

Spontaneous, unrehearsed dialogs outdoors on campus at the University of California in Berkeley: Transcripts of three FAMILY OF GOD radiocasts by Vern Bennom Grimsley © 1972

The Family of God Foundation Box 347, Berkeley, CA 94701

## "What Is God to You?"

Salutations, sons and daughters of God! This is Vern Bennom Grimsley, proclaiming the teachings of Jesus — the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. This broadcast is originating on-campus at the University of California in Berkeley, where I'm talking outdoors with a gathering of students.

Student: What is God to you?

Vern: I believe God is—

S: You do believe in God? A God?

V: Yes, I do, yes.

S: What do you believe in?

V: I believe that God is the First Source and Center of all things and beings, that God is the Creator, Controller and Infinite Upholder of all reality, that God is the Universal Father--

S: Personal?

V: Yes, that God is personal--

S: Why personal as opposed to impersonal?

V: Because if God were the acme of all reality, and if we were then to deny God personality, we would be denying God one large portion of the very highest we know of reality here on earth. In other words, if we were to conceive of a God infinite, perfect, eternal and all the rest, and then deny him personality — when we consider that the highest realities we know here on earth are personal realities: love, friendship, fellowship — we would be denying God this and it would be a logical contradiction in itself.

S: Are you keeping God then on a personal level? I mean, might not a stone feel that God is a stone, when in reality God might be something infinitely more than a stone?

V: I would say that God may be, and indeed is, infinitely more than just a personaltiy, but he is at

least a personality. By this I mean that God can know and be known, love and be loved, that I can have a sense of interaction, of fellowship, of transaction with God.

Another student: You with your finitude can have a relationship to Infinity? How? How do you bridge the

gap?

V: Personality is what bridges that gap. Otherwise, spatially and temporally, the Infinite, the Eternal, one might argue, could not be known by someone who is finite and who is time-bound. But it is by this factor of personality that personalities can know each other. And for this reason, one of the most important things Jesus said was that God is a Father, that God can be known, and that men are children of God. And that word Father, used 152 times in the New Testament, depicts a Diety who is not abstract, who is not somehow disinterested in man, but who is compassionately concerned, and who can know and be known. I think that's important.

S: There's no questioning the fact that most religions picture God as being personal; that in itself

doesn't prove anything.

V: Right.

S: The fact that Christ spoke of a personal God just might be part of his milieu, of what he grew up in.

I would further say that I have the experience

of God as a personal God.

S: What sort of experience do you have? I mean, you experience God as a person -- what does that mean?

V: In the same sense that I'm standing here in this crowd, and I experience you as a person, someone with whom I have interaction, and a sense of fellowship — or at least we're communicating — in the same way, it is possible to have this sort of fellowship and communication with God.

S: What form does the communication take?
Obviously you don't talk to each other. Not like this,

not with sound waves moving through air.

V: I don't use the microphone.

S: No, well, how do you communicate? I mean, how do you know that it's not all from you outward? V: In other words, how does a person know that prayer is not just a process of bouncing thoughts

off the dome of his own cranium, and indulging in some sort of auto-suggestion, or psychological trickery on himself? Obviously, there's no way of demonstrably proving this with a slide rule. But a person can know this. Again, in the same kind of experience that you have in communicating with another person -there's a feel, there's a taste about it. In the same sense that William James one time said. "What's the difference between a moral act and an immoral act? A moral act tastes better." This is how it tastes. The experience of it, the feeling of it, is that of a real feeling, and furthermore, it makes a palpable difference in a person's life. When you believe that you're infinitely beloved, in spite of your own imperfections and failings, that you're infinitely valuable and worthwhile to God, it makes a difference in the way you go about your daily life. And that's some sort of evidence in itself.

S: Do you make a distinction between believing and knowing? What I'm suggesting is, do you believe with an aura of doubt, perhaps, these things, as opposed to knowing. You know you're in Berkeley, you

don't doubt you're in Berkeley.

V: I would make a bifurcation between belief and faith: that faith is more than belief and that belief is nothing but intellectual assent. One might nod his head to the proposition that we're standing just south and east of the Student Union building on the Berkeley campus, but it wouldn't make an enormous difference in one's style of living. What I'm saying is that faith molds and motivates one's life, and the faith that one is loved by God, a child of God, gives an entirely new impulse and impetus in going out and being able to live with joy, with a sense of peace, and living as a brother or a sister to all the rest of mankind. (Turning to another student)
Did you have any questions?

S: No, I'd like to make a statement, though.
Well, you know when I was real little and I went to
Sunday school and everything, they taught me that God
was in each and every one of us, because he created us.
Well, I kinda think that they were half right. In
other words, I think that there's a part of God in each
and every one of us, but also that we are all part of
God.

V: Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you," in other words?

S: Well no, not really. I just meant that everybody on this world is like God, all in one. And so therefore, when you love God you're loving yourself, and you first must love yourself before anybody else. And therefore that makes you God.

V: I believe you made a correct point in saying that in order to love another person, you first have to have a certain self-respect, and many psychiatrists and psychologists have pointed this out ... that a person who has no feeling of his own worth and selfhood finds it very difficult to see any worth in other human beings as well. This is why I was emphasizing the belief, the faith that you as individuals are the children of God, that you're valuable, regardless of what denomination, sect, or cult you may join, or whatever membership card you may sign. The important thing is a person finding this new sense of his own value as a child of God, and then, in the context of that, he can love other people in a new way, because he understands who he is.

S: But why must you be a child of God? Why can't you be God? Why can't you be a part of him, instead of just a child?

V: Part of God? In other words, pantheism, as in

Hindu Philosophy?

S: Like saying, you are God! If you're saying that you're a child of God, that's saying that you've got a Father, and you have no father, you have no mother, you're your own creator, your own creator of

personality.

V: I would say if we define God as infinite, I do not feel myself to be infinite, therefore I could not say that I am God.

Another S: Do you believe in some sort of life after death?

V: Yes I do, very strongly.

S: What survives death?

V: I believe man's soul does.

S: What's the soul?

V: I believe the soul is the result of the interplay between the spirit of God, which is inside man's

mind, and man's mind itself. In other words, the soul is the third entity, it is the real transcript, the identity of the human being. It is the real you, the soul is, and it is a priceless thing! As Jesus said one time, "What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

S: Tell me, are you a Christian?

V: I'm a follower of the teachings of Jesus.

S: OK.

V: (To another student) What'd you say?

S: I just said good. Oh, he was saying something about life after death? Can I give my views on that?

V: Yes, what do you think?

S: See, I think that, you know how people all know that there's supposed to be a determining factor? Whether or not when you die you go to heaven or hell? You know, that sort of thing.

V: You mean a sort of judgment?

S: Yeah, a judgment. Alright, so I think that when the judgment day comes, you die, and when you're born again you're either born into a very miserable life or you're born into something much happier. One way or the other, whichever way it works. Because I don't think the soul ever dies. The body can die, but the soul lives on.

V: There's one thing I would add: if a person has the free choice, on this earth here, to live or to commit suicide, I think that he also, spiritually, has the choice to commit cosmic suicide, if he wants to. In other words, a person would not have to live eternally, so great is the sovereignty of man's individual free will; he can choose, if he wants, to live eternally, in this spiritual realm, or not. Nothing is forced upon man, against man's will. God has given man free will, we are infinitely loved, sons and daughters, and all men are children of God.

S: Who is God? Is he God, or Jesus, or Buddha,

or Allah, or anyway you want to look at it?

V: My definition of God is that God is the First Source and Center of all things and beings, the Creator, Controller, Infinite Upholder of all reality, that God is the sovereign, eternal, immortal, invisible being, and he's the Father of all men. Not that God

is running some sort of a heavenly adoption agency, and you have to become a child of God, but that you are already.

Another S: It's really refreshing to hear a nonviolent voice. I mean, someone who isn't advocating hate, kill, and destroy in America. It's a most, most welcome voice. How did you manage it, though?

I believe that this is the only hope.

S: It certainly is!

If you look at planetary history and see that people down through the ages have often been living in virulent and vitriolic violence, the time is coming now for a spiritual renaissance. I think we can live as one family on this planet, and that whatever your background, sociologically or economically, whether your furniture goes back to Louis the 14th or your car goes back to the finance company the 31st, whether you're rich or whether you're poor, whether you do most of your business with a stockbroker or a pawnbroker, that you're still a child of God. That's the crucial point about man. That he's infinitely loved. if he'd only dare to believe it.

I'm still puzzled by your concept of a soul. You would contend there is something more to a human mind than just the physical, chemical, electrical processes of the brain in reaction to the body?

Yes. I would say there is. V:

What more is there? And what is your evidence? S:

Well. let me tell a story.

Another S: What church group do you represent? I'm not representing a denomination. I'm here as an individual.

That's very good.

Let me tell a story. On one occasion an atheist and a man of spiritual faith were arguing, and the atheist was saying, "I went to a museum of science, and there on the shelves I saw all the things that compose human beings. I saw so much phosporus, so much lime, so much potassium, so much water, and so forth." And he said, "I did not see a little jar there with 'The Soul' on it. So," he said, "where's your soul?" The man of faith said, "I refuse to argue with you about this. I refuse to discuss it at all." The

atheist said. "Aha! I have you!" The man of faith said. "No, but if you think I, as an intelligent." rational person, am going to stand here and waste my good time arguing with just so much lime, so much potassium, so much calcium and water, you're crazy." Bravo, very clever.

V: Well, what I would say is -- what'd you say?

Another S: It doesn't answer the question.

V: I would say in a sense it does. Because the point this is making is that what you recognize about another person is not just the outward, physical nature of a person--

Another S: But you can't really talk about it. V: One of my convictions is that man has within himself all that he needs inherently, innately, to find God, to have this experience ... that simply by the faith to dare to believe that man is infinitely valuable, that we're sons and daughters of this God. that we have a fragment of infinity, a spark of divinity within us ... by just that alone, man can be transformed from the inside out, like turning a sock inside out. Yeah.

V: No, but when Jesus himself says to interpret it the other way, you ought to.

S: No, wait a minute. And if it's convenient for you to interpret a particular statement that Chrsit or others made in the Bible as <u>literal</u>, you'll interpret it as literal. According to your convenience! In direct opposition to the statement of Christ himself that you should not <u>twist</u> the scriptures to your own purposes, for that is what the scribes and the hypocrites do. And that seems to be what you're doing, twisting the scriptures.

V: The analogy which I gave was a point where Jesus himself declared that he was not saying something that was to be taken literally, but to be taken metaphorically, namely, being born again. He was not talking about physiological birth, but he was talking about spiritual birth. What'd you say?

Another S: You're out of tape.

V: Ha! But not out of thoughts! Yes.

Another S: Like believing in the Bible or something.

I may believe in mysticism, and I may believe in God in some form, but I won't believe in the Bible.

V: Would you say that you have an inkling of a feeling that there is a spiritual reality in the

universe?

S: Yeah, I believe that there has to be.
V: I believe that too, Jesus himself was not talking about a doctrinaire, dogmatic way of life. In fact, he was proclaiming a very simple thing: that it's not necessary for a person to nod his head to all the hide-bound ecclesiastical concepts down through the centuries to find God and have this experience. Would you concur with that?

S: Yeah--

V: I'll tell you one reason I think that it's important to study the teachings of Jesus: that here's a man who was there. If I want to find out what London was like in the times of Samuel Pepys, I read Samuel Pepys' diary. And in the same sense, Jesus of Nazareth was a man who uniquely was God-conscious, was a highly spiritually developed person, and therefore it is important to study his teachings.

S: (after a hesitation) I agree. And I agree

that it's probably equally as important to study other people who were probably equally enlightened all over the world, rather than concentrate a study on Jesus Christ.

V: Jesus was calling man to the quest after truth, and not just into a dogmatic and narrow sectarian viewpoint. Because he was saying — for example — that truth makes a person free. Would you agree with that? S: Yeah.

Another S: Naw, I think it's outmoded. It should have been abolished by educating the very young.

V: Religion could be abolished by education, you think?

S: I mean, it should be, it should be. It's totally false.

V: How does a person explain then, that such men as Albert Einstein — and some of the most educated

people around -- are highly religious?

S: It's because of his early training. Einstein probably was a little bit religious. But ... he never really expressed his belief. It's impossible to tell from his writings what his beliefs were, and certainly, as all his relevant writings show, he was very much of the mind that religion was very harmful.

V: No, I'll give you some quotes from Einstein. He said, "God is not playing dice with the universe."

S: That's not a religious statement.

V: Yes, it means that the mind that created this universe is a systematic mind.

S: That was just an expression he used. He didn't use that to express that he had any concept of God at

all, because I'm sure he didn't have.

V: Let me give another of his statements, then. He said that when he made a great discovery in theoretical physics, he did so by the following methodology: putting himself in God's shoes, so to speak, and asking himself, "How would God have done this? How would God have created physical reality?" S: He never used God, the use of the concept, in that way. For instance, he was of the opinion that there was no rational force behind the universe, or controlling the universe in any way. This is the important thing, that there is no rational force behind the universe. And everybody who's intelligent

already believes that. The best refutation of what you've just proposed is written in stone at Princeton University, where Albert Einstein was, of course, on the faculty; it's on a stone fireplace -- one of Einstein's quotes -- and it goes as follows:--The quote is well known, but it has nothing to S: do with his idea or concept--Einstein said it though, sir. V: That's not relevant to the question. It is relevant to the question, and here's the V: quote:--God doesn't exist, this is the relevant thing. S: V: The quote on that Princeton University fireplace, by Einstein, is as follows: "God is not a prankster, but a Mathematician." He was saying that this is an organized universe, that it's not a simply blind and unreasoned cosmos. And it seems to me that all of physics, all of--He believed that there was no rational control or thought or mind behind the universe. (To another student) What'd you say? V: (To the student speaking previously) How do you know that it's his idea and not your interpretation. because that's something you always have to face. Well, because I'm acquainted with what Einstein's thought was. You're acquainted with what you believe--S: No, no, I'm acquainted with his ideas on that. He didn't express his ideas very often, but when he did, he was anti-religious. I think that Einstein was a man who--V: In the sense of the existence of God, and this is the question. The belief in a rational force behind the universe, which is, at the best only a theory. But, if you look at the universe, you see a universe which is rationally understandable, which makes sense; in other words, in which there are laws of cause and effect. Would you agree? (After a hesitation) Yes. And Einstein was simply saying that it didn't

appear to be nothing but one huge, blind, uninterpret-

able mass, but that there was sense to it. Now again,

a person has a choice along this line, in the same sense that a person has a choice to believe himself to be a member in the family of God. But I think all human beings are sons and daughters of God, and all are-- And what do you think about religion? Another S: The essence, the essence! Ha! The essence, yes. How about the father-V: hood of God and the brotherhood of man? Does that sound good? You'll have to explain. S: That this planet is one family. Do you think V: that? S: This universe. This universe is one family. The brotherhood of beings, then. Of all essence. Of all essence. Alright, shall we take a vote on this? Ha! Another S: A religious program? Ha! Yes it is! What radio show is that? It's a syndicated broadcast on several stations, not only in California, but in Oregon and Washington, and Indiana--S: On religion? Yes, right. Religion and philosophy. I think all people are children of God and all men are brothers. Do you think so? Yeah! S: You do? Yeah! Ha! Take this man's picture and dip his baby shoes in bronze. I think that's great! Do you think it's going to change the world for people to believe that? Yeah. S: Another S: Well, I can live without it. Do you think it might be more fun to live with V: it? No, not at all. S: V: I think it is. I believe in living in a religious way, but not believing in religion. Does that make sense?

V: Ah, would you say it's a different thing to believe in God than to believe in religion? That those are two different things?

S: Well, I don't believe in God, but I believe

in living rightly.

V: I believe God believes in you.

S: Alright.

V: I mean that you're a daughter of God, but you may not know it.

S: He's got too many to look after, now.

Absolutely.

V: Too many people for God to look after? Like the old lady in the shoe, not knowing what to do, and all?

S: Yes, many, too many. He's got lots of water but nobody ever uses it anymore.

V: Nobody ever uses the water anymore?

S: Yes, the hippies! The hippies never use water.

V: Ha! I think God does know all about his children. Jesus said that God knows every hair on everybody's head. How does that strike you?

S: Well, alright.

-end-

A Heroin Addict Tells How He Found God

Student: I have been a member of the church of Satan, of the Nicherin Dishonen, of the Rosecrucians, two different groups, of about six or seven black and white magical groups, of the Roman Catholic Church. I have been infiltrating and subverting dozens of religious and magical groups over the past five years of my study. I set out deliberately to do it. I've gotten kicked out of every single one of them, and they've all kicked me out with exactly the same words: "Shut up or get out, kid!"

Vern: This radio broadcast is the only organization which has not yet driven you away — what I'm saying is that I think authentic religion is not afraid of someone who asks questions. I think authentic religion is not afraid of criticism, it's not afraid of heckling, it's not afraid to examine ideas, because it has a faith in God which is a powerful one and an

individual one.

S: And I will agree with you on that, but unfortunately there seem to be very few people with that kind of authentic religion, since everybody I talk to gets either angry or afraid, whenever I start talking to them.

V: Do I?

S: No, but you're one of the few authentically religious people I've ever met in my life, and I have met thousands of them, all claiming to be religious. But I have been in Berkeley now for three years, and I haven't exactly been the quietest person in Berkeley for three years. I've been doing a lot of screaming, and in my time in Berkeley I've had my head clubbed by cops twice, I've had two of my ribs kicked in by radicals, and I've been attacked some twelve or thirteen times by Christian evangelists. Now out of

those three groups, which one of them is the most dangerous and violent?

V: I once had my nose broken in three places, and believe me, I'll never go those places again! I'll tell you that! What a man has to suffer for his belief! (Turning) You say that you've found a new love of God in your life? Is that right? Girl: Yeah!

V: Even to the point that you can love who?

G: The police!

V: Fantastic! How did you receive this love of

God? How did you find God yourself?

G: OK, I was here at Berkeley and I was sitting at the fountain, and these two guys — there was a Christian on my right and a Christian on my left, and they both had Bibles, and I laughed at them, and I said, 'What do you have Bibles for?'

V: They had you surrounded, in other words.

G: Really! They didn't know they were going to talk to me and I didn't know I was going to talk to them.

V: That's something that everybody needs to remember, that God has them surrounded. God is on the right side, left side, up, down, and everywhere, right?

G: Yeah, right. So we got into a rap about Jesus. And at first I laughed at them, and then I found out that what they said was true. And they loved me, and I felt the love that came out of them.

V: Which was really God's love, you feel, in

them, working through them?

G: It wasn't lust, and so I'm still bitter toward everybody. But just lately I've been growing up, and one day my parents said something against the President, because they're not Christians, they're really atheists, and I really felt strange. I said, 'He's a human too, you know.' And I've just really been filled with love.

V: So you know the joy of living as a daughter of God and a brother or a sister to every other human being?

G: Amen!

V: That's great, ism't it? (Turning) Have you ever had prayer answered, have you ever felt that prayer has been answered in your life?

Another student: Sure, sure. I was in jail once, and I didn't have a job, and while I was in there. one night. I was laying down, and I decided that I would pray to get out of the place and have a job when I got out. And when I got out. I had a job. That's great! Somebody was asking me one time, if a person didn't have enough money, if he were in terrible condition, what difference would it make if he found God, had God in his life. I said. first of all, finding God in your life changes you so much that you can go out and you treat other people differently, you behave differently in the world, people respond differently to you, and as a result situations are different. Is that right? S: Yeah!

V: Do you believe God is your Father, and you're a son of his, and every person on this planet is a brother?

S: Sure, sure. I really believe that. Ah, I don't know how to put it in words, but, you know, I feel it, see? Really, you know, I just can't explain it, you know, I've got it all inside of me, you know, but right now it just won't come out.

V: That's what's going to change this world, I believe. Here you and I are, standing on this Berkeley campus. You're a black man and I'm a white man, and yet I believe that we have one Father, God, and we're brothers, and I believe that can change this world, if people love each other that way, do you think so?

S: Yeah, I think so. I wish all of the people felt that way, you know. It would be tremendous if everybody just came into one, and had that belief.

V: And began living as the family of God.
S: Right, right, right. I was watching TV; I forget the name of the program, but he had a rock and roll group on. And the subject came up — this guy had studied ministry — and the subject came up about black people, and he said, 'This is the way I feel: out in the open, the flowers that you have in your garden, they belong to God. People, humans, are the same way — they're flowers of God. All of them are one.'

And all different colors, still! V:

Definitely, definitely, right, right.

S: That's great! I believe all different colors are sons and daughters of God, and brothers in one family, and if people will turn to God with all their hearts and begin to live with this new love, then the world is going to be transformed. I believe that. Do you?

S: Yeah, I believe so too.

I do too. (Sounds of riot, chanting in background) The crowd is turning on us at this point. Ha!

We're going to have an interesting thing S:

coming up here pretty quick.

The crowd is chanting, pointing, and yelling. I don't think we're going to have a riot situation at this point, but one never knows here on the Berkeley campus at the University of California. The chant is going on, and just as we were talking about the brotherhood of man and how we need to love each other, we see a visual demonstration of it right here on the campus, right?

That's right.

Now in this situation here -- as we see the crowd -- one thing a person can do when a crowd becomes angry as we just saw, is talk to individual people in the crowd; we've got it calmed now, but people oftentimes -- when there's a crowd scene of this nature, and they're becoming angry -- don't talk to each other, they only start shouting or start chanting. We need to have understanding between individual people in a mob scene or in a crowd like that. That makes all the difference in the world if people think of the person next to them in that crowd as a brother, and as a fellow child of God. Right? Right, right. I wish somebody could get in S: there one at a time and pull them out.

Talk to them as individuals, you mean, about V:

God?

Definitely, right, right. Because you see when you've got a crowd on hand like that, everybody wants to look good in his fellowman's eyesight, see, and you can't talk to them as a group, because they're going to get to shouting and hollering at you, and I believe if you can pull them away, you can cool it down.

Right, right. V:

Male street person: Well, I used to be strung out on smack.

V: You used to be on heroin, in other words.

S: Yes.

V: For how long a period of time were you on heroin?

S: I shot it every day for a year.

How much was that habit costing you? How

expensive was it at that time?

Well, it ran as high as fifty dollars a day. And I have burned people, ripped'em off, I have been in knife fights--

V: Winning or losing?

Some I won, some I lost. As I smile now you can see some teeth missing. It nearly cost me my life. I got so bad into burning and ripping off, that people were out to kill me for it.

This was during the period of time -- you say

for a year -- while you were on heroin?

S: Right.

Continually and every day? V:

Right, right. S:

And then you found God, and this changed your V:

life?

I was in Mendocino hospital for my third time. S: and when I was released, the very same day I was released, I thought back to the other two times I was released, and I flashed on what the doctor said, what the psych said: he told me that if I wanted to kick I'd have to stay up there at least a year, and even after that time, they weren't sure that I'd be off of it or not, and soon as I came out, I sold my bus ticket to go to San Francisco -- and I had some money, and I was thinking of going back into the city my third time, and fixing that same day I got out of the hospital, which I had done the previous two times I was released.

Taking a shot of heroin? V:

S: Right, same day I got out of the hospital. And I knew I was going to do it. And I stood on a highway, then I started doing some soul-searching. Because I've had it, I've had it enough, you know, I've had it up as far as I can take it.

V: You probably almost felt as if you were searching for your soul, didn't you, in doing the

soul-searching that you did at that point?

S: Yeah, I was searching for something to rescue me from all of this -- everywhere I turn, like, I've even tried to take acid to get away from heroin, take speed to get away from heroin, and I met a chick, and I went out with her for a while, and we were making it together, but it didn't work.

V: Then how was it that you found God as a personal experience in your life, after all this drug-

taking and all this trouble you'd had?

S: All strung out on dope, thinking all these lowly, dirty thoughts, about ripping people off, and burning them, and it was a comforting thought to know that I don't have to straighten out to come to God, but he can take me just as I am and come into my life.

V: Exactly as you were. And at the time you were thinking this and praying this, you were on

heroin.

S: Well, you know, I used to think that in order to meet God, I'd have to clean up first, and I'd have to get my head straight, and get all these thoughts out of my head and all — about ripping off, and burning, and purse-snatching, and whatever. But it's not true! He don't care what's in your head. God doesn't care what's in your mind. He doesn't care what you look like. He sees you inside. He wants to know if you're searching, if you want the truth, if you want to change your way of life, if you want to come to the truth and the light, that's what he's interested in.

W: He's interested in this questing and hungering

of your heart, whether you're hungry for God.

S: That's right.