

- Okay, looks like we are on, excellent.

- Well, thank you again.

- I wondered if you could, in this book, you did a wonderful job of talking about strategies for bringing Sophia theology and feminist theology to churches, and I'm just wondering if you think that this would work today, would it be different, would it be easier or harder, or would you change anything?

- Boy, just because of everything that happened--

- Right.

- It shut things down, just so, so... Categorically. Whatever's there is pre everything that happened.

- Right.

- So now it just seems like, oh yeah sure that would have been nice.

- Yes. There's a sense of what could have been?

- What could have been. I remember actually talking to a parishioner of mine at Art Street who went on to go to Drew. And at some point I said, you know it's a shame. It was after re-imagining and all the controversy, and just all of the ways that women in those organizations had been shut down so harshly. So it was really a shame, because this really would have been such a wonderful thing to bring to the churches. And it doesn't seem as though it's going to be possible now. She said, "Yeah, I don't think so." And she was a student. I mean, she was a student. She wasn't a pastor who was kind of in the thick of things. She was a student looking at it. I know that I had it would be nice, this is again, way back, I thought it'd be really nice to write a book for lay women. Just a little chapters with little exercises and little scriptures, and it would, it was just too hot, it was just too hot. It was like a, it just sent, you were either for or against, there was no, there's no place for, oh wow, or just the kind of lovely discovery of what might, of what's there that might be helpful. So it just felt like that just all got shut down in the churches. The place that I know that it still continues is with the Roman Catholic sisters. They've been able to keep, to really let it thrive in nice ways. That's been very sweet.

- Do you see any, oh go ahead Hal.

- I was just gonna, Susan, would you say a little bit about your own personal relationship to Sophia in those regards? I mean, sort of, where she is for you?

- Oh, okay, that's a different question. Well, that's not future so much as--

- Well, I mean, if framing that future-ly would be interesting to me.

- Well, I don't think, I mean, I... I don't know future, right. I can tell you where it's come from, or where it's been, or where it is now. When I did the spiritual exercises, which is a part of my... Part of my formation as a spiritual director was to do spiritual exercises. And that's very, very Christological. Very Christological. And I did it with Sophia (laughing).

- Oh, you did, okay.

- Which was really quite lovely and wonderful, really. And I think my own spiritual life has evolved-- (all laughing)

- We're disentangling tea bags here, I am listening, yes (laughing).

- I think I'm much less personal in my own prayer life and personal isn't where, that sits more, it's much less personal, much more open to a large, I don't think so right now, a larger world.

- Does that mean Sophia still plays a role, or not?

- Sophia is, I mean again, because Sophia was a personal, a personal, you know, the personal. The personal has pretty much dropped out of my spiritual life. And the places where I can connect with Sophia, I think part of the place that I connect the most, I know it's the place I connect the most, is the passage in Sirach, where the sage is describing wisdom in Torah and equating them. And describing, in using the metaphor of river, the various rivers, the sea, and there's this wonderful passage that talks about an eye... I am a tributary from the river, from the sea, I'm a tributary from the river, and I water my flowerbeds. And when I water my flowerbeds, and this is totally not accurate,

- (laughing) Don't worry about it.

- I'm not, I didn't grow up in a culture that memorized verses. And from then, becomes a tributary, becomes a river, becomes the sea. And that, I think if I was gonna talk about my spiritual life, that would be it. That would be it. It's, you know, when I'm doing my personal work it's watering my flowerbeds, and then that merges, that connects to the large sea. And I think that's probably the Sophia passage that most relates right now, for me.

- So the images now would be more images of water or natural-- I mean, is that how you're imaging God, or is that imaging your personal, spiritual life, or?

- Yes, both (laughs).

- Yes, both, makes sense yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

- Yeah, and I think being outside in nature is one of my best spiritual practices and that's all very, it's all very wisdom-y, Sophia-y to me.

- Yes, yeah, yeah.

- Yeah.

- Do you see, do you still teach about Sophia? Did I read somewhere about you connected to queer theology or?

- Well, let me wander around in that a bit. So, first of all, church-wise, church-wise my, simply, my pastoral appointment was quite different than Susan's. So Susan became the cathedral preacher. And that's a lot of different kind of people. And with the kind of good pastor she is, she was sensitive to, at least I felt like you knew that you preached to who you got. And my last 24 years here in Chestnut Hill, so I came to a completely, basically, a disappeared church. There were six people all over 75 when I arrived. And I got, but indication in a situation demographically that there were new people moving in. So I got really, did a restart, and was there for 24 years. And built up with colleagues a real innovative and strong congregation. And some of the first people who came were very interested in thinking about themselves spiritually as women. Now they were really a lot younger than we. In other words, this wasn't what I would call kind of first-wave feminism, or even second-wave feminism, these were people in their 20s and 30s, 20 years ago. And so, they were... There were some interests in Sophia and we, so Sophia became, I guess, in our worship life, a minor deity. In other words, there were probably four or five times a year in which we either preached about or had liturgies about her, used some of those, and it's been mostly new ones that I wrote. And so I would say it wasn't the experience of people catching fire with her, but she became something that people cited, listened to, from time to time. So there wasn't kind of clash that froze things in so many other, because we were coming out of nothing. And we were mostly non-church people. So we attracted the younger, non-church folks, or the spiritual seekers, or the people who had been chased out and gotten lonely and came back, things like that. I would say my, I ended combined almost that entire time I was at Union. And there, I would, by and large, none of my students, or very few of my students, would have known about Sophia, but when they learned about her, and I mean, so you can't, I maintain you can't do New Testament studies without knowing Sophia pretty thoroughly. And so, they have to know her. And so there were, I've quite a few sparks that were flying for people both spiritually and intellectually around Sophia. Again, not as a primary, but as a secondary way of engaging God and knowing who you are. So that would be, so I would say, I have a, kind of a steady beat of interest in her and engagement with her in my two ministry and theological settings. The other thing to say, no a couple of the other things, the other thing that's happened to me in my last 25 years is I've been very engaged with all these newly discovered texts from early Christianity, which turned out to be full of Sophia. And when were working with that, I would say, that'll make sure that people think it's heresy.

- (laughing) Right.

- And I, myself, thought that it was. But now I would say I have gotten to know those texts a lot better and found out that it was all of the early kind of heresy-baiting things about those new discoveries in general, was just a crock. And so, I've found... Both in the local church, not only here when I was pastoring, but as I lecture across the country, there's enormous interest in those texts for spiritual nurture and inspiration. And when they bump into Sophia in a number of those, they're engaged by her. And the theology of those texts is much more thorough going relative to Sophia. So I would say that a bunch of students and people, that I, since I'm no longer in the local church, but people in churches where I speak, are quite interested in her. And especially because she, she's just, she's even deeper than the big corpus of the texts in the Bible that there is. There's just a lot more use of who she is in terms of patterns of pain and sorrow. There's a lot of thinking about her as a primary or secondary god-figure in these texts. And so, I mean... The thing that's right in the middle of, or I'm in the middle of now, is that a bunch of my either recent grads at Union or students are very interested in these texts mainly for spiritual nurture and therefore quite interested in Sophia. And so they find them, so they're at least as interested as I, in Sophia for the themselves, spiritually, and although I would say, for me, Sophia, in my own spiritual life, Sophia is still a part of it. Not quite as much as two years of meditating on her everyday, but meaningful to me. Yeah, so...

- What is it about Sophia that's feeding these people, what is appealing to them spiritually?

- Partly because she's new and they're tired of old. Partly because in some of them she has new stories. So, for instance, I will try to just keep this to three minutes. The dissertation that just was done under my supervision is about the creation of the world by Sophia herself, in which she does it imperfectly, and screws things up as well as brings humans into the world, and then she redeems herself divinely to be the primary bringer of salvation and or Jesus to the world. So here you have a divine figure who has a complicated story that doesn't repeat the canonical Eve as the bad woman, but is a problematic and salvific figure at the same time. People are like that mixed-up-ness, actually. And then secondly I would say that just her largeness of female presence in these texts. So she's kind of the go-to person in a lot of stories. So I don't know where that's going exactly, but I find myself in another realm of helping me, helping folks be presence to her in these newer texts. And, of course, I teach that this is just a large family corpus both inside and outside the canon. Then let me talk a little bit about queerness. I guess I would want to just put that in a larger frame. So, because... Because gender is such a, I've learned, is such a carrier of self-understanding and that happened to us and all of our people as we introduced Sophia. So who she was became who we were. And so that simply made me really want to be very interested in, I guess, theory, feminist theory, which turned into gender theory, as far as I'm concerned, for me, the smartest people and the most insightful people that were feminist theorists became gender theorists, in other words, it was not a stable world of the feminine and the masculine, but a complex way of knowing ourselves in terms of who God is and who we are that shifts all the time. And so I have found, in my life and work, that third-wave feminism, and or gender theory, which is more or less the same thing, I think, is enormously generous and life-giving in terms of thinking about who God is and who we are. And profoundly queer. In other words, gender theory and queerness, it's not an accident that we've had to find new languages to think about the sexuality, gender, and identity as gifts about God and from God, and addressing, and nurturing us as to who we are. So for me, I think, so for

instance, this whole thing about Sophia and Jesus now, are they one and the same or different. I just like the question better than any of the answers. And I like spiritually thinking about Jesus and Sophia, sometimes being the same and sometimes not being the same. Sometimes too really powerful divine presences and sometimes being the same and sometimes edgy connected, and edgily connected. Yeah, so I think that's where I am about her future. I think she's got, she got a pretty interesting life ahead of her in our world. And got quite a bit of life for us. So like 2/3 of what I just said is just theologizing. But it for me has been really connected strongly to people's spiritual thirsts. And so you know the people that I live with under 40, they just won't, they need spirituality so much and they need really important, good thinking theologically. So I don't find them wanting to just talk theology, but they want to ask who she is, what she does, and it feels like the combinations of the new texts and the new theorizing helped actually be productive spiritually.

- I did want to get back to a comment that you made and you referred to, at least a while ago, about Sophia as goddess, and you talked about Sophia as deity, am I right about that? Yeah, you said...

- Yeah, yeah, I remember that.

- You were saying that you didn't, really.

- No, well, I said several things there.

- Yeah, but I'm just wondering, one of the charges that people made is, this isn't Christian because she's a goddess, and this is pagan. So I'm just wondering how you would respond to that?

- To that? To that proof?

- Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

- Well in as much as, yeah well, she's a way of imaging God as female and... People have often called female god-figures goddess. It's not a particular, this is not a term that really resonates much with me just because I've been raised so Christian, so Methodist, you know, it doesn't really work with, certainly, when I think about intellectually it's like, what's the deal? There's no deal here. So God equals he? (laughs) That's the whole problem with G-O-D anyway.

- Yeah, yeah, yeah.

- Yeah, but she's divine is that. This is definitely what she is, boy. Big time.

- And I think I was the one that got our book into some goddess language. I know that the only goddess reference in the book, I wrote. And I was learning actively from first-wave feminist people about that language. And it felt to me like what they were saying made sense. I think that that project also failed. In other words, I think goddess language hasn't really grabbed the hearts of tons of women. There are still, that's a marginal term. And so I think I've, that was a, that was something I would take back in terms of how

to be with Sophia, to call her a goddess. Turned out to be what I thought would be helpful to a bunch of people, but wasn't particularly. And so I resonate with what Susan has as a much more kind of flexible language world. But, and I'm... Since, so, since in... Right now in our country, what's happening is the bottom's falling out of Christianity. And there are whole bunch of people who have some loyalty to some parts of it and are leaving. And are spiritually thirsty. It's, I mean, I don't feel protective of what's really Christian and really not. I feel much more engaged by, so what's going on and big picture for all of us, theologically and spiritually, and it probably not goddess stuff, but it is profoundly sensitive in terms of gender and sexuality and what it means to be men and women, and places in between. And I think that she has lots to offer as a part of a choice of a pantheon.

- Yeah, if I could just switch from those kind of categories all together, and use some other stuff. Well, I wanted to piggy back a little bit on the pantheon goddess, the deity stuff. But then I want to get into something else. I said I've been doing spiritual direction for a really long time. And one of the big draws for me, always, has been the fact that I really got beat up spiritually, and I really wanted to provide a safe place for people. And that's what my spiritual director did for me. I wanna provide a place where people could really themselves and own what their spirits have experienced, what the spirit is doing in and through them and bringing them. And for them to have a place where they can really just pay attention to it and honor it. And that so much has to do with my own experience of Sophia. Not only in my own experience, but then all of the stuff that kind of flew up around it. And there have been people along the way who have come specifically because of my book. I have gotten people--

- Really?

- Oh yeah, for sure, for sure. And then I've gotten other people who've come who have just found out, somehow or other, Sophia's become a major part of their journey. I have a woman who just, was it just, it was just last fall, it seems like years ago now, a Mennonite woman who had her, it wasn't a rebaptism, but like a Sophia baptism. And she invited some of her friends and family to come and we did a Sophia baptism. It's lovely. It was wonderful. And so there have been moments like that. And just last week (laughs), just literally, just last week, a rabbi, a woman rabbi, we were exploring a dream that she'd had, and she called it her wisdom tree. It was so, we just really spent a lot of time with that and this is a person who hardly ever can stay with anything more than two minutes and she's really seeing this is a central and guiding image for her that has a lot of power for her in terms of discernment and she's actually even emailed me about it since and done some collage work and art work with it. So there's people like that in my life that come, that for whom Sophia, always that Sophia can be experienced as meaningful and growthful. So that's just a piggy back on your stuff. But the other thing I would want to say is that there's something about Sophia, wisdom, the wisdom world, I hate to say wisdom theology, that just feels too boxy, but the wisdom world that really allows for us to, well I guess maybe I'm, I spoke for myself earlier about the whole thing about the sea and water in the flowerbeds and all that whole big connection, that's the wisdom world connection. And it has said so much about the natural world says so much about the environment, it says so much about our time in our world right now, which is so, facing such a crisis, we're in crisis, not just facing it. We are in it. And think that the wisdom world has a lot to bring to that in terms of sustenance, as we take it on and honor what's been given us and live into it in ways that are hopefully healing as opposed to destructive. I think

there just a lot there for us. And I, maybe a lot of us the, a natural imagery, I don't know, but I don't think it's just the natural imagery part of it is that the fluidity, there's a lot of fluidity. She comes into holy souls, she's mist and she's tree and she's sea. Do you know there's a lot of fluidity as a whatever, as a presence, that allows for presence to be honored in this world and universe of ours. Yeah, well.

- Beautifully said. And this has been wonderful. Is there anything else that you would want to say that you haven't had a chance to say?

- It's nice to think back about the whole conversation. Let me see. It's not often that we get to sit down and say, okay, so what did you think about those last 15-- (laughing obscures speaker)

- We've been stirring the memories, haven't we?

- (laughing obscures speaker) It's really lovely. I think I've said all I need to.

- Thank you, thank you both very much.