of Christ. By that time in the novel you are not surprised, and you realize that somehow this novel succeeded in blurring boundaries and preparing you to be open to new insight. Revelation. She is driven from the convent by the end of the novel, and you see that you have convents and churches not only to engage us with God but to protect us from God. That is post-modern.

There is a loss of a center in postmodernity, a decentering. There is a suspicion of large assertions, including that one. It is hard to utter, in postmodernity, large, sweeping, universal claims. Too many people come to the microphone now who once were excluded from the conversation. It is tough to stand up and say,

“Well, we *all* know that,” or, “I think we’re in basic agreement that . . .”

In one of his books William Placher notes, “Isn’t it curious that we have four Gospels?” You might have thought at some point that somebody would have said, “Matthew got it mostly right and Matthew’s Gospel is long, and it gets most of the good stuff in. Let’s all go with Matthew. OK?”

Yet Placher notes that one of the earliest persecutions in the church was of the man who tried to harmonize the Gospels and put them all together as one. They drove him out and burned all those harmonies of the Gospel. Why is it curious that we have four, equally authoritative, canonical Gospels? Because, Placher says, Jesus of Nazareth is nonviolent, and the only way you get unity is by violence. You have to do violence to somebody’s voice to get unity. The church knew enough about Jesus to be unwilling to do that — to silence a kinky kind of voice like John’s.

That is premodern. There is a curious sense in which the premodern starts to resonate for the postmodern. This is a radical insight for me, because I am sure that I was told in seminary that if I planned to be a preacher of the Gospel, I had a big problem. My big problem was with *modernity*. On one side was this old, ancient, premodern, prescientific, naive world of Scripture, and over here there were people who used telephones and atom bombs. How could I bring these two worlds together? I labored translating the Gospel through existentialism, feminism, Marxism, or whatever I could get at. I tried to find out what the modern world could hear, and then I would try to crank the Gospel down to that. Here at the end of the twentieth century, therefore, forgive me if I am a little surprised that suddenly the modern world does not have to be taken quite so seriously.

We are learning that the modern world is nothing but a world; that is, it is a configuration of metaphors and ways of talking about and looking at the world, but it’s not the world. Modernity is losing its privileged place among us. In her book Susan Bordo notes that there is a sense in which the modern world may be seen as a blip on humanity’s time screen that lasted about two hundred and fifty to three hundred years in Northern Europe and some of its colonies, and that was it.

On campus, it is fun to bump up against Muslims and all sorts of people who just never got to the modern world. They never participated in the Enlightenment. They have not sat at the feet of Jefferson.

Why should Scripture submit to the canons of modernity before it could get a hearing? Why do we privilege the limited vision of modernity as being *the* vision to which all other ways of construing the world must submit? There is a kind of arrogance in modernity, epistemological arrogance, that thinks that we have in our brains the ability to understand, to grasp, and to use everything.

Modernity went hand in hand with capitalism, which tends to commodify everything. You might have seen on *20/20* or *60 Minutes* or one of those Sunday



night news shows their exposé on sex courses at Duke University. I had been out speaking in a Methodist church. I came in that night, and my wife said, "You're going to have a tough week. You should have seen this program on TV. They have a course here at Duke where they are giving explicit sexual instruction."

I said, "Gee, there was a time when they would have known how to do that naturally. How dumb are they?"

And sure enough an alumnus called me on Tuesday. "What are they teaching down there?" he asked. "I saw this thing on TV and these sex courses and all . . ."

I said, "Look, this is called training in power and affluence. We are trying to train them to rule in this society, on this society's terms. And rich people have a lot of time on their hands. Since they do not have to worry about anything important like food or clothing or housing, they have a lot of time to do sex. We have them take these sex courses the same way we have them take, say, opera appreciation courses and accounting courses. It kind of all fits into the life of affluence and power."

The alumnus said, "You know, you are cynical!"

But, in a way, that is a kind of postmodern observation that politics is in everything. There is a real appreciation in modernity that all ways of knowing and understanding are linked to some kind of configuration of power. There is politics behind all that we think. Consider the kid who stands up and says, "Well, that is fine, and that is your opinion, and that is in the textbook and all, but I think the important thing is for me to think for myself." Why does he think he can think for himself? I could demonstrate that because of the Constitution, Buick commercials, and Wall Street, he is not permitted to think anything but that he ought to think for himself. It is the way we get them. So there is a nice fit between the dominant modes of power distribution and the ways we think.

All this is a bit of an academic, around-the-bush way of saying that I am impressed that *this* is the world of our youth. When we deal with youth, we are dealing with some very different ways of configuring the world. MTV has been a useful device for anesthetizing the young, but you learn a lot on MTV about the ways in which our perceptions have changed. I have noticed this when I watch MTV with my daughter. I cannot understand what I am seeing. There are no connections between anything. There are just images, constantly changing.

On the TV program *The Real World*, five random people are put in an apartment and videotaped. Someone asked me the other day whether I believed that we all were saved in Jesus Christ, and I said, "Yes, with the possible exception of the producer of that show, *The Real World*. That guy oughtta fry in Hell, but that's just an opinion." The only thing real about *The Real World* is that MTV pays for six months of psychotherapy after you get out of that apartment! That is real.

This says to me that we are experiencing radically different modes of perceiving; we are getting people who take joy in the lack of connections. I am reminded of Robert Alter, the Harvard literary critic, who says that, before the short stories of Kafka and the novels of James Joyce, we had forgotten how to read Scripture. We had lost the intellectual skills required (thank you, historical criticism) for reading and understanding the Bible. In Joyce's *Ulysses*, in just five or six pages, are Molly Bloom lying in bed, thinking; a page out of the Dublin newspaper for that morning; Molly's recollection of Michelangelo's statue of David; her thoughts of her husband and his inadequacies; the entrance of Leopold Bloom; a conversation between Molly and Leopold; and then, Molly's thoughts again. What is going on here?

Was there an early James Joyce and a later James Joyce and bad editing? No. What there is is a writer who is attempting to enter into the richness of human perception, the way our brains work. Alter says something very much like that is happening frequently in Scripture where there are different voices and different points of view and perspectives. I think our youth are again able to perceive such rich modes of representation. They yearn for a richer, thicker description of the world than that previously available to them in modernity.

Kids do not have many things they cling to with the exception of friends. Their world does not get much farther than just a couple of people they can really trust with their lives. This is a generation that has been raised by a lot of untrustworthy people. These are the first latchkey kids, the first generation of divorce — factors that make a difference in how they perceive the world. Right after I came to Duke, a parent asked me, "What do you think is the biggest moral challenge facing our young adults today?" And I replied, "Your divorce." A lot of that damage does not kick in until they are about twenty-three and making relationships. They have watched people whom they love fail and hurt one another, fail and hurt them. So forgive them if they are tentative, if they move in together and cohabitate for nine years while waiting for more data to come in before they commit to a marriage. People become like that when they have been hurt. They are reluctant to make promises in a world where many promises to them have been broken.

Young people are oral rather than literate. It's MTV. Life is a blip on a computer screen. The literate world hopes to fix things in concrete, on the page, forever. The literate world does its business by abstraction. Words on a page are abstractions from experience and concrete reality. Adolescents today seem to be returning to experience and concrete realities.

Today's youth are accused of being apolitical. In truth, they are very political, but in a radically different way than we expect. They have lost faith in large, systemic, governmental answers.

There is among them an unprejudiced openness to the claims of faith, to spir-

itual things. I used to think that was good news. Now, I am not sure. Continually I am amazed that they will talk religion and that they are curious. But they are indiscriminately curious. We get excited when two hundred young people attend a talk about "Monastic Spirituality Today," but those same two hundred show up the next night for a discussion on "Two Years with a Zen Master." They took notes at both sessions and believed both speakers. I do not know what to do about that cafeteria-style spirituality. At least they are open to the specific claims of specific faiths; they realize that all this cannot and must not be homogenized.

It is a time of dismantling — a time of great losses and relinquishments. The young white male, for instance, can be a dangerous animal right now. That is what Stanley Hauerwas said the morning after Timothy McVeigh was indicted: "The blue-collar white male is feeling that a world is being dismantled at his expense." What does that mean? Old ways of describing and grasping and old means of identity, by which some people built themselves up around other people, are crumbling.

In a course I teach titled "The Search for Meaning," I ask students to write papers in which they project where they will be ten years after graduating from Duke. Whom will they be living with? How much money will they be making? What will they be doing? The women respondents tend to express an "I-want-to-have-it-all" syndrome. They say, "I want to be ranked in tennis in the state." "I want to have three children." "I want to be a partner in a law firm." "I want to be . . ." And I write on their papers, "You are a wonderful person, but you are not this wonderful. Think again. You're going to have to make choices." But I marvel at the unbridled optimism among the young women, who seem to say, "It is our time! Go for it!"

The young men invariably write papers that are pessimistic. "I will be living in a smaller house than my parents." "The economy is shot to hell. I will probably have to work two jobs." "I probably cannot afford to get married for years."

And yet, the papers written by women are written by people forty percent of whom, by the end of their freshman year, will have received treatment for eating disorders in some form either in high school or in their first year in college.

It is a time of relinquishment, pain, and exile for a lot of people. According to Scripture, this is a great time for us to be in ministry because we do well in times of relinquishment and exile. We do well when people out there know in their gut, "Something is missing; something is wrong; I am looking for a richer description of the world."

To be postmodern in the "age of whatever" is to believe that the Cartesian project was doomed to failure. There is no way to get unconflicted knowledge. There is no way to lessen the trouble of different points of view. There is no way not to have an argument. There is no way to avoid the peculiarity of our point of view. We are all speaking differently. I have trouble understanding you. I am male,

you are female. It is a postmodern willingness to put some of the conflict back on the table. To acknowledge our real differences rather than smooth them over in the interest of a false, imposed unity.

I end by saying that it is a great time to be Christian communicators and enactors because I think that as Christians we really do believe that all truth is relative. There is no such thing as “objective truth” — by the way, if you find any objective truth, go worship that. Worship of abstractions like “objectivity” is much easier than worshipping a Jew from Nazareth who is God. Christians do not believe truth is objective or universal. We believe it is personal, a person, a Jew from Nazareth named Jesus. We make the astounding claim that when we look at him we know all we ever hope to know about God and what is going on in this world as God’s world. We really believe that we know nothing until we know him. He is the key to all truth.

Somebody asked the other day, “What is it like being on a modern, godless, secular, campus and being a Christian?” And I said, “It is a lot like teaching biology.” That is, one thing you learn in a university is that there is no self-evident, unconflicted truth. There is no unconflicted, free-standing knowledge. It all has to be unpacked; it all has to be argued. The great thing is that we get to be there to argue our truth, the truth that we have not discovered by a scientific search of the world, but the truth that has come and discovered us. This truth that has come to us — Jesus — does wonderfully well on the postmodern campus.

I was talking to Marcus Borg from the Jesus Seminar awhile back. I said, “Well, Marcus, what do you have to say about Easter? How do you avoid the kind of Bultmannian, Willie Marxsen trap of the resurrection of Jesus rendered into just something the disciples thought up? Is it just saying ‘He will live on in our memories’?”

And he said, “Well, I think the resurrection points to an experience they had.”

And I said, “But Marcus, these were not very creative people, these disciples. I cannot believe that if they were thinking something up they would have thought up anything this interesting. I just do not think they were that original.” No, I think they were assaulted by something not of their creation. That is part of the difficulty we have in talking about it; it is just so far outside the range of our rationality.

Anyway, to be postmodern is, at a minimum, to admit that there is a lot going on out there. There is a breakdown of conventional modes of discourse and explanation. But what a marvelous time, during a time of exile, dismantling, and relinquishment, to be there with a promise, to be there with testimony that says, “Alright, if an old world is breaking apart, that is OK. We were told not to put our trust in it anyway.” What a time to bear witness that there is One who, even though we have used our great devices to keep out, is busy coming in.

At the end of our Easter service this year, a woman came out, grasped my hand, and said, "I have been alienated from the church for the last twenty years."

I thought, "Why do I need to hear this on Easter?"

Then she said, "I have always been turned off by the hypocrisy and the cowardice of the church."

I said, "Look lady, I work for the church. I know a lot more about hypocrisy than you do."

But then she said, "Would you please deliver a message to the musicians for me?"

I said, "Well, alright."

She said, "As I said, I have been alienated from the church, but today in the service, I found God irresistible and completely unavoidable."

I said, "Well, that is great. We would call that a victory here — just one person coming out and calling God irresistible."

And she said, "You know, I am a graduate of Wellesley."

And I said, "Well, we would call that a miracle then." 🌸