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Jesus was not a Christian.

Toronto author says at WLU

Tom Harpur, whose recent book, *For Christ's Sake*, has earned him a great volume of hate mail, says the most startling thing that his researches in the New Testament have shown him is that Jesus Christ was not a Christian.

Speaking on campus in the Meet-the-Author series sponsored by the Wilfrid Laurier University Bookstore, Harpur, a Rhodes Scholar, columnist, and lecturer in the Toronto School of Theology, said none of the tenets of modern orthodoxy can be found in the New Testament itself.

There is nothing, he said, about the establishment by Jesus of a group of people called priests, nor is there evidence for a doctrine of a holy trinity. It took four centuries for that concept to develop.

And he agreed with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran theologian, who wrote from his Nazi concentration camp cell that Jesus came to abolish the idea of religion altogether.

"Religion panders to the illusion that you can have absolute certainty about the things of the spirit," Harpur said. "Religion panders to the lust for certainty in the human heart. People lust for an infallible Bible or an infallible Pope, and religion will promise that.

"The problem is that faith, as defined in the Old Testament and the New Testament, has nothing to do with absolute certainty whatever. It has to do with radical trust, with radical commitment, with risk, and adventure-- it is Abraham going out not knowing whither he went and it deals with Jesus not having four aces up his sleeve."

He said religion has to do with building bridges between God and man. "The whole emphasis is on trying to get back to a right relationship with God, and I think Jesus came to abolish all that."

"The whole heart of the message of God is not about bridging gaps, but about God's free offer of grace-- as in the story of the prodigal son who returns home and finds his father on the road to meet him, to kill the fatted calf for him, and to feast with him.

Harpur said his whole book is an attempt to answer the question: who is Jesus Christ for us today?

"So, what is my view of Jesus? He is the place where I, and I believe the honest seeker, sees God focussed in human terms. Jesus is the place where I can encounter the living God on a scale that I can understand.

"But I cannot find anywhere in the pages of the New Testament the equation that Jesus equals God. We have created a sort of Clark Kent-Superman model of a heavenly being who comes down out of eternity and walks about like some kind of magician. He is not really human, and then he takes off again for parts unknown.

"And somehow, by dying on the cross, he is supposed to have earned forgiveness for everyone's sins. He's a kind of divine Mr. Fixit and I find that hard to accept myself, and I think that many on the edge of the church find it hard to accept, too."