

Bono: David Sang the Blues and Jesus Did Some Punk Rock

U2 frontman Bono exchanged Bible references and bantered about music, theology and evangelicals' role in AIDS activism in a recent radio interview with Focus on the Family President Jim Daly.

Growing up in Ireland with a Protestant mother and a Catholic father, Bono imitated C.S. Lewis in "Mere Christianity," where Lewis argued that Jesus was a lunatic, liar or Lord.

"When people say 'Good teacher,' 'Prophet,' 'Really nice guy,' ... this is not how Jesus thought of himself," Bono said. "So, you're left with a challenge in that, which is either Jesus was who He said He was or a complete and utter nut case."

"And I believe that Jesus was, you know, the Son of God," Bono said, according to a transcript provided to Religion News Service. "I understand that for some people and we need to ... if I could be so bold, need to be really, really respectful to people who find that ridiculous."

In the interview that was broadcast on June 25, Bono made comparisons between biblical characters and music.

"First of all, David's a musician so I'm gonna like him," Bono said. "What's so powerful about the Psalms are, as well as they're being gospel and songs of praise, they are also the Blues. It's very important for Christians to be honest with God, which often, you know, God is much more interested in who you are than who you want to be."

As Bono praised David's "honest language with God," Daly noted that "sometimes it gets you into hot water with the more orthodox folks, because they see you as edgy, maybe too edgy at times."

It's a criticism that Bono's used to hearing.

"You've gotta be very careful that grace and politeness do not merge into a banality of behavior, where we're just nice, sort of 'death by cupcake,'" Bono said. "Politeness is, you know, is a wonderful thing. Manners are in fact, really important thing. But remember, Jesus didn't have many manners as we now know."

Bono recalled the section in Luke 9 when Jesus told a man not to wait and bury his father but to follow Jesus immediately. Daly responded to Bono's summary, "Seems cold-hearted."

Bono replied, "No, seems punk rock to me. He could see right into that fellow's heart. He knew he wasn't coming and he was just, it was pretense. We've gotta be a bit more cutting edge, not look to the signs of righteousness. Look to the actions."

Bono made an explicit connection between his faith and his work with the ONE Campaign, the humanitarian organization he founded to fight poverty and disease.

"It's very annoying following this person of Christ around, because he's very demanding of your life," he said while chuckling. "You don't have to go to university and do a Ph.D. to understand this stuff. You just go to the person of Christ."

Daly threw a C.S. Lewis quote at Bono: "When a man is getting better, he understands more and more clearly the evil that's left in him. When a man is getting worse, he understands his own badness less and less." Bono jokingly replied, "Yeah, that could turn up on the next U2 album, but I won't give him or you any credit."

In his work on HIV/AIDS, malaria, poverty and other areas, Bono noted the challenge of finding the right issue to take on.

"We have a pastor who said to us, 'Stop asking God to bless what you're doing, Bono.' Which by the way, I constantly do. He said, 'Find out what God is doing, 'cause it's already blessed,'" Bono said. "And when you align yourself with God's purpose as described in the Scriptures, something special happens to your life. You're in alignment."

Most of the 9 million HIV/AIDS victims who were saved are alive because of treatments funded by the U.S., Bono said.

"I am here to thank the American people for that," he said. "And I also want to thank the evangelical community for that, because it wouldn't have happened without their leadership, because they like myself, pestered George Bush and the administration, who actually deserve praise for starting this out."

He compared HIV/AIDS to biblical stories of leprosy.

"People don't understand in that Scripture, the Samaritan was at odds with the ideology of the person he stopped on the road for. This is why we call it The ONE Campaign," he said. "You and I can have many disagreements on many philosophical, theological things. But on this we know we can agree on."

Daly said he expects potential blowback from Focus listeners who might see Bono as unorthodox.

"Does he use a bad word here and there? Yeah, probably. Does he have a Guinness every now and then? Yeah, probably," Daly said. "When you look at it before the throne of God, I think (God will) say, 'You saved so many children.'"

Daly said his predecessor James Dobson might not have done an interview with Bono, but Dobson did get blowback for having Dr. Laura Schlessinger on his program because she is Jewish.

"Bono clearly accepts Jesus as Lord. I wasn't prepared for his quickness in inserting Scripture into the dialogue," Daly said

of the artist who has been married to his wife, Ali Hewson, for decades. "I celebrate with them that they have four children and have been married 30 years. Not everyone in the Christian community can say that."