

Episode 170 Lord Jesus Christ with Dan Trier

This transcript has been edited for clarity and space.

Dan Trier

Hi, I'm Dan Trier, Knoedler, Professor of Theology at Wheaton College,

David Capes

Dr. Dan Trier. Good to see you, Dan.

Dan Trier

It's great to see you again. David.

David Capes

Welcome to this podcast. You've not been on before.

Dan Trier

No, you haven't come up to visit at the right time, I guess.

David Capes

It's been a couple of years since I've been on campus. It's great to be back on the Wheaton campus and to see the beautiful fall colors. You've written a terrific new book we're going to be talking about called *Lord Jesus Christ*. It's part of a series called *New Studies in Dogmatics*. I have to confess I haven't read the book yet. You and I have talked about it over the years. But I haven't had a chance to get a copy in my hands and read it. But it just happens to be that I'm here now.

I want to talk about the book because I know a little bit about the field. And a little bit about Christology. I'm curious about what you've done in this particular book. But before we do that, for those who don't know Dan Trier, who is Dan Trier?

Dan Trier

Well, that may not be the most riveting question they've ever heard probably. I grew up on a farm in Northwest Ohio. And I did a lot of Bible quizzing as a teenager. I memorized 13 books of the Bible in my six teenage years and that has been incredibly formative for my life and vocation. I went to Cedarville College and Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary as they were called then. I did a Master of Divinity and Master Theology in New Testament. And then I did a PhD in systematic theology with Kevin Vanhoozer at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. And from there I went south, all the way from Deerfield to Wheaton. 40 miles according to the IRS, so I could not deduct my moving expenses. This is my 23rd year on the faculty at Wheaton.

David Capes

You've headed up to the PhD program and you and I've had a lot of conversations about it over the years. And you're back at that again.

Dan Trier

Well, yes, we love our PhD program and its students and what they're doing. We have 90 graduates now in 15 to 20 countries around the world at any given moment. The Lord's blessed it richly and so we try to keep the trains running on time for that program.

David Capes

You're perfect for that. I think in many, many ways. The 13 books that you've memorized, are they still with you these days?

Dan Trier

They are. Not quite at the level of being able to quote them without error anymore. But large swaths of some big books regularly will just come back to mind. Matthew, John, Acts, Romans, and, First Corinthians were some of the biggest ones that we did. And we had to be able to quote them without error at one stage of life. And you know, large phrases still come back when I need them by the Spirit.

David Capes

What translation did you quote them in?

Dan Trier

We were avantgarde. My first year of Bible quizzing, I think was the second year that they started using the NIV instead of the King James. So NIV 1984.

David Capes

And that language is still with you? Even though NIV is continually changing.

Dan Trier

Yes, it is. And the little bits of King James from other work in grade schools still, occasionally.

David Capes

I've found a lot of times the King James gets it right. When other translations, modern translations get it wrong.

Dan Trier

Yes, they all have their strong places.

David Capes

And King James has a beautiful cadence and rhythm and language to it. And it translates a number of difficult passages, I think in ways that we're coming to agree with more today. At any rate, let's get to your book now. The book *Lord Jesus Christ*, a part of this series *New Studies and Dogmatics*. Tell us about the series. What it is proposing to do and then let's dig into your book.

Dan Trier

The series editors are Michael Allen, a graduate of Wheaton PhD program, and Scott Swain, my best friend in the program at Trinity studying with Kevin Vanhoozer. And they have become known for, quote-unquote, reformed catholicity. The idea that the way forward for evangelical theology is a certain kind of going backward. First and foremost, to Scripture, but also paying more attention to the theological tradition, but in a distinctly Protestant way. The series is kind of an homage to G.C. Berkouwer, a Dutch theologian who wrote a series of volumes *Studies in Dogmatics*, in the 1950s, through 70s or so. And there are roughly 300-page treatments of different dogmatic loci. And they have some history of the doctrine, some discussion of Scripture texts along the way, and some constructive proposals embedded in the studies of the different doctrines. I think that our series is probably a little more constructive and a little less historical than Berkouwer's volumes. But broadly speaking, the aspiration is to be an updated series like that, for broadly Evangelical, and maybe, especially broadly reformed students. Several of the volumes are out, a number of them are still in process. I have learned myself how hard it is to write one. I sympathize with my friends and colleagues who are currently laboring over there. It's hard to do in 300 pages, a really constructive work that is also readable for pastors and future pastors, seminary students. Such is the goal.

David Capes

You use the term earlier, reformed catholicity. And I'm curious if and to what degree, maybe the church fathers figure into some of those readings?

Dan Trier

That's a great question. In this work, for example, when I read John chapter 1, and focus on the concept of revelation and how it relates to Christology, Athanasius plays a prominent role. His reading of John, not that I'm going to assume that he is 100% right, and that he determines every exegetical decision, but in the broad sense of believing that he can teach me to be a better reader of Scripture. And that learning the logic of how he functioned in those Nicene controversies will help to retrieve John chapter 1 and the best of the theological tradition for Christology today. So there certainly is an Athanasian thrust in parts of this book. At the same time that there are also some distinctively reformational moves too. I do believe that there should be more emphasis on the pilgrim human faith of Jesus, and not simply adopting the view of the ancient tradition that he had the beatific vision, from the very beginning, that he not only was the divine son, but that he knew absolutely everything in his humanity from cradle to grave. I think the Reformation put an emphasis on the pilgrim faith of the Incarnate Son and ways that he identified with us in growing in wisdom and stature and favor with God and humanity.

David Capes

He didn't arrive in the manger fully formed?

Dan Trier

Not in my view, and I don't think that emphasizing his pilgrim faith requires a kenotic Christology either. So that's where this is both a deeply traditional Christology, but also in some ways, a contemporary reformational Christology.

David Capes

You have 10 chapters in the book, and you start with scripture, which is a great place. Go back to the sources.

Dan Trier

Yes, each chapter starts with an exegetical section.

David Capes

And then you move into the more dogmatic section. You begin with a close reading of the text. You and I have talked before and I know that you look at all the genitives and all the verbs and all that because you don't leave anything out.

Dan Trier

Well, I try not to, but I have limitations.

David Capes

Is this book for pastors? Is it for church leaders? Who did you write this for?

Dan Trier

I didn't write it primarily to other scholars. That's the first thing to say. There is technical scholarship reflected in it and I hope undergirding it. But as much as humanly possible we're writing for future pastors, future ministry leaders who might be theological students. And an advanced undergraduate or graduate level who might have this book as one section of a theology survey course, or a volume in a Christology elective course. So it's for theological students, and I hope it is also for working pastors. Part of the reason for the exegetical sections is not only to keep theology grounded in Scripture, generally, but I hope to portray for pastors, that Christology is preachable. I grew up with wonderfully faithful, well-intentioned ministers of the word who nevertheless generally did not preach Christology. They assumed that we knew what orthodox Christology was, and we would just kind of catch it, I think, by osmosis. And then they went on to preach other things about how we should live in Christ. But I didn't really know Christology from my experience of the pulpit ministry growing up, and I would like to encourage changing that. I've tried to show that the doctrine of who Christ is, and how it relates with his work is predictable. And I hope some of these expositions of these texts will at least contribute to that aspiration at the pulpit level.

David Capes

At the end of the day, is there a payoff for preaching Christology, as opposed to preaching application? How should we then live? Do you see that as being primary and formative before you get to the application part? Or is there an application part embedded within the Christology?

Dan Trier

Yes, both. I think preaching Christology is important because especially depending on how liturgical a church is, or how a church is liturgical maybe I should say. People are not necessarily going to catch orthodox Christology by osmosis. And so we have lots of Arian or other deficient Christology alive and well in pockets of our evangelical churches today. Because we don't preach and teach about it, it

seems to me. And moralistic therapeutic deism, etc, from Christian Smith, research would show that we are just not teaching the faith to people. I do think Christology merits a focus in its own right. But on the application side, I would also say, and maybe this is a reformed answer, but maybe it's also an answer that resonates with contemporary biblical scholarship. Life in Christ flows from union with Christ, from our participation in him. We need to know who Christ is to know how it is that we find life in union with the risen Lord.

David Capes

You mentioned a moment ago that there seems to be pockets in places where more unorthodox or not fully orthodox people reside. And I have heard and have talked to people, younger people in particular that have a hard time accepting the deity of Christ. Accepting his humanity is almost a given. But the whole question of the deity of Christ, your book here has to deal with that. Have you seen that? Have you heard that, within some of your networks that some younger people are having difficulty accepting that particular idea about the significance of Jesus?

Dan Trier

Yes. I have heard that. A pastor friend of mine some years ago said that there were people committed to an Arian Christology, who came to his church. I won't name where but it's kind of mid-sized, 250-ish person congregation, and they said, we are Bible believers, just like all of the other things in this church. And we'd like to join. We'd like to be Bible study leaders. We want to be really active in your church, but they rejected the full deity of the son. And so that became a frontlines pastoral issue for my friend. How to navigate sincere Bible believing people who nevertheless held essentially Arianism.

David Capes

Did they become Bible study leaders?

Dan Trier

No. You know, he tried to work with them to keep them around so they could encounter orthodoxy. I believe that didn't really work out. You know, we have students here who regularly encounter at the edge of campus, a very dedicated Jehovah's Witness man who comes several times a year to hand out leaflets and evangelize for that faith. And our students really vary in their capacity to engage him well, as opposed to getting eaten for lunch. He's a good arguer and he knows his Bible. And so I do have this burden that we would see divine majesty of Christ clearly in the New Testament. You have done so much to contribute to that in your work in the Early High Christology Club. I try to engage those works as extensively as space will allow.

David Capes

I try to. With Larry Hurtado, Richard Bauckham and others.

Well, I'm one of the people who became engaged in that. But yes, thank you for being aware of the Early High Christology Club.

Dan Trier

I don't have a mug.

David Capes

You don't have a mug? We need to get you a mug! We did a podcast on that with Carrie Newman. And it was a lot of fun, discussing the founding myth of it. I'll have to share that with you one day. But that is a concern of mine. And now that we really do have a growing number of people who, for whatever reason, haven't been trained to think theologically and ever heard those lessons about who Jesus is, and his divinity in particular. And we don't ever want to set aside the full humanity of Jesus and we try to understand that as being integrated, as a part of, but not having one or the other. You know, to be able to see it together. And at some level, Christology comes down to being a mystery. It's beyond the human imagination, just like for me, scientifically, black holes and dark matter and dark energy, all those kinds of things. Maybe one day we'll understand it, but I don't think we will. I think there's just a limitation to our human capacity to understand the Creator and His creation fully.

Dan Trier

A lot of what dogmatic theology is trying to do in this realm is to give a kind of grammar through which we can articulate the biblical mystery and celebrate it and worship.

David Capes

That is fantastic. Well, the book is entitled *Lord Jesus Christ*. It's by Daniel J. Trier. And it's available now. Right?

Dan Trier

October 31 is the official launch day.

David Capes

So Halloween?

Dan Trier

Reformation Day, we call it in my tradition!

David Capes

All Hallows Eve, some would say. But the Reformation tradition it is. Let's go with that. Dan Trier, thanks for being with us today on The Stone Chapel Podcast.

Dan Trier

Thank you, David.