

# Tom Thresher

## “Reverent Irreverence and Integral Faith”

Episode 14 (transcript of audio) of The Advent of Evolutionary Christianity  
[EvolutionaryChristianity.com](http://EvolutionaryChristianity.com)

**Michael Dowd (host):** Welcome to Episode 14 of “[The Advent of Evolutionary Christianity: Conversations at the Leading Edge of Faith.](#)” I’m [Michael Dowd](#), and I’m your host for this series, which can be accessed via [EvolutionaryChristianity.com](http://EvolutionaryChristianity.com), which is also where you can add your voice to the conversation.

Today, my featured guest is [Tom Thresher](#). Tom is a [United Church of Christ](#) pastor and both a [Progressive Christianity](#) and [Integral Christianity](#) leader. He teaches leadership at the [Bainbridge Graduate Institute](#), and he’s the author of a book, which is also the title of our conversation, [Reverent Irreverence: Integral Christianity for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, From Cradle to Christ-Consciousness](#). Early on in this conversation, you’ll hear how Tom felt called to ministry, and I invite you to suspend judgment and just keep listening. You’ll find this a very interesting conversation.

**Host:** Hello, Tom Thresher, and thank you for joining this conversation on evolutionary Christianity.

**Tom:** Hey, Michael. It’s nice to talk to you again.

**Host:** Tom, I was particularly interested in having you in on this conversation—both because of your very interesting background, which I’ll let you share here in a minute, but also because you’re a pastor and you are also a significant voice in the Integral Christianity movement, and have worked with both students and parishioners. You have a recent book out, [Reverent Irreverence: Integral Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, From Cradle to Christ-Consciousness](#). I’m wondering if you could share a little bit of your background—your testimonial—with our listeners, and how you see yourself in this larger movement.

**Tom:** I’d be glad to. If you will, being a Christian minister is quite a surprise to me. I wasn’t raised as a Christian or had anything to do with the church, quite honestly. As a devout heathen, I had a [New Age/Hindu/Zen](#) belief system, which suited me just fine.

In the ‘90s, I had some extraordinary experiences that led me to become a minister. This is my third career. I was a college professor for ten years, then I was an artist/craftsman for a dozen years, and now I’ve been a pastor for eight years. So, that’s the background in a nutshell.

**Host:** Were you raised in a Zen/Hindu background? How were you raised?

**Tom:** Nothing, really. I have this memory of going to my grandmother's [Southern Baptist](#) church and having the bejeebies scared out of me, and then getting thrown out of Sunday school. That's my full experience of Christian churches growing up.

Then in the '90s, we had been going to a little church on the Oregon coast, which was quite a wonderful place. I could be there and not feel like I had to run screaming out the door. Then these unusual experiences happened. So I went to the minister there and said, "I have got this dazzlingly clear call that I'm supposed to go into ministry. What should I do?" And he said, "You might consider being baptized." *[laughter]*

**Host:** Tom, I've got to back up. Share a little bit, to whatever degree you're comfortable, about these spiritual experiences, and also a little more about this call, this deep feeling that this is the direction you're supposed to go in.

**Tom:** Well, telling this story usually makes me sound crazy, but it probably is appropriate. I had some extraordinary experiences where someone I knew was convinced he was having a conversation with Jesus and was relaying it to me. That sounds nutty. I'm a college professor; I didn't believe this stuff. But there was enough evidence that I said, "Something amazing is going on." And it went on for several years.

During that time, extraordinary things happened in my life, unexpected things. And then one afternoon in January, this person said, "I think you're supposed to be a minister." That idea had never, ever occurred to me. And in that instant, it was absolutely clear that that was what I was supposed to do. I literally almost fell down. And everything fell in place after that. It was quite extraordinary. The money was there. We sold our house. Everything was there and lined up for it to work out. It's been extraordinary. I love what I do. I can't imagine doing anything that's cooler than this.

**Host:** As they say, the Lord works in mystery ways.

**Tom:** Yeah, I'm really happy about this one.

**Host:** Say a little bit about your ministry, and what makes it unique. What is, exactly, Integral Christianity, or Integral Church?

**Tom:** I got a doctorate in the '80s, and basically wrote an interdisciplinary dissertation that crossed the fields of psychology, philosophy, and economics. It was very confusing. Somebody handed me a book by Ken Wilber, and suddenly there was a model that made it crystal clear. I became appreciative of his work immediately, because it held up a reasonable model of the world to me.

The other side of it was, while all this weird stuff was happening with my call to being a minister, Integral work gave me a grounding that allowed my mind a place to rest without being freaked out with the rest of the stuff that was happening. It was large enough that it could hold my experience.

When I went off to seminary, [Integral theory](#) and the [Integral model](#) was my theology. This was how I was trying to look at the world, through levels of development, through what [Ken Wilber](#) calls the 1-2-3 of God: God in the first person, God as out there, and God as the universe, if you will. And that seemed like a no-brainer.

The folks in seminary were not so happy with that, but we managed to get along for 2½ years until they gave me my license and sent me out the door. *[laughter]*

**Host:** Which seminary was this?

**Tom:** [Pacific School of Religion](#) in Berkeley. A wonderful place; I had a good time there, but we were truly glad to be rid of each other, I think.

**Host:** And you did your [master's in economics](#) and a [doctorate in education](#) at [Stanford](#), wasn't it?

**Tom:** Yes, I did, back in the '80s. So after I had finished seminary, I went to one church for about a year, and that didn't work out. I put myself out in the market very clearly, not in terms of Integral, but in terms of being not a conventional preacher, and I figured there might be five churches in the country that would want me. This wonderful little church here in [Suquamish](#), Washington, west of Seattle ([Chief Seattle](#)'s ancestral home), said this is the right match. It's turned out to be a wonderful match.

I've been here now eight years, and using a lot of Integral theory as a map, we have slowly embodied it. One of the things, I think, that makes us unusual is that the Integral perspective is a great map of reality, but it really doesn't have any substance to it.

**Host:** It should be noted, for those who aren't familiar with [the Integral map](#), with [Integral philosophy](#) (YouTube clip [here](#)), that this is both a developmental and an evolutionary map. That is, it is an attempt to take in all of human knowledge and various paths, and to make sense of it, by having a map so you can see how different disciplines, different states of consciousness, or different developmental trajectories relate to each other.

**Tom:** Wonderful. You've said it beautifully. In fact, we don't call ourselves an Integral church; we call ourselves an evolving church.

**Host:** And having been in your pulpit, I want to say publicly what an extraordinary congregation it is, and your leadership. It's clear there is a symbiotic dance between that congregation and you as minister. It's really quite extraordinary.

**Tom:** There aren't really any maps for what we're trying out, so the spiritual demands are profound. The primary one is for me to shut up my overactive brain and listen. When I do that, it works well. It never moves as quickly as I want, but it is moving, and it's moving in high quality ways, which never cease to astound me.

One of the things I got in my journey into ministry was the message, "Tom, something greater than you is in charge."

**Host:** Having pastored three churches myself over the course of a decade, the sense that there is some larger reality to which I am accountable—that it's not all up to me. I think that is an important mindset for ministers—whether they use religious or secular language to talk about that larger reality, whether they're comfortable using traditional God understandings, or other more contemporary metaphors and language for [Ultimate Reality, or Ultimacy](#).

Tom, I'm wondering if you could share a story or two of how an evolutionary perspective, how a deep-time perspective, has made a difference for someone?

**Tom:** I have a program in the church I call TAGS: "Talking About God Stuff." It's quite an open conversation. A principal voice that we've studied is [Brian Swimme](#). Brian, of course, brings a strongly evolutionary perspective on the world with this subtle spiritual background. The way we work with the class is we watch a little bit of his work, and whatever topic of interest arises, then we can move off with conversation.

For a substantial portion of the congregation, this evolutionary orientation is a pivotal part of their theology. What I've watched over the years, with a lot of individuals, is this expansiveness, this willingness to move beyond their traditional worldview without having to jettison it.

And [your work](#) (*video and audio content, [here](#)*) has been wonderful. We've used a bunch of it, as well, for actually making those connections between the evolutionary perspective, as articulated very often by Brian Swimme, and the tradition—and you make a wonderful bridge there for folks. It helps with their language, and saying, "Okay, I can connect these two now."

**Host:** Thanks. For me, I often get asked the question, [how did you go from being an anti-evolutionary fundamentalist to being an evolutionary evangelist](#)? Was it a hard break? Was it a difficult thing? My honest response is, "No, it wasn't difficult at all." It was a step-by-step emergence. It was an emerging of a more expansive way of holding my Christian faith.

But I never felt I was giving up something. I never felt like I needed to let go of or surrender or say goodbye to or grieve the death of, or any of those metaphors that are often used. None of that was my experience. It was just an emerging into a more expansive way, a more evolutionary and ecological way, of holding my Christian faith in a way that from an emotional and spiritual standpoint fed me and nourished me. I felt like I had a more intimate relationship to God, a more grounded, realistic way of holding all the core concepts of my faith.

So I can understand some of your congregation not feeling they had to jettison their faith to be able to embrace an evolutionary worldview.

**Tom:** You asked me earlier what is it we're trying to do as an evolving, Integral church. In many ways we're trying to do on a micro level what you're doing on a macro level. You're having this large national, maybe worldwide, conversation. And at the other end of the scale, we have a hundred or so folks here saying, How do we create a culture safe enough and accepting enough and open enough so that individuals can make the transition you're talking about? How can we include this broader perspective in a way that is profoundly safe and that is willing to hold the space for as long as individuals need to integrate these different views?

What I'm suggesting is we're working on exactly the same project, on different scales. It's going to be great fun to have folks in my congregation hear all of these interviews to see the larger picture of what we're engaged in.

**Host:** It's pastors like you and [Ian Lawton](#) at C3 Exchange in Spring Lake, Michigan, and [Bruce Sanguin](#) up at Canadian Memorial who are doing the important work of really integrating this deep-time, sacred evolutionary understanding within our tradition—and supporting people, supporting families, supporting individuals, supporting an entire congregation in this integrative process. I think, frankly, you are my heroes. You are doing some of the most important work on the planet. As well, I've had several [conversations with amazing evangelicals](#) who are bridging to the very traditional (very conservative in many cases) evangelical world and bringing this deep-time, meaningful, and inspiring way of thinking about evolution.

[Connie](#) and I both have been so inspired by the conversations that have been taking place and the work being done. We are learning, in a deeper way, about what some of you are doing in local congregations.

**Tom:** It is very exciting. It's fun to have you as the bridge, Michael. I'm glad that you and Connie are doing this work, because somebody has to do it.

**Host:** Thanks, brother. I loved your TAGS: Talking About God Stuff. Are there other innovations that you do as a congregation, as adults or with kids or whatever, that have worked?

**Tom:** Two things occur to me. One is fairly focused, and the other is more general. Let me start with the more general idea.

As I mentioned just a bit ago, creating an atmosphere of safety is incredibly important. I titled my book "[Reverent Irreverence](#)" because of the importance of playfulness. One of the things that we really pay attention to—and I'm the lead clown—is trying not to take ourselves very seriously.

With a culture that is comfortable making fun of itself and playing, there's tremendous permission to try on new things, to take on a little bit of an adventure. As this permeates a

culture, and as individuals see other folks taking risks and being loved and held, it really does create a dynamic culture.

I'll give you a specific. This last Sunday, a woman sang, "I Wonder as I Wander." She has a fabulous voice, but she was having difficulty that day. She'd get to the high note, and her voice would crack; it would just break. She'd giggle a bit. She'd go back to the song. And each time she'd get to that high note, it would crack. The congregation held her in comfort and in love, and she felt free to finish this entire song—laughing with herself and the congregation. She just put herself out there and said, "Here I am, fully me, with this mistake and all," and was held.

Those kinds of examples allow other people to risk. On a larger cultural scale, that's an important piece. On a smaller scale, we also do pretty intense personal work. We use [Robert Kegan's](#) work, called "[Immunity to Change](#)." Bob Keegan is a [chaired professor of psychology at Harvard](#), and he has an extraordinary process of helping people to walk deeply into themselves and look at the invisible assumptions that we hold that so often run our life. We might call it the shadow side, shadow work. We have an ongoing program where folks really can engage in an actual process of personal transformation, using these tools.

The most extraordinary example was a woman, a few years ago, who was deeply involved in the church, took on these principles, and lost 250 pounds. She reformed her physical body by investigating the assumptions she held—what's safe, what wasn't—and how could she actually make small, safe changes that ended up making a huge change in her life.

And then I'm going to take on a class here, starting in December, on what we call, "Putting On the Mind of Christ." It will be the practice of [nondual awareness](#).

**Host:** If you could say a bit about that, in terms of the phrase "the mind of Christ." You're interpreting that through an Integral lens, and quite a few of our listeners aren't necessarily familiar with the phrase "nondual consciousness." Could you say a bit about what you mean by "nondual consciousness," and how you see that exhibiting the mind of Christ, or expressing the mind of Christ, or helping people to have the mind of Christ?

**Tom:** One of the assumptions and one of the understandings of our church probably resonates deeply with the mystical traditions of most faiths. I mention that because one of the consistent things across the mystical traditions is the understanding that the core of our being is essentially divine, and that we can awaken to that divinity—that this is not something we necessarily have to go *to*. It is, in Christian terms, our birthright.

**Host:** "Created in the image" of God would be a more traditional way of talking about it.

**Tom:** "Created in the image and likeness and fullness of God," if you will. As [Francis of Assisi](#) said, "What you are looking for is what is looking." Or, as [Meister Eckhart](#) would say, "It is the eye of God that is looking through me."

One way of encountering Jesus is as one who realized *that*, and was perhaps one of the most profound examples we've seen in history. Here is this individual who lived into the

fullness of that possibility. It's not something external; it's something that's available to each of us.

So the question is: Can we know and see the world through the eyes that Jesus saw the world? It's referred to as "nondual" because, in keeping with the mystical traditions of all faiths, what one sees that way is that there is no separation, there is no duality. There is wholeness, fullness, oneness. The reason we use "nondual" as the language is that "wholeness" suggests "unwholeness," and we get caught up in this horrible bind of language trying to express that which is inexpressible. And so "nondual" says there's not just two; it's fully whole all the time. There are no boundaries in the universe; there are only edges in an infinite continuum.

So the question is: Can we actually practice seeing through those eyes? There are some practices we'll do. For the most part, it's "let's see if we can have a taste of seeing how Jesus saw."

**Host:** What I'm reminded of hearing you speak, Tom, is a phrase I used to say a lot in presentations years ago. I haven't actually thought of this in quite a while, but this is it: If I think like a farmer, I'll act like a farmer. If I think like a plumber, I'll act like a plumber. If I think like a dancer or an athlete, I'll act like a dancer or an athlete.

If I think like Jesus, I can more easily act like Jesus. The term *Christ-ian*, "little Christ," actually originally meant, not someone who believed certain supernatural propositions, but that when we take on the mind of Christ, we exhibit the fruit of the Christ. We are "little Christs" in our own world. We are incarnations of the divine, and truly in flesh and body we do incarnate (at least to some degree) the values of "the Kingdom," the values of "the reign of reality," the values of love, integrity, justice, peace, sustainability, compassion, generosity and so on.

As I'm listening to you, I'm reminded of that. It sounds like you as a congregation are in that process, in that exercise, in that conversation.

**Tom:** It's not all of it; it's a piece of it. One of my arguments is that, if a church isn't doing something like this on a pretty substantial basis, it's missing both its opportunity and its mission. No other institution really has the authority to do this.

**Host:** ... or the permission to be involved in people's lives, in the intimate and sometimes challenging details of their actual day-to-day, week-to-week, month-to-month, year-to-year living.

**Tom:** Exactly. So if we're not going to do it, who *is* going to do it?

**Host:** Tom, I want to ask a question related to that. Sometimes when people—certainly those on the more traditional or conservative side of things—hear language like "nondual" and "it's all one," I know a common question, a common objection, sometimes is: How do you make sense of the existence of injustice, evil—people or institutions or organizations that are clearly seeking their own benefit at the expense of the larger body of life, or at the expense of others?

How does a nondual perspective, or this “mind of Christ,” shed light on how we think about the things we should be promoting and the things we should be, in some very real sense, seeking to change or alter?

**Tom:** That’s a really good question. It’s a constant question. So I’m going to give a suggested answer—not assuming that this is the final answer. But this is where an Integral map helps us tremendously. Because what an Integral, or developmental, map tells us or suggests is that we see through lenses partially; we see through a glass darkly. Looking through the eyes of the Christ, there is no evil. It is seen in wholeness in a way that is dramatically different. But everything prior to that is partial. And within our partial seeing, we encounter evil—actually, we don’t encounter it, it emerges. It is part of living in the world of duality.

This is a hard comment to make, but evil is to a great extent in the eye of the beholder. If we enter it as understood as evil, we engage it as evil and live within that world. If we see it from the mind of Christ, we love that which we would formerly call evil, and only within that context of unconditional love is it transformed.

**Host:** At some level, my gut tells me that’s profound. At another level, I’m not sure I’d language it that way, but I want to push into it a bit. The way I think of *evil* is within the frame of a nested, emergent understanding of the universe—that is, we see greater complexity consistently emerging out of lesser complexity. The universe as a whole has gone from simple atoms to more complex atoms to molecules to more complex molecules to creatures to more complex creatures to societies and more complex societies. So, given the nested, emergent nature of divine creativity, I see *evil* as that which is pursuing its own self-interest—whether an individual or corporation, whatever—at the expense of the larger or smaller [holons](#) of its existence, the larger or smaller wholes that make it up and that it’s a part of.

One of the things that is common to our tradition is the understanding that God (which is that Reality which includes all other realities, yet also transcends all other realities) could take anything—no matter how wicked or evil—and there can be tremendous creativity that emerges out of that. This is [one of the fundamental patterns we learn from the history of the universe: that chaos, destruction, breakdowns, violence—extinctions, even—are the primary things that have catalyzed creativity for billions of years.](#)

From that largest perspective, what is evil if the Divine uses that, if [Reality](#) is able to use that, for new creative emergence?

So I language it somewhat differently, but I think we’re coming to a similar place.

**Tom:** We are pointing at the same thing, and you said it so much better. Thank you. I do appreciate it. This is one of the things that is so important: that we find this language, because you said it way better than I’m saying it. We’re right on the same page.

**Host:** Tom, that actually leads me to want to ask a different kind of question related to this, which begins with the observation that there is no such entity as Christianity as a whole. There

are millions of people who identify as Christians who are looking through very traditionalist eyes; they're looking through a very traditional understanding—what gets called “blue” in [Spiral Dynamics](#) (also [here](#) and [here](#)) or “traditional consciousness.” It is often a literalist understanding. Those people differ radically from other Christians who are coming from a modernist perspective—a science-based, sometimes mechanistic understanding of Christianity. They also differ radically from those coming from a postmodernist understanding of Christianity, or an Integral understanding of Christianity.

So for me to ask, How do you think Christianity will evolve—which is the question I'm leading into—I want to start by saying it's an odd question. There is no one monolithic entity called Christianity. Still, I want to ask you, looking into the future, imagining 50 or maybe 100 years from now, as you imagine a healthy, vibrant, life-giving Christianity—a Christianity that's truly a blessing to the world, a Christianity that has fully embraced an ecological worldview and an evolutionary worldview—how do you see that different from the Christianity that we now see here, than what we see now?

**Tom:** For me, an essential piece of this is that a Christianity that is truly a blessing to the world doesn't deny any part of its heritage. “Magical Christianity” that focuses on Jesus doing miracles and walking on water is a literal take on the Bible, the traditional view. All of these different perspectives must be held for the fabulous contributions they have made to the full richness of what we call Christianity.

In our congregation, we do a little thing that's had surprisingly wonderful effects. When we sing a hymn, at the top it's listed, “Singing our Tradition.” We have a spiral that goes up, a widening spiral with a cross in it. That symbol indicates the full developmental spectrum of Christianity—from magical to traditional, modern, postmodern, Integral, and into numinous. And then the hymn we sing, we label it. We say, this is from the magical part of our tradition; this is from the rational; this is from the numinous. And so in that instant, we say what we're doing here is celebrating the fullness of that tradition.

When I see Christianity in the future, I see it holding the fullness—from magical to numinous—of everything we have gone through for a couple thousand years of people trying to find, What is it to be fully human and to live divinely on Earth?

One of the fun things that has come out of making that model visible is that we can now sing, in a very liberal, progressive church, “Battle Hymn of the Republic”—without wincing.

**Host:** What you just articulated was great, because one of the real growing edges, as I see it, within the Church and the larger culture is to be able to look back on our own developmental trajectory, our own evolutionary past, and find a way of being grateful for the various developmental stages, the various ways of thinking at each stage, the practices and doctrines or whatever in a religious context that emerged at that time.

It's almost like, collectively, we're going through what a really effective therapist does, which is helping the person to reinterpret, to re-story their past in a way that things that they used to look back and interpret in a blame way or a judgmental way or a way that is filled with

guilt or shame—that they’re able to look back and feel gratitude. They are able to recognize they wouldn’t be where they are today without it, and they see it as compost or soil out of which they could grow in a healthy way.

Being able to shift from judgment and guilt, or confusion, to one of gratitude and trust and inspiration is *huge* in any individual’s life. And what I’m hearing you say is that when you think of how the Christian tradition may be evolving, that we may be going through that development *collectively*. I find that deeply inspiring, the way you just articulated it.

**Tom:** That’s my hope. The other piece of it is, all those parts of us are still there. We had ice here recently, and I hit a patch of it, and I’m spinning down the road. I don’t want some numinous, distant God. I’m going to relate to God, “Please, bail me out of this! I need a personal miracle right now.” I don’t want to have to *not* be able to go there. All of that is important. For me, this is what church is about.

**Host:** I love it. Connie and I have a little ritual. Whenever anything sort of serendipitous or coincidental happens, one of us will look at the other and say, “Did you see that? I think it’s a sign.” And the other one will say, “I think it means something.” We play with it, but in a real way, we are in awe. It’s like nourishing that magical side of us, and it’s not because I think there’s some consciousness external to the universe that has singled out, at that moment, that thing to happen, that way. I certainly wouldn’t make that case, but it’s fun and nourishing and yummy to think that way and embrace it.

**Tom:** And a part of me actually thinks that way.

**Host:** Let me shift focus a bit. One of the things I’ve been trying to field-test with the various people I’ve been having conversations with is a possible “core commons”—that is, what we have in common. I think we share an understanding of reality that we gain through evidence, and that we think of [evidence as, in a very real sense, divine communication](#) (also see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). I think we all share a deep-time perspective, an evolutionary understanding. As well, I think we all have a global heart; we’re all committed to global values. We’re committed to a healthy future for our planet and our species and for evolution itself.

Does that resonate with you? Are there any other things that you think we may share in common, in terms of the diversity of folk involved in this conversation?

**Tom:** No, I think you’ve said it well. The feeling of our world right now—at least American culture, to me—is that we’re not just standing on a precipice; we’re standing on a whole bunch of precipices. The old answers haven’t worked, and we are desperate for some new understanding.

My sense of the Christian world is that we have a common mission of trying to find some way to save humanity. To do that evolutionarily requires the full spectrum. From any one

perspective, everybody else looks like idiots. But when we stand back and look at the whole, it may be this chaotic cauldron that we're enmeshed in from which a new idea will emerge.

And the wonderful thing of an evolutionary perspective and deep time is that we're at the beginning of it. We're really just brand-new, and there is hope that something quite spectacular will emerge out of this. I have a deep confidence in that.

**Host:** I have that deep trust, or faith, as well. Thinking about the larger timeframe, [if we compress the 13.7 billion year history of the universe into 100 years](#) (YouTube clip, [here](#)), at that time scale, early humans emerge around Christmas Day of the 99<sup>th</sup> year; *Homo erectus* arises on December 29<sup>th</sup>; and then *Homo sapiens* (wise humans: speaking, verbal, symbolic-speaking humans) arise on December 31<sup>st</sup> of the 99<sup>th</sup> year. So, after 99 years and 364 days, the very last day of a hundred-year process is when God created us (to use the religious language), or when we *emerged* out of the body of life (to use the more secular language).

And from that vantage point, I think you're right. These aren't the End Times; these are just the beginning. We know this from the fossil record, and from a careful understanding of the history of the cosmos.

So the question then becomes, what's our *role* in a positive way? How can we participate in this larger unfolding of what [God/Reality](#) is doing? And how can we participate with the kind of integrity as "little Christs," Christians?

**Tom:** I love taking that evolutionary perspective because, as you know very well, evolution is not smooth. It has these leaps, and there is a crisis that precedes every evolutionary leap that we consider beneficial. My suspicion is we are at such a moment. My perspective—and I don't know how universal this is—is that we *do* have something unique to bring to this: it is our symbolic consciousness and, for me, the mentality of "I don't know." My primary job is to listen and to respond with the kind of authenticity you're talking about.

We have a fairly simple practice that's being demanded of us. It's simple, but it's not easy. And in that, I think there is great hope.

**Host:** I feel it, just having an evolutionary understanding of our evolved nature, understanding human instincts, what it's like to live in a world of "supernormal stimuli"—that is, things that we're programmed evolutionarily to want and to want more of, and that we have instincts that don't match the world that we have to live in today. Our instincts match a world in which our ancestors used to live, and those instincts helped them survive and reproduce in that type of world.

For me, that evolutionary understanding has given me such tremendous hope, freedom, joy. I don't have to die to experience heaven; I experience heaven here, in this life. We get to *live* in Christ, in joy, in that peace—even in the midst of the chaos, even in the midst of the feeling of suffering and the injustice happening and the things that still are yet to emerge, or yet to evolve, or yet to mature.

I was just telling somebody last week that in the 2½ million years of human existence, there's no time I'd rather be alive than now.

**Tom:** Following on what you're saying and that sense of joy, you talk about how we survive, we live, with a bunch of traits and compulsions that were embedded in us evolutionarily that don't suit us now. At the same time, at the other end of the spectrum, we have these incredible individuals like Jesus, like Buddha, who laid down a track for us that allows us to enter the fullness of the world, even with all the traits that we inherited to survive in a much different world. And that's exciting—that there is this opportunity that's laid out, and these possibilities that are laid out ahead of us.

**Host:** What you're saying reminds me of this story: On Thanksgiving Day, I happened to be with my father in New York, and I got a call on my cell phone from [Barbara Marx Hubbard](#). She called because she said that on holidays, she wants to connect not just with her *genetic*, but also with her memetic family—the people she's most aligned with in terms of worldview, her evolutionary family.

It was really precious to get a call from her out of the blue like that, but she was saying something similar. She was saying that she sees Jesus as the embodiment, the incarnation, of what humanity is growing into, what we are emerging into, what a mature humanity would be like. She sees Jesus as the archetype of that, and I found that to be an inspiring thought.

**Tom:** Yes, I would agree with her completely. And this is the work now of how do we embody the steps to emerge into that archetype, and to step back into the notion of church? That's what the church is about for me. And if it's not doing that, it has no point.

**Host:** Good point. Well, Tom, in bringing this conversation to a close, could you say a little bit about your book, in terms of what are you trying to do in the book, and how would somebody benefit in reading it? And then any other projects you're working on, or anything you'd like our listeners to know, and a website, or wherever they can get more information about you and your work?

**Tom:** The book uses Integral theory to lay out a map and say, we'd like to help our churches become places where each of us could step onto an evolutionary journey of becoming more Christ-like. Here's a road map that might help us figure out how to get there. So that's the first piece.

The second piece is, here's one church that's been trying to do that for eight years. And here are the things we've discovered, some of the mistakes we've made; these are some of the things that work. So it's a nuts-and-bolts book in the end that says, here's how we can do it—or at least, here is the experience of one church that's been struggling with it now for eight years.

**Host:** And the book title again is [\*Reverent Irreverence: Integral Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. From Cradle to Christ-Consciousness\*](#). I'm assuming your book is available on Amazon, but do you have a website you'd like to leave with folks?

**Tom:** Yes, let me give you two directions. One is, you can go to the church website. I think it's the most representative of what's going on, and that would be <http://www.SuquamishUCC.org>. And the other thing is, [I actually created a little movie that's up on YouTube that in five minutes talks about this](#). Type "The Evolving Church YouTube" in google and you'll get there.

**Host:** Great. Thank you, Tom Thresher, for being with us, and for sharing your experience, your ideas, and your wisdom on this leading edge of faith.

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