

CLARITAS

A Journal of Christian Thought

FEATURING

Understanding God Through
Modern Rap: Coloring Book

Super Power or Higher Power?

The Diabolically Ridiculous





CLARITAS is the Latin word for “clarity,” “vividness,” or “renown.” For us, *Claritas* represents a life-giving truth that can only be found through God.

WHO ARE WE?

The *Cornell Claritas* is a Christian thought journal that reviews ideas and cultural commentary. Launched in the spring semester of 2015, it is written and produced by students attending Cornell University. The *Cornell Claritas* is ecumenical, drawing writers and editors from all denominations around a common creedal vision. Its vision is to articulate and connect the truth of Christ to every person and every study, and it strives to begin conversations that involve faith, reason, and vocation.

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OPENING REMARKS

Dear Reader,

People have always found meaning and comfort in secure identities. Today, identity is a hot topic on Cornell's campus and beyond. Mark Lilla, a professor at Columbia, recently wrote an article in for the New York Times entitled, "The End of Identity Liberalism." The article discusses the divisiveness of identity politics and urges people to focus on the things that unite us as a people in America rather than the things that divide us. I agree with much of what the author says, but this can easily be taken to the extreme. There must be a way to affirm differences and still be one. There must a way to constructively deal with division while remaining united.

At Claritas we believe that all human beings are God's children. Whether you walk in that identity or not, you are a child of God. The difference between Christians and non-Christians is a claim to this identity. Seeing yourself and others as God's children changes your perspective and the way that you interact with others. As C.S. Lewis said, "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors." Identity in Christ as a child of God is the unifier. In a time when people yearn to define themselves by the groups to which they belong, their careers, their friends, or material possessions, there is one identity that outlasts and supersedes them all. Jesus is the truth that allows us the freedom to celebrate our differences.

Nina Simone charged artists to make music for the times. At Claritas, we analyze culture, identity, and ideas through the lens of the Gospel. To pick eternal truth out of pop culture is our greatest pleasure. To ponder questions of life and philosophy informed by unchanging truth is our unending endeavor. I invite you to join us in our quest for truth and meaning in this life in light of the Gospel.

Sincerely,
Emani Pollard
Editor-in-Chief

SUPER POWER OR HIGHER POWER?

By Zachary Lee

When earthly heroes fail, to whom shall we turn?

Imagine the life of Jesus Christ as a superhero movie. It sounds a bit far-fetched, but a studio with the right actor (Joaquin Phoenix would be perfect), a hefty budget, and a solid marketing campaign could pull it off. But then again, do audiences really need yet *another* superhero film to watch? With a total of six superhero movies released this year alone, one would think that it is time for this genre to take a page out of Captain America's screenplay and hibernate in cryostasis for a few years before resurfacing. But the inundation of these films reveal an interesting phenomenon: modern heroes are characterized with much more nuance and complexity than the trope of "stop the bad guy and save the world." These contemporary heroes let their bleak and dark backgrounds shape the

foundational tenets of their character rather than try to rise above them. Furthermore, their flaws, rather than being hidden, are instead augmented and made palpable to audiences. As a result, the narrative arcs of these heroes suggest that it is much easier to live with vices rather than overcome them. As heroes have become a little more villainous and villains have become a little more heroic, today's audience has a difficult time distinguishing between the two (think the DCEU's *Suicide Squad*). This trend of blurring the distinctions between hero and villain is indicative of a disturbing cultural norm: rather than accept that we can transform and become the best versions of ourselves (as creatures made in God's image), we are content with being stuck the way we are. We are much



more concerned about how to live *with* our vices and fallen natures, rather than trying to *overcome* them.

Yet if we were to look at the hypothetical superhero film of Jesus Christ, we would find a radically surprising message. He looks far more like Dostoyevsky's idiot than Jerry Siegel's Superman. The story and character of Jesus is compelling because he defies the contemporary hero type. Jesus conquers evil not by gaining inhuman or superhuman powers but by embracing his humanity in the incarnation.¹ Jesus makes no excuses for vice but fights sin, ego, doubt, ambition, and despair to the point of shedding his own blood.² He redefines strength not as "might makes right" but as the transforming power of God for salvation to all who believe.³ Thus while the heroes on the screen are the ones that we make in our own image, Jesus inverts this relationship. He calls humanity to look at his image and perfect life. In doing so, he challenges us to live a life free from inner demons instead of trying to coexist with them; he challenges us to embrace self-sacrifice instead of self-fulfillment.

Jesus conquers evil not by gaining inhuman or superhuman powers but by embracing his humanity in the incarnation.

This idea of the "flawed hero" is not revolutionary. As early as the 8th century B.C., with epics such as *The Odyssey*, the Greeks were the first to characterize heroes not as paragons of virtue, but as blemished, crooked, and haunted souls. Every Greek hero had a "tragic flaw," and Odysseus is a prime example. Throughout *The Odyssey*, Homer makes it clear that Odysseus' tragic flaw is *hubris*: that is, an excessive pride toward, or defiance of, the gods which eventually shapes him into a nemesis of Olympus. In a pivotal sequence, Odysseus contemptuously mocks the Cyclops Polyphemus, the son of Poseidon the sea god, and in anger Poseidon made the seas violent and turbulent while Odysseus and his crew make their journey back to Ithaca. The event triggers a cascading series of trials and hardships which costs the lives of his crew and finds Odysseus unchanged nor humbled by his sufferings. The Greeks crafted a kind of hero who, though he was gifted with the blessings of the gods, was nonetheless still flawed and expressed no unction to change himself. Odysseus acts as

both villain and hero which is relatable to both ancient and contemporary post-modern readers.

This ancient depiction of tragically-flawed heroes has had enduring influence through the centuries and remains relevant today. While indicative of the timelessness and perspicacity of the Greek narrative, the tradition of Odyssean heroes is also slightly depressing: humanity has a long history of resistance against a purely virtuous hero. Flawed heroes are much more appealing. Gone is the idea of having to overcome our wicked propensities. If superheroes are a mirror to our own lives, then we are ready to admit that we are flawed and broken. Yet we admit our flaws and brokenness not so much because we would change but rather because we expect society to accept our flaws as an intrinsic part of who we are. Though there is a superficial sense of liberation when we admit our faults, sadly, we make no effort to overcome them. We make heroes in our own image and if these heroes only wrestle with their demons but never overcome them, then we too feel validated to live with our vices. Thus, we begin a centripetal cycle of contentment with our flaws and build this contentment into the daily routine of our lives.

Writer Timothy Willard⁴ puts it best:

Much like beauty, heroism in our culture has turned in on itself. It's self-fulfilling rather than





self-sacrificing; stuck in the muck of egoism when it should be touching the transcendent ideas of love and obedience. We root for it. Unfortunately, that for which we root, we risk becoming.

Thus, from the literary epic to the visual screen, heroes such as Daredevil and Walter White preach that perfection and self-sacrifice are too high of an aspiration to reach. Instead, society must learn to settle for less, give up on this idea of a perfect hero, and embrace self-fulfillment by other means.

Now how does the story of Jesus look on stage when past narratives have spotlighted questionable characters as tragically flawed (anti-)heroes? It is interesting that in recent films like *Risen* or *Ben Hur*, Jesus is someone who can profoundly change and transform the characters that he meets yet still seem unrelatable. Since Jesus never sinned or committed any crime both on screen or in the Bible, he is sometimes represented as a perfect human being with whom it is difficult to relate. How do we even empathize with someone who never lied once or didn't silently curse out the crude thug who cut him off in traffic while he was riding his donkey? He must be divine.

But while it appears that Jesus is unrelatable,

he is in fact someone with whom we can relate the most. Jesus was not some super human who effortlessly did not commit any wrong. On the contrary, Jesus was fully human and was tempted to sin in the same way all of us are. He struggled but learned obedience from what he suffered.⁵ But at the same time he was also fully God. Christ's dual nature as fully God and fully human is a mystery, and even I, who have gone to church for my whole life, still find his incarnation difficult to grasp. But let us take a closer look at Jesus' origin story. Two-thousand years ago, Jesus left heaven, was born to Mary, and raised by her and Joseph.⁶ Though Jesus was fully human, he was also fully God. He retained his divinity even in human form. Yet in his humanity he was still tempted to sin, overcame those temptations, and lived a pure and blameless life. Hebrews 4:15 reminds us: "We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who is tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he did not sin." Here, the author of Hebrews states that just because our high priest (Jesus) did not sin, his sinlessness does not infer a life free from temptation. To the contrary, Jesus was tempted in every way: he felt tempted to lie, steal, cheat, and do every remaining vicious action ever done in the history of humankind. So I find it personally interesting that Jesus Christ is ostracized and branded as one with whom

others cannot relate despite the fact that he can sympathize with our flaws and sufferings. Jesus is a “hero” with whom we should be able to relate the most. He knows the despair of God-forsakenness,⁷ and yet he did not let the darkness erase his faith.

But to acknowledge the perfection of Jesus is to also acknowledge that as humans, we are without excuse. Jesus has modeled in himself how we should live despite our flaws, brokenness, and sin. When we see Jesus, one who acts as a mirror to our own lives, he forces us to consider change. Becoming better people is not enough: we must try to be more and more like him. If we set Jesus Christ as the standard for goodness and the paragon of virtue, then now there is a corollary demand for repentance because we realize we do not measure up to Christ. To reflect the image of God encapsulated in Jesus’ life as one of us, we have to move past self-fulfillment and into self-sacrifice.

Unfortunately, with the current roster of cinematic messiahs, if it is only Hollywood’s advice and counsel that we seek, then humanity will never be able to truly change because we will not see the need for it. Batman, Wonder Woman, and even our current recharacterization of Superman teach us that superheroes conquer villains and not their own egos. But if we instead try to look to Jesus and perceive the standard he sets for humanity, we become haunted. Jesus’ humanity reveals how far we have fallen, too far to save ourselves. We cannot be the hero of our own story. We need a Savior.

Herein lies the fundamental difference between the message of Earth’s mightiest heroes and Jesus. Earthly heroes teach us a Promethean defiance against the world, fate, and even the gods. We think our vices make us who we are as we achieve our dreams, goals, and aspirations. Earthly heroes stay center stage. But Jesus instead teaches surrender. A person has to die to self and one’s ambitions in order to truly live.⁸ Yet this act doesn’t have to be difficult; to be transformed is to acknowledge that what God wants for my life is the truest form of who I am,

so I can let go of my pride and ambition because what God has planned for my life is better than anything I could have dreamed. Surrender therefore becomes a joyful process. Thus, as tempting as it is to want to look to an armored avenger or Asgardian demi-god to teach us how to comfortably live with our flaws, instead let us look to Jesus who will push us to walk a harder, but ultimately more human road. 

Earthly heroes teach us a Promethean defiance against the world, fate, and even the gods. We think our vices make us who we are as we achieve our dreams, goals, and aspirations. Earthly heroes stay center stage. But Jesus instead teaches surrender.

¹Phil 2:8-9 NIV

²Heb 12:4

³Rom 1:16

⁴Timothy Willard, “What Jason Bourne Could Learn from C.S. Lewis”, *Acculturated Pop Culture Matters*, last modified October 7, 2016, <http://acculturated.com/jason-bourne-cs-lewis/>

⁵Heb 5:8

⁶Matt 1:18

⁷Mk 15:34

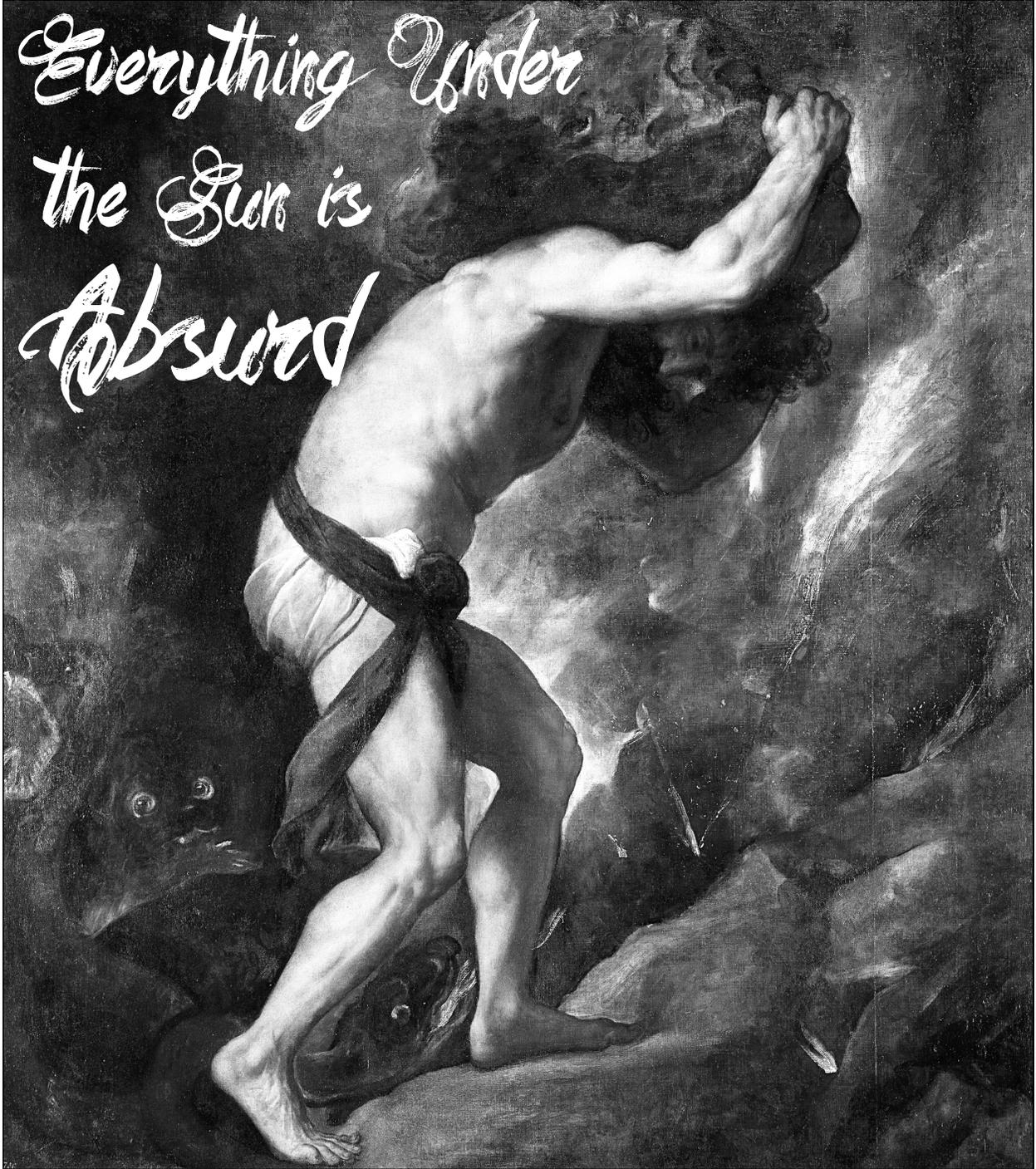
⁸Gal 2:20



Author: Zachary is a freshman in the College of Arts and Sciences, studying English and Comparative Literature. He writes poetry, performs it, reads avidly novels and almost all genres of storytelling, plays the saxophone, reviews movies, and likes listening to the newest tunes in Christian hip-hop.



Everything Under the Sun is Absurd



By Michael McGinnis

Considering the existential and Biblical ideas of the absurd

Since July, I have been reading *The Plague*, by Albert Camus, alongside an older member of my home church. We discuss parts of the book through the lens of Christianity, and one topic which recurs over and over is the absurd. Truly, the entire book seems to be about the absurd and responses to it. Camus's idea of the absurd is central to his existential writings: however, this idea of absurdity is also present in the Bible.

In this article, I will discuss the absurd as it is shown in both works and contrast the responses they present.

Existentialists define the absurd as the tendency to search for meaning in an existence that has none. Camus himself defines the absurd as being "born out of this confrontation between human need and the unreasonable silence of the world."¹

It is the idea that in spite of all our hopes and desires *the universe does not care*. One could say that the many natural disasters demonstrate this lack of care. For they often destroy property and take lives regardless of our efforts to avoid both. I often experience the absurd when I cannot fall asleep at night, even though I could fall asleep in a lecture that afternoon. Camus gives the example of Sisyphus, a mortal sentenced to repeatedly rolling a boulder up a hill only to let it roll back down, as the epitome of the absurd.

It is the idea that in spite of all our hopes and desires *the universe does not care*.

The idea of the absurd is fundamental to *The Plague*. A plague itself is an action of nature opposing man's hopes for comfort and life. In the book, the experiences of one character shows the absurd especially well. This character, M. Michel, is sick with the plague. Yet one day, the weather is beautiful which creates an atmosphere of hope within the town. M. Michel's condition even seems to be improving. However, the plague continues to worsen, and M. Michel dies the next morning.² Such dashed hopes occur throughout the book. For each time the plague was expected to lessen, more people died. That is the absurd: that despite all hopes, or even rational expectations, the universe does not care.

The Bible surprisingly confronts the absurd, though it was written much before Camus articulated his ideas of the absurd. The author of Ecclesiastes, referred to as "the Preacher", repeatedly uses the word "vanity" in order to express a sense of absurdity. The second verse reads "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity."³ It is helpful to know that "vanity" was translated from the Hebrew word "hebel," which refers to trying to grasp a mist or wind. So the Preacher claims that all things are like attempting to hold onto wind; not only is it impossible, but it is pointless to try. Throughout the book, the Preacher asserts the vanity of things such as self-indulgence, toil, wealth, and honor. He even includes wisdom, though there are expressions of its value in other parts of the Bible. This vanity is analogous to the existential absurdity because the Preacher claims characteristics such as wisdom and honor are impossible to hold onto, in spite of our desire and effort to do so. So there is no fulfilling way to be wealthy, as it is insubstantial like a mist.

Toil becomes pointless because working for security or wealth is like chasing after wind. In this manner, the Preacher would claim that wise spending is vain. Similarly, he would say that working all day to pay the bills is absurd.

The claims in Ecclesiastes which concern wise spending and work seem to contradict other passages of the Bible. While the Preacher claims that wise spending and work is absurd, other parts of the Bible praise them as having worth. For are we not called to be good stewards of our resources, including money? Are we not also called to honor God in our work? It is important to notice a distinguishing remark which the Preacher makes concerning all that is vain. Often, the preacher notes that all that is "under the sun" is vain. For instance, this occurs when the Preacher questions the meaning of work: "What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?"⁴ Further, the Preacher notes that he "has seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind."⁵ So, everything that the Preacher claims is meaningless exists "under the sun." One Christian apologist, Ravi Zacharias, that in the original Hebrew, the phrase "under the sun" signified a situation without God.⁶ So, in 14 when the Preacher claims "all is vanity," he refers specifically towards all that is done without God. Thus, wise spending is not absurd, as long as the spending centers around God. Wisdom is not absurd either, if it is used to the glory of God.

Though we can live in such a way that life is not vain, we still are confronted by the absurd. This happens when a tornado comes through, uprooting trees and destroying our houses even though we desire for them to stay intact. The idea of the absurd is most often noted in the question: why do bad things happen to good people? This is often discouraging to Christians and is used to argue against the Christian God. For how can we experience the absurd in this manner if God were truly all-powerful and loving? I believe there are two ideas which help to understand our experience of the absurd: that some of the absurd results from the fallen world, and that the existence of the absurd can result in good.

When I say that we exist in a fallen world, I mean that the universe does not exist as it was created. When God created the universe, he called it "very good."⁷ However, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, sin entered the world. Because of this, childbirth became

painful, the ground was cursed, and work grew less fruitful and meaningful.⁸ So the universe was created to be good, but with the fall of man the universe fell too. This fallen state causes natural evils such as devastating hurricanes and tornadoes. In this way, the “unreasonable silence of the world”⁹ towards our hopes and desires is a manifestation of the effects of sin. So, as we confront the horrible effects of hurricanes or plagues despite our desires for safety and health, we can understand the source to be the fallen-ness of the universe.

Though some absurd results from sin in the world, God may use instances of the absurd for our good. We often experience the absurd, but God may use these events for our good, such as to bring us closer to him. For instance, an illness is certainly contrary to one’s desire for good health, and may be a manifestation of the absurd. Yet this illness might cause you to rely less on yourself, and focus more clearly on God. So this illness, while being bad in itself, may result in good from a spiritual perspective. It is important to note that the absurd occurrence is not good in itself because it results in good. Instead, God uses a bad occurrence for good, giving it a dual purpose. Similarly, I do not mean to say that we simply accept the illness. For it remains absurd that people become sick in spite of their efforts and desires to remain healthy. In light of this, we can still mourn the absurd as it represents part of sin’s effects in the universe.

It is evident that we will always wrestle with the absurd and its existence. However, if we look “above the sun,” we can find hope as we look forward to the new creation where we will not experience the absurd.

Even understanding these ideas of the absurd, we may be tempted to fall into pessimism. For these experiences remain absurd even if they result from sin in the world. Likewise, instances of the absurd which may be used for our good remain absurd as we live in a universe which is deaf to our hopes. It further may seem absurd that we are attached to Adam and Eve’s sin:

sin which we did not commit. Through this, it is evident that we will always wrestle with the absurd and its existence. However, if we look “above the sun,” we can find hope as we look forward to the new creation where we will not experience the absurd.

As Camus articulated the absurd in his novels, the Bible confronts this idea in Ecclesiastes as well. Though the Preacher claims that all things are vain, he specifically relates it to life without God. In contrast, life centered around God is not absurd but has meaning. Though we still experience the absurd due to sin in the universe and will continue to wrestle with it, we can look “above the sun” for hope. Further, we may also eagerly await the new creation, where we may live in a new universe without sin or confrontations with the absurd. ☞

¹Albert Camus. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. Translated by Justin O’Brien. New York: Vintage Books 1991.

²Albert Camus, *The Plague*. Translated by Stuart Gilbert. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.

³Ecclesiastes 1:2 ESV

⁴Ecclesiastes 1:3 ESV

⁵Ecclesiastes 1:14 WSV

⁶Ravi Zacharias, “What is Worthwhile Under the Sun (part 1 of 2).” Podcast audio, March 10, 2012. <http://rzm.org/let-my-people-think-broadcasts/what-is-worthwhile-under-the-sun-part-1-of-2/>

⁷Genesis 1:31 ESV

⁸Genesis 3:1-7, 16-18 ESV

⁹Albert Camus. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. Translated by Justin O’Brien. New York: Vintage Books 1991.



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moving forward?

Is change the opposite of death or its harbinger?

Blurring reality

ever so slowly,

that the edges don't quite break skin,

From grazing the lines

of jagged glass

marking our "boundaries",

How sad is it,

To kiss cold lips

To talk to a still heart

hoping to hear its echo

reflected in the grief of your voice,

How sad is it to see your world become encased in glass,

In gold lettering

the word "memory"

glitters empty,

To run away from one death is to embrace another,

To be embalmed or

slowly crumble away,

Either way

there is no staying

the same

In the name of progress

we are told to let go,

In the name of reverence

we are told to never leave behind

the ghosts whose lives played out,

faded out,

gave out,

Like a single flame in the snow...

What did they possibly hope to accomplish?

I don't really know...

Yet we are shouldered with dreams

And quests,

Dragons to slay and natures to suppress

Tunes in my head

Not quite sure how they got there,

And still I dance,

I dance with eyes

too tired to stay open,

Searching for the feeble flicker

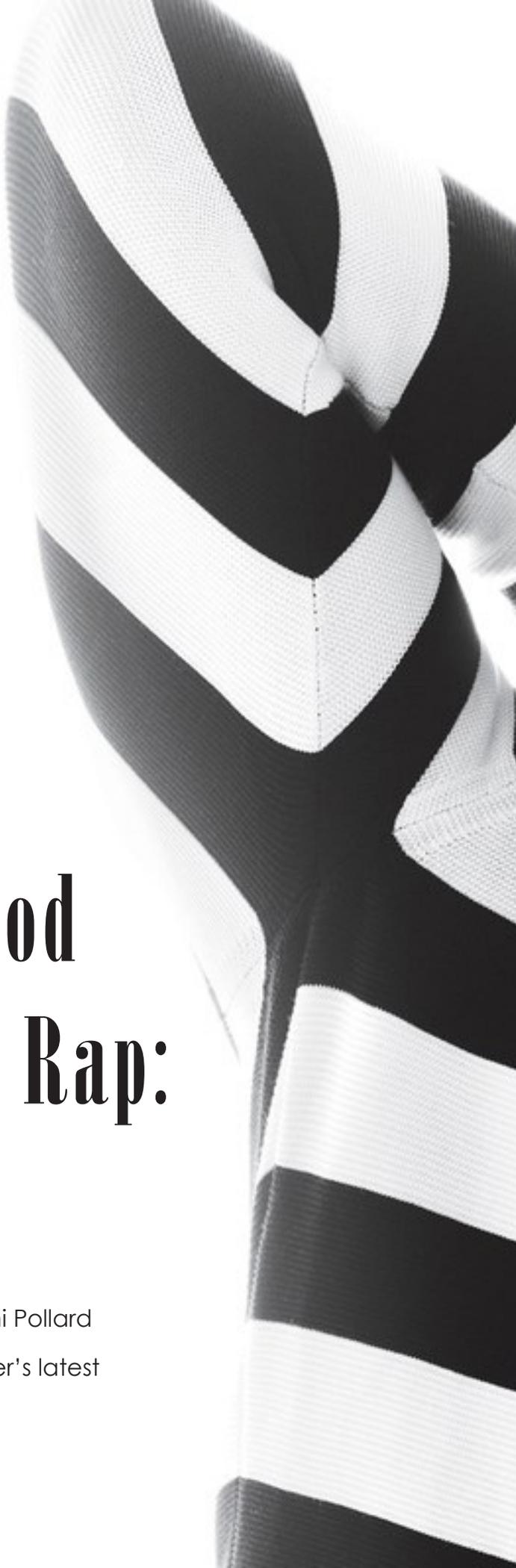
From generations past...

They tell me it's supposed to

light my way.



Author: Sharon-Rose Alonzo is a sophomore in the College of Arts and Sciences and is majoring in Biology & Society. A member of Sabor Latino, B.O.S.S. and Justice Rising, she has an equal passion for dancing, service, and people. She hopes to broaden the world's perspective on what Christians are capable of.



Understanding God Through Modern Rap: Coloring Book

By Damilare Aboaba, Gaired Jordan, and Emani Pollard

A theology of joy permeates Chance the Rapper's latest mixtape *Coloring Book*.





This is the first installment of a multi-part series of articles considering the Christian faith and its place in rap music. In this series we want to show that the increased tendency of modern rappers to reference Christian themes in their lyrics represents a desire to use the shared experience of African American Christianity as a vehicle to speak about contemporary life. Further, we want to show that modern rap cannot be understood with a solely reductionist listening. In a sense it is necessary to “try on” the believing perspective of these rappers in order to fully understand and appreciate their work.

Drawing on our collective ideas and feelings about rap we will review the work of 4 artists in 5 albums (Coloring Book by Chance the Rapper, The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill by Lauryn Hill, College Dropout by a young Kanye West, good kid, m.A.A.d city by Kendrick Lamar, and The Life of Pablo by Kanye West) and speak about the ideas that form the cornerstone of their personal theologies.

More than anything else, however, we are concerned with bringing a grounded Christian perspective and conviction to this discussion. To that extent, we are also going to compare the theology apparent in each of these albums to historical and traditional Christian understandings of God and human life. This is not intended to be a critique of each artist’s personal faith, rather a critique of the theological ideas expressed through their music.

A note before continuing: For the purpose of this series, the use of cursing will not add to or take away from the analysis of Christian themes. Also, not every single song will be discussed at length.

On the aptly named song “Jesus Walks,” Kanye West raps about the almost condescending nature of the music industry towards rappers who speak explicitly about Christianity. He says,

“They say you can rap about anything except for Jesus
That means guns, sex, lies, videotape
But if I talk about God my record won’t get played, huh?”

Although West is by no means the first rapper to speak about Christianity, at the time this song was revolutionary because it was unheard of for a mainstream rapper to be so open about his spirituality. Similarly, while West did not pioneer the use of Christian imagery in rap, he certainly popularized it. That said, it is difficult to trace when the links between Christianity and rap became so explicit. This is particularly jarring considering that Christian imagery has become more noticeable in rap even as it has declined in secular culture.

One line of reasoning could see these two phenomena as tightly linked. The less Christianity becomes sacred to the broader public, the more leeway artists feel they have to use Christianity as a vehicle for discussions about other topics. Ultimately, the issue is Gordian in its complexity. However, one prominent thread can be picked out by understanding how Christianity has shaped African American culture, and consequently African Americans themselves.

The less Christianity becomes sacred to the broader public, the more leeway artists feel they have to use Christianity as a vehicle for discussions about other topics.

Unfortunately, when Christianity is discussed we primarily think of white American churches. Yet, the black church has been as crucial to the development of America’s unique spiritual heritage as its white cousin. This is particularly true and apparent in the life of African Americans. In the historical context of a country and culture that has often not welcomed them wholeheartedly, the black church has served as a meeting point and safe place for African Americans. The black church has functioned as the cornerstone of African American culture. Many African Americans go to church as children,

perhaps dragged along by more religious elders. Even though they may drift away and become largely secular, many, if not all, are dramatically marked by some aspect of church. For some it is the stirring nature of gospel hymns, for others it is the often theatrical nature of the preaching. One thing is clear--everyone leaves with a base-level knowledge and understanding of the Bible and biblical themes respectively.

We think that our favourite African American rappers are no different in how Christianity and the black church has shaped them. What makes them special is their careful and premeditated effort to use the wealth of African American Christian experience to critique and comment on contemporary life. What many internalize and lose awareness of, they have externalized as a means of sharing their profound experiences.

In this first installment of this series, we will discuss the theology of Chance the Rapper: modern rap’s theologian of joy.

Earlier this year Chance released his third mixtape entitled *Coloring Book*. *Coloring Book* is a great album. Among other things, the album is a commentary about inner-city Chicago and Chance’s life as he becomes a more established presence in modern rap. By intention, the album is also full of Christian imagery and symbolism. An uplifting, feel-good collection of songs, it is very much in line with Chance’s style. This is evident from Chance’s distinctive use of sound effects as he raps to his determined fight to ensure his produced music remain a free gift to his listeners. Thematically, the mixtape seems to be fundamentally concerned with joy and joy seeking. This is important because it gives a starting point for understanding the parts of Chance’s theology that he makes apparent in *Coloring Book*. Listening to the mixtape it quickly becomes obvious that, despite several overt references to Christianity and God, Chance’s theology is primarily about joy. In that sense, it is perhaps not correct to call it a theology at all. To the extent that there is a subject being discussed, it is joy, not God.

The first song on the album is “All We Got.” This song gives us an initial lens through which we should view the album: “At the end of the day, music is all we got.” This means that whether life is good, bad, or ugly, music will always be there to translate Chance’s heart and soul--music will always be there to express your heart; music will always be there to express the heart of the black community. This idea is important



because each song on the album communicates an aspect of Chance's soul and life. Furthermore, the sounds and subject matter in Chance's music demonstrate the freedom and joy that he experiences through music. Music is important to Chance, and by extension we his audience, because it is a vehicle for seeking and finding joy. In a carefree state of expression he talks about praising God and giving Satan a swirly.

We move from there to "No Problems," (Gaired's personal favorite). In "No Problems" Chance declares to all label companies that, "I'm gonna do this rap thing my way and if you don't like it, try me." This is the first time we see the theme of staying true to yourself. There is a certain joy and satisfaction that Chance derives in staying true to himself. This is an important theme that

Chance will come back to later in the album.

As Chance reflects on and laments his childhood, an important brief interlude gives us one of the first looks at the Christian message in his album. In the interlude the female speaker says, "May the Lord give your journey mercy/ May you be successful, grant you favor/ And bring you back safely." Let's call this the "God's got your back" clause. This clause is defined as 1) God will keep you safe, 2) God will help you in your journey, 3) God will give you success. This is the first real theological statement on this album. There's nothing inherently wrong with this clause, but it is perhaps more startling for what it leaves out than what it brings to the mixtape. Put simply, the statement is not comprehensive.

While the Christian God is indeed a good Father who loves to take care of his children, this care occurs in the context of a Father-child relationship. Chance fails to mention the condition of a truly submitted relationship with God, where one is fully yielded to and dependent on God. To be fair, he need not mention these things to believe in them himself, but a greater foundational understanding of who God is is necessary for understanding the nuanced ideas he alludes to in this brief interlude. It is more significant, however, to consider what it signals when Chance leaves these things out. On a surface level, Chance is talking about praising God. However, a question hangs in the air as to why he does this. At best, Chance is praising God for who he is. At worst, and this is the viewpoint most supported by the interlude, Chance appears to be praising God for what he gives. From the little we know of how highly Chance prizes joy, he appears to be using praising God, just as he used music generally, as a vehicle for his ultimate goal: joy.

At best, Chance is praising God for who he is. At worst, and this is the viewpoint most supported by the interlude, Chance appears to be praising God for what he gives.

In the interlude “D.R.A.M. Sings Special” the vocalist sings, “You are very special.” This interlude is positive and encouraging. It simply affirms the listeners and tells them that they have significance--a necessary and timely message that dovetails well with Christianity’s affirmation of the worth of every human being because they are made in the image of God.

Chance’s theology of joy is perhaps explained most clearly in “Blessings.” In the chorus the vocalist sings, “I’m gonna praise him, praise him ‘til I’m gone/ When the praises go up, the blessings come down.” From this we can pick out three parts to Chance’s theology of joy. First, God (“him”) deserves praise throughout one’s entire life. Second, the best way to praise God is to have joy, which, in the context of this album, is displayed through triumphant and whimsical sounds. Third, when you praise God through joy, he blesses you. These three points make up the cornerstone of Chance’s theology of joy that permeates the album. This focus on joy makes sense when you think about growing up in a city with one of the top murder rates in America,

referenced in “Angels.” Submitting to despair would be paramount to throwing your life away or just becoming numb to all the pain around you. The reality of pain and suffering coupled with grandma’s knowledge of God and blessings, produces an understandable theological perspective centered around joy.

Praises turned to joy is a very simple formula for joy and contentment in life. “Blessings” no doubt has a wholesome message--if you praise God, he will bless you--but it is important to know that a balanced theology does not see relationship with God as merely transactional. For instance, God’s blessings are dependent on his undeserved love for us rather than the praises we give him. Additionally, individual conceptions of “praise” may be arbitrary for lack of being informed by the Bible. Praising God is generally thought to look like thanking God for what he’s given you, going to church, tithing, and loving other people, the logic following that when each of those are accomplished, God will bless you. This, however, overlooks the dimensions of personal sacrifice, obedience, and the right attitude that must accompany praise and worship. Chance sometimes seems to be pursuing joy for the sake of praising God rather than praising God for the joy given to him by God.

“Same Drugs” is a relatable song about growing apart from past loved ones. Toward the end of it, we find another umbrella theme of the album. Chance sings “Don’t you color out/ Don’t you bleed on out, oh/ Stay in the line, stay in the line.” This is a nod to the album title and reaffirms a prevailing theme, stay true to yourself. Chance is encouraging the listeners to not lose what makes them a masterpiece. This seems to be the true purpose for *Coloring Book*. Chance uses this album to encourage all of his listeners to be themselves and take pride in what makes them unique and special.

At this point, about halfway through the mixtape, a relatively clear image of the theology in *Coloring Book* has taken shape. Joy is what makes life worthwhile, particularly amidst life’s struggles, and it should be pursued with zeal. God gives joy through his blessings, and as a result he should be praised for those blessings. Yet, all this talk of joy seems strangely idyllic in a world with deep problems like the refugee crisis in the Middle East and America’s continued struggles to confront and deal with racism. We are not implying that it is the responsibility of a 23-year old man from Chicago’s Chatam neighborhood to speak about or confront these

issues. Chance makes music for fun and joy and he is entitled to do that. But this is perhaps why the type of Christianity found in *Coloring Book*, one grounded primarily in a theology of joy, sometimes rings rather hollow.

Although *Coloring Book* covers both light and dark subject matter, such as frequent mentions of the high rate of murders in Chicago (“Angels”), somehow the album never seems to descend fully into or confront the darkness around us. It manages to remain unmarred by ugliness because joy is at the core of almost everything that happens in *Coloring Book* even when it is not explicitly stated. More crucially, it manages to remain unmarred by ugliness because it lifts up its nose and almost refuses to look at it. That is why Chance can go from “Summer Friends” to “D.R.A.M. Sings Special” to “Blessings” in ten minutes. Joy lifts up and encapsulates those moments where he is telling his listeners of their inherent self worth and distances those moments where he is talking about the death of so many people. Chance tells us to “Wear your halo like a hat, that’s like the latest fashion/ I got angels all around me they keep me surrounded.” But as one commentator on Genius puts it,

“Along with being an encouragement to not be ashamed to wear your faith on your sleeve, ... [it] may also be a reference to just how many people are dying in Chicago from violence, so many to the point that it has almost become like a fashion trend, to the point where not even children are safe...”¹

His theology of joy keeps what is in truth a very dark image from totally overwhelming his listeners. However, it also keeps those same listeners from being able to fully engage with, and feel the pain, of all those who, like Chance, have been touched by Chicago’s violence. Without an openness to God it is near impossible to understand why Chance consistently uses joy in this way. More importantly, without an openness to God it is easy to see this use of joy as correctly unbalanced but impossible to understand why a more nuanced view of joy is both possible and necessary for dealing with life’s tragedies.

Die-hard fans of Chance the rapper know that his faith and joy are inextricably tied up with his relationship with his grandmother. Chance’s grandmother looms large when Chance talks about religion. If you’ve listened to what he’s said and rapped about his grandmother, Chance almost treats his grandmother as both a metaphorical and literal messenger from God. Nowhere is his grandmother’s influence on him more clear than the Christian contemporary hymn inspired “How Great.” The song is simultaneously a song about God’s incredible greatness and an eulogy to the grandmother who caused him to begin to take his faith seriously, and who passed away just a few weeks before he recorded the song. The choir sings that God’s name is the name above all names, that he is worthy of all praise, and that Chance’s heart will sing how great his God is. This is easily one of the most vulnerable songs on the entire mixtape.

The song starts with a sermon where the preacher essentially argues that God is better than the best thing that anyone has to offer. Chance raps about a variety of different subjects touching on themes from his mother’s love to his role as a representative of Chicago, but always skillfully tying his subject matter back to the Bible. Chance clearly draws on a deep well of knowledge about the Bible. For instance, he mentions the final book of the Old Testament



The reality of pain and suffering coupled with grandma’s knowledge of God and blessings, produces an understandable theological perspective centered around joy.

written by the prophet Malachi. This reference is downright esoteric to a secular culture. In fact, the lengths that Spotify goes to to make sure most of the references are understood is slightly surprising and indicative of how much of Chance's message is lost when his listeners do not at least try to put themselves in his shoes. For instance, when Chance mentions a mustard seed, Spotify notes that "This line refers to Matthew 17:20 of the New Testament, where Jesus tells his disciples that faith as small as a mustard seed is enough to move mountains."

A second song titled "Blessings" concludes the album. As far as final songs go, it is gorgeous. Chance's lyricism dovetails perfectly with the choir's quiet singing and eventually the choir takes over. Towards the song's midpoint, the choir sings, "Are you ready for your blessings?/ Are you ready for your miracle?" Chance tells the part of the story that a lot of people remember: God is going to bless you. And following Chance's style, joy produces praises, which produces blessings, which produces joy, etc.

Coloring Book is a great album with many Christian themes and symbols. Chance is able to

present an attractive and compelling joy because of the overlaps between the apparent theology of his mixtape and a more nuanced theology grounded in the Gospel. To that extent, a believing perspective is necessary to understand and appreciate the true power behind Chance's understanding of God and joy. That said, whether by choice or for other reasons, *Coloring Book's* theology is limited because it presents a hollowed-out Gospel solely based on a personal theology of joy that is unable to fully confront the all-too-apparent evils of day to day life. In this regard as well, a believing perspective also helps illuminate the limitations of a theology focused primarily on joy, rather than the joy-giver.

Amidst all this joy one feels a slight hollowness. Given that the cornerstone of Chance's Christianity is joy much is left unsaid and unaddressed. For instance, even if Chance can maintain joy in the face of the death of Chicago's youth (both physically and metaphorically) is this enough for us his listeners? Consequently, when all is said and done and the listener is presented with Chance's joyous response to the challenges and difficulties life throws at him, we cannot help but wonder whether *Coloring Book's*



theology of joy would be sufficient if Chance were to lose his daughter, his girlfriend, and the gift that has brought him such acclaim--his ability to rap. Said differently, how joyful would Chance be were he to lose everything for which he joyfully praises God? 

spin.com/2016/05/review-chance-the-rapper-coloring-book/.

“Angels Chance the Rapper,” Genius, Genius Media Group, Inc., <http://genius.com/8052220>.

¹Christopher R. Weingarten, Jon Dolan, Jon Freeman, Brittany Spanos, Joseph Hudak, Mosi Reeves, Kory Grow, Keith Harris, Richard Gehr, Maura Johnston, Patrick Doyle, Joe Levy, Andy Greene, and Rob Sheffield, “50 Best Albums of 2016,” *Rolling Stone*, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/50-best-albums-of-2016-w451265/young-thug-jeffery-w451312>.

²Tom Breihan, “Premature Evaluation: Chance the Rapper Coloring Book,” *Stereogum*, <http://www.stereogum.com/1877062/premature-evaluation-chance-the-rapper-coloring-book/franchises/premature-evaluation/>.

³Britt Juliuos, “Review: Chance the Rapper Turns Atheists Into Believers on ‘Coloring Book,’” *Spin Essentials*, *SpinMedia*, <http://www>.



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By Eunice Ju with Andrew Deng and Kathleen Li

A conversation: eight questions from non-Christians

Kathleen is an atheist/agnostic who attended AAIIV (the Asian American Intersvarsity fellowship) a few times last year out of personal interest but stopped due to frustration with what seemed to be arbitrary interpretation of the Bible, the sense of evangelistic pressure as well as general disbelief. Andrew was born into a Christian family but stopped going to church – which he viewed mostly as a place for fellowship – after middle school and is now also atheist/agnostic. I (Eunice) was born into a Christian family and am Christian myself.

We are all friends who met through the Chinese Student Association (I'm not Chinese) and I asked them to have this conversation with me. From the conversation, I gathered that there were major and fundamental questions that my friends had in spite of their significant experiences with Christianity, leading me to think that there is little effective dialogue between the Christian and non-Christian community, at least within the Cornell student body.

The following is a summary of and response to questions that my friends raised during the last

half of our conversation; my responses here are written almost as I told them in person at the time of conversation.

HAI HONG CHINESE, COLLEGETOWN -
September 15, 2016

1. What is the Christian faith?

EUNICE

So what do you think Christianity is? [] What do you think Christian faith is? Like what do you think I believe in?

ANDREW

[]I would assume it's the presence of a god or the God, whichever one...to me that's sufficient. I don't know about the specific details you have to believe in or do certain things. []I'm trying to [think back to church], I can't remember.

EUNICE

Okay, Kathleen what do you think I believe?

KATHLEEN
Being.....

ANDREW
Maybe that's a good point. Many non-Christians don't necessarily understand what it means to be Christian.

EUNICE
Did AAIV ever make it clear what Christian faith is?

KATHLEEN
Uuuuhhh...yeeno because I can't answer. But I didn't go a lot you know...

EUNICE
How did someone try and convert you without letting you know what they were trying to convert you to? (laughs)

KATHLEEN
Because it's hard for them to explain too what they're believing. I feel like, it's an idea of faith, this unending belief and oh! It's love, (laughs) love for God and God's love for them. [...]

I guess I never had Christianity defined to me when I went to church.

As a self-professing Christian, I believe that there is a creator to this universe. Let's start there. I believe that as there is a creation, there must be a creator. I believe that the creator loves his creation: us. He isn't a clockmaker god who made his creation and stepped away but rather, is invested in his creation and is a relational god. I then believe that since he loves us, he gave us a choice between 'Him' and 'Not Him', and mankind chose 'Not Him'. This is our sin and having done wrong, we need to atone for that wrong. But because he hasn't abandoned us (he's invested in us), he has given us the atonement: the option to believe in his Son's sacrifice – Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. So if you want to get back into relation and fellowship with God, all you need to do is believe in the atonement he has provided. That's what I believe. The crux of my faith is whether or not God exists. If God does exist, for me everything else just follows.

ANDREW
I guess I never had Christianity defined to me when I went to church. It was all these little

small partial lessons[].

2. What is the point of going to church and having fellowship?

KATHLEEN
So what's the point of going to church and following Christian beliefs if the base line is like belief in Jesus's sacrifice?

Faith isn't something you do alone. God created all of us and he has a relationship with all of us. If I have friends, I want to go hang out with them. For instance, I have a lot of friends through CSA. I can just say, 'I'm part of CSA and I have my membership card and that's all', but that's clearly not the point. It's not just that I'm in CSA but that CSA gives me people to hang out with. It's not just that I believe in God but that believing in God gives me something more, brothers and sisters. If there are people who believe the same thing I do and believe that God loves them the way God loves me then why wouldn't I want to hang out with them? Humans are social creatures. Furthermore, being with people of the same belief helps you maintain that faith.

3. If the Christian faith is such an absolute truth, why doesn't everyone come across it on their own?

KATHLEEN
I guess because people are always questioning it[], I felt like if it's something that's so true then eventually you should stumble upon it or [once you believe in it, your faith shouldn't shake that much.

EUNICE
Want to talk about Satan now? (laughs)

KATHLEEN
I thought that was a Catholic creation [the idea of hell and Satan.][I heard that in the reading of some version of the Bible, it's that he loved God so much that he refused to like either apologize to or bow to humans when God told him to, so that made him, his [disobedience]...led...him from...

Choosing 'Not God' is to sin and Satan chose Not God. He was an angel who decided that he would rather reign on his own than serve God. Naturally then, he wants to keep humans who have the same choice as him from changing their minds. So he's active too – as much as God is

active, so is Satan. Faith is not just a passive act of humans deciding they choose God and that's all. There's also someone who doesn't want us to choose God because he himself didn't choose God. That's why there's contention and struggles in faith. Sin is a very active thing.

4. Why are there so many churches and is there one true church?

ANDREW

[[How would you explain why there's so many different churches under Christianity. [[Their beliefs are like slightly different, right? Is it like, there can only be one correct one?

No, definitely not. Historically speaking, the Protestant Reformation and different interpretations of the Bible led to the establishment of several different denominations – which also helpfully made it difficult for the Catholic Church to stamp out the movement. The different denominations emphasize or value things differently. For instance, Baptists emphasize baptism. Evangelicals focus on preaching and sharing the Gospel. Presbyterians are actually defined by how the church is governed. There are also nondenominational churches. Inherently all Christians, Catholics included, should believe in the faith I stated earlier. (There's a creator, the creator loves his creation, the creation strayed away and he wants to bring his creation back to him through Jesus.) Attendance to different denominations is

based on personal preferences or convictions. In my case, I was raised Presbyterian and I attend a Presbyterian church in Ithaca, but whenever I go on vacation I just go to any other church and if I were to go grow up and live in some other town, I would just pick a church I like, generally regardless of what denomination it's under.

5. What is heaven and hell?

KATHLEEN

AAIV says that the concept of heaven and hell is either being with God or being without him.

So heaven and hell are locations. “Paradise”, “lakes of fire”, and other common descriptive language are useful images, but heaven and hell are first and foremost the experiences of knowing or not knowing God. So heaven and hell are also here on Earth, i.e. knowing God is happiness, peace, and rest and not knowing God is anxiety and self-burdening. I think that makes sense because if you don't believe in a god, *you* are in control of your own life and I think that's really intensely stressful. Heaven is the eternal experience of knowing God and hell is the eternal experience of not knowing him.

6. Do babies go to hell? Is God fair?

ANDREW

Can young children truly have faith?



I think so. I told my Jewish teacher in first grade that she was going to hell and then went to the principal's office and tried to criticize the principal, who was Christian, for not evangelizing with me. And I was fully cognizant and I remember it and I had full faith. Whether or not I was informed, tactful or intelligent at that time is very different. But I do think there is independent thought. Whether that transfers into babies is very debatable, among non-Christians as well. Some people say if a baby were to die very early in their lives, due to SIDS or otherwise, they wouldn't go to hell. Others say that they're certainly damned since they would be without faith. Some say that if the parents are believing then the baby gets saved, because through baptism the parents' faiths cover their baby until the infant grows up to confirm its own faith as an independent. So I was baptized as a baby and got confirmed in 11th grade and that confirmation separated my faith from my parents' faith.

I personally don't have a confident answer to this question and I don't know if I necessarily need to have one. In the case that babies go to hell that leads to the discussion that God is unfair. But I think that if God were to save one human in all of human history, that would be more unfair for him than it would be unfair for us if thousands of thousands babies went to hell. He had to kill his son for us. It's always more unfair for God than it will ever be for us, since he never owed us anything. If you believe what I believe, then we are the ones who chose not to believe, so what does God owe us? But instead, the way the Christian covenant – contract – works is that God does all the work and all we have to do is believe that he exists. So we can't say it's unfair since he's doing all the heavy lifting and he's just like, 'please believe in me.'

I don't think we have a right to say God is fair or not fair.

And I think this applies to infants. We can't say that it's unfair because the fact that the option even exists is entirely thanks to God. If *we* had created that option and then God was like, 'nah I don't want to take babies' then we'd be like, 'what the heck'. But God gave us that option and if we humans, regardless of age, fail to do our small job – small compared to God's sacrifice – of having faith, then that's on us. I don't think we have a right to say God is fair or not fair.

7. What is God? Does understanding precede faith?

KATHLEEN
Jesus was God.

EUNICE
Jesus is God. It's like how a table has height, length, depth. Different dimensions of God.

KATHLEEN
So the idea is that he killed himself.

EUNICE
He died for us. Yeah because-

ANDREW
But he's still alive because-

EUNICE
He came back from the dead because he's God.

ANDREW
Or was God dead.

EUNICE
So...

ANDREW
Or a dimension of himself was dead.

EUNICE
[]God became human so he could die for us.

ANDREW
All of God? Or-

You can't think about God concretely because God isn't like a jar of Jell-O that you can cut it in three. God as Jesus as human died and came back to life. If you read the Bible and think about it concretely, it gets more confusing. Jesus prays to God asking God to not kill him. As he dies he asks God, 'why have you abandoned me?' and when Jesus resurrects, he's less human and more God. Then, the Holy Spirit comes and is now in us all. The Father, Son (Jesus), and Spirit – the Trinity – are fully all God. One God. So if you think about God concretely it doesn't make sense, because God isn't a concrete being. So then, what is God if he's not concrete? He's God, a new, separately, and singularly unique entity. I think that's really hard for us to understand. The closest we could get to describing it would be to say that they are roles or personas or dimensions of a great spirit, and those are all inaccurate to a degree.

ANDREW
And he doesn't have to be concrete?

EUNICE
No he isn't concrete.

KATHLEEN
[[We just can't understand.

ANDREW
[[That's the biggest, hardest thing for me-

EUNICE
For me, I can't wrap my mind around it [[and normally what that results for me is that it just adds my admiration of God. [[I think if I were to understand God, I would find that very [disconcerting].

ANDREW
Right because that defeats the entire point. [[But I don't know. To what extent is a lot of faith just like just you confusing yourself? I don't mean to be offensive.

To what extent is a lot of faith just like just you confusing yourself?

EUNICE
I don't think [I get] confused. [[It's just God. [[I get that it doesn't make sense but it doesn't bother me that it doesn't make sense. So it doesn't result in confusion.

8. What about other religions?

ANDREW
[[Other religions - are they wrong? [[What if another religion is very, very close? [[Are there any other religions who share the same core components?

The Christian God is actually fairly unique in that most faiths and religions view their god as a Judge or a Creator and nothing else. The concept of God being a relational god, as in one

who is invested in his creation, is pretty unique to Christianity as far as I'm aware. Who knows? Maybe there is some small religion out there that I'm not aware of. But of all the religions I know, Christianity is pretty unique in that aspect. If there were a religion that shared the same exact faith as Christianity then, regardless what they call themselves, we have the same faith. Religion is more complicated than faith because it comes with a culture, a tradition and certain practices but if the faith is the same, then I don't see why they wouldn't be lumped in in terms of some external perspective.

These eight questions touch on faith, fellowship, Satan, the church, heaven and hell, damnation and justice, God as an entity and Christianity as a faith and religion. These are questions so fundamental to the Christian faith that I find it confusing, if not disturbing, that my two friends failed to find answers to them despite their active interest and participation in different Christian communities. I therefore encourage the Christian community to truly consider whether they are communicating with the non-Christian community. I pray that William H. Whyte's quote doesn't apply here:

"The great enemy of communication, we find, is the illusion of it."¹



¹Whyte, William Hollingsworth. "Is Anybody Listening?" *Fortune*, September 1950, 77-174.

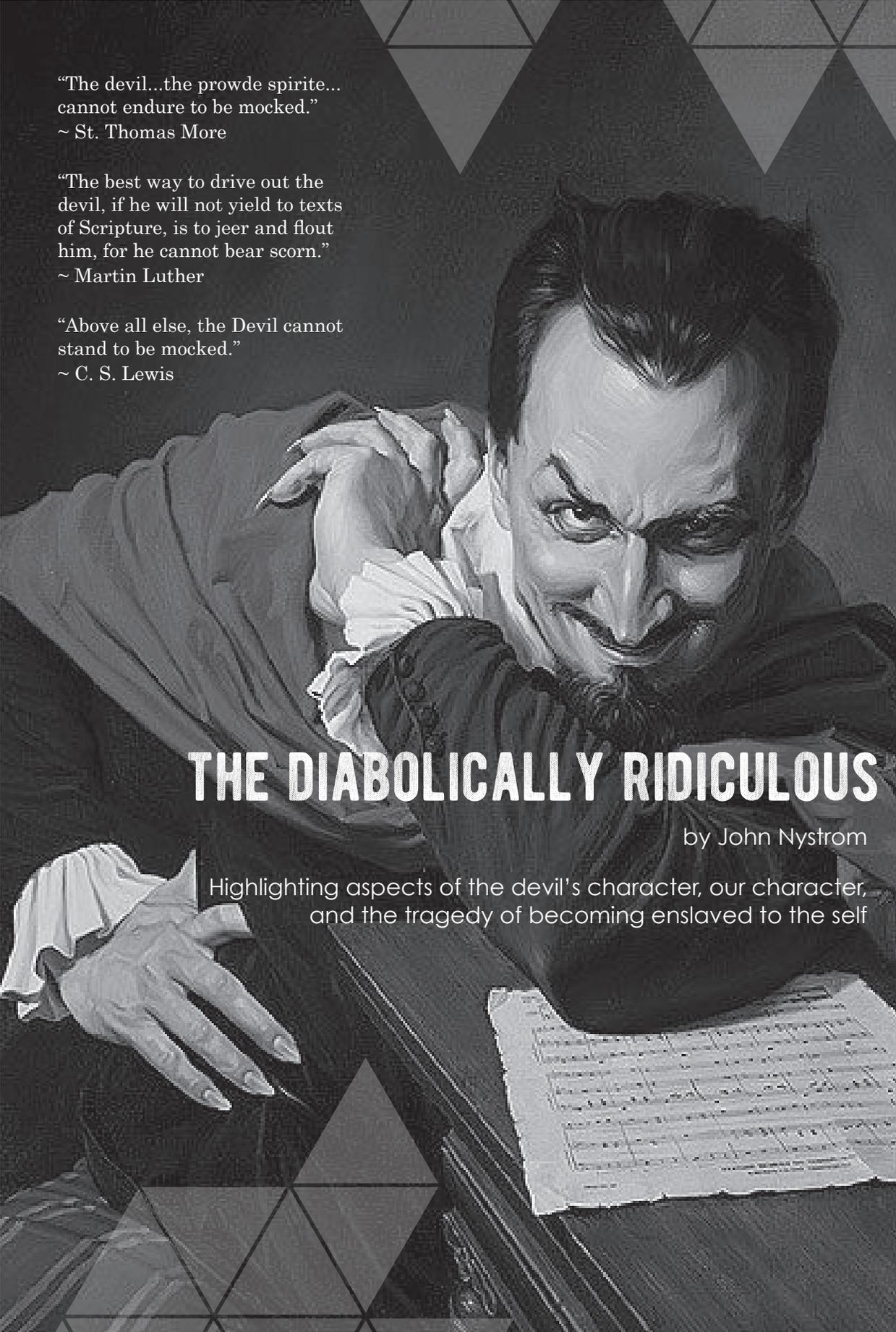


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“The devil...the prowde spirite...
cannot endure to be mocked.”
~ St. Thomas More

“The best way to drive out the
devil, if he will not yield to texts
of Scripture, is to jeer and flout
him, for he cannot bear scorn.”
~ Martin Luther

“Above all else, the Devil cannot
stand to be mocked.”
~ C. S. Lewis



THE DIABOLICALLY RIDICULOUS

by John Nystrom

Highlighting aspects of the devil's character, our character,
and the tragedy of becoming enslaved to the self

We live in an age where it is not fashionable to believe in the devil. Perhaps it is because people find it too ridiculous to believe in a diabolical little man in red tights with a Mephistopheles mustache popping about the world and orchestrating all evil. Perhaps some prefer to believe in the devil as a parable rather than a person, better yet a mythological symbol standing for all tragic heroes in their fight against ultimate condescension, unbearable authority, and unstoppable fate. Or perhaps people dislike the concept of the devil because they find that having such a being serve as the epitome and scapegoat for all the evil that exists is too neat, unrealistic, and impossible.

All of these descriptions exaggerate and reinterpret the biblical and traditional understanding of the devil, and while they cloud the issue when arguing for or against the devil's existence, they are interesting in their own right. I assert that each misconception mentioned earlier contains a partial truth, and when each is understood in light of the others, one gains a more comprehensive understanding of who the devil is. In this paper I aim to highlight the ridiculous, tragic, and evil nature of the devil in order to better comprehend him. Such a comprehension will first, I hope, help us to understand ourselves. Secondly, I hope that it will serve to mock the devil. Above all, the devil despises truth and mockery probably because, when it applies to him, they amount to the same thing. To speak the truth about the devil is to mock him.

We live in an age where it is not fashionable to believe in the devil.

What makes the devil ridiculous? To answer this question, another question must be asked: what makes anything ridiculous? Why do people find short, angry children (or men), raging lunatics, or a comedy sketch about bringing a cup of dirt to a science fair funny?¹ In short, it is due to the apparent absurdity of incongruity. When certain aspects of a situation or concept do not match up with the rest of reality but instead seem to fly in its face, and that which would be appropriate is nowhere to be found, there is an instant recognition of the absurd. A couple illustrations will take this explanation where it needs to go. Imagine a very irate chihuahua. What is comical about this creature? It is not that his rage is unwarranted or unjust; that's as may be. The greatest comic element is his size and the fact that it seems incongruous with his huge ferocity.

An angry wolf, five feet high at the shoulder, is something appropriate, serious, and frightening; an angry chihuahua, three and a half inches at the shoulder, is hilarious. (Interestingly, those who actually work routinely with small dogs know that they are the frightening ones.)

Absurdity and incongruity are also evident when they invade ceremony. Funerals are a good example. Whatever else is expected at a funeral, one thing is certain: the dead person should remain dead. If the ultimate incongruity happens and a dead man wakes up at his own funeral and thanks everyone for coming, the end result would be many shocked faces and one ridiculous situation.

To speak the truth about the devil is to mock him.

The devil is truly ridiculous because he is so incongruous. On the one hand, he is incongruous for the absurd audacity of his rebellion against God as found in the book of Jude: "And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, [God] has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day..."² Satan was an angel, possibly the highest and most powerful of the angels. Of all creatures, Satan should have understood the power of God the best. He stood next to the omnipotent God yet strove against him, a finite being against his infinite creator. The chihuahua bore his fangs and squeaked when he attempted to growl at his owner.

Furthermore, proving himself to be even more incongruous, the devil rebelled not in a glorious uprising, but rather in a petty response to a perceived insult. *Paradise Lost*, perhaps the greatest epic poem of all time, speaks of the devil's motivations:

SATAN, so call him now, his former name
Is heard no more Heav'n; he of the first,
If not the first Arch-Angel, great in Power,
In favour and praeeminence, **yet fraught
With envie against the Son of God, that day
Honour'd by his great Father, and
proclaim'd
MESSIAH King anointed, could not
beare
Through pride that sight, and thought
himself impair'd.**³

Milton asserts that Satan, the “ingrate, he had of [God] all he could have,” and by envying the eternal Son of God’s position and honor, he considered himself unjustly treated. Thus, the injustice Satan felt he had endured consisted of having to watch a more powerful, glorious, and deserving being than him, a being who was also his creator, be honored and placed in a position higher than Satan’s. Satan begins a schismatic war that rips heaven apart, simply because he felt he had been insulted when the Son of God was honored more than him. Satan is doubly ridiculous because of the size of his person and his motives. A growling chihuahua is a silly picture, but if his motives are noble, he rises above his stature, and one begins to respect the little creature. Contrarily, Satan owns a cause even smaller than himself and thereby strips himself of this right as well.

Due to his actions which are as ridiculous as his plight and his pettiness, the situation the devil ultimately finds himself in is very tragic. In fact, it seems that many people view Satan as a tragic hero. In their frequently asked questions page, The Satanic Temple has this to say:

Satan is symbolic of the Eternal Rebel in opposition to arbitrary authority, forever defending personal sovereignty even in the face of insurmountable odds. Satan is an icon for the unbowed will of the unsilenced inquirer... the heretic who questions sacred laws and rejects all tyrannical impositions. Ours is the literary Satan best exemplified by Milton and the Romantic Satanists, from Blake to Shelley, to Anatole France.⁴

Thus, the devil is shown to be the heroic confederate willing to face sure defeat in defense of the noble causes of inquiry, truth, and autonomy. Milton, whom I quoted earlier, is even brought in to corroborate.

I disagree with the Satanic Temple on many grounds; two of these are the above depiction of the devil and the assertion that Milton agrees with that depiction. The above quote describes how the devil may view himself but not how John Milton did. This is an important argument because even though John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is not gospel, it is a powerfully accurate, poetic, and important description of the Christian tradition’s view on many spiritual realities, particularly the devil. C. S. Lewis, the great medieval scholar and writer, shows clearly that Milton saw the devil as merely tragic, rather than a tragic hero:

This progressive degradation, of which he himself is vividly aware, is carefully marked in the poem...From hero to general, from general to politician, from politician to secret service agent, and thence to a thing that peers in at bedroom or bathroom windows, and thence to a toad, and finally to a snake—such is the progress of Satan.⁵

Satan’s story is a tragedy in the classic form: a character begins in glory and ends by consciously watching himself descend into misery and infamy.

I assert that up to this point I have made a strong case for why the devil is ridiculous and tragic, but from my description, he does not sound very evil. We have all known vain and petty people, and while they may be obnoxious or small-minded, it seems a stretch of the imagination to call them diabolical or dangerous. But perhaps it is the devil’s pettiness that makes him dangerous. For what do petty people crave but to be taken seriously? And what better way to be taken seriously than to do something drastic, serious, and evil? Machiavelli asserts, “it is better to be feared than loved.”⁶ Likewise, Milton writes from Satan’s perspective that it is “better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.”⁷ The petty man or woman is full of hard, melodramatic ultimatums and will do everything in his or her power to at least appear, if nothing else, dangerous. Furthermore, as Lewis stated earlier, Milton’s Satan is “vividly aware” of his degradation. Perhaps Satan, knowing his ultimate end, reacts to it with a fatalistic response and hopes to make as many as he can just like him.

For the tragedy of the devil is this:
that in becoming obsessed with
the self, one becomes enslaved
by the self.

Despite his motivation, according to the Bible, Satan is the most dangerous creature on earth. In the Gospel of Luke, Satan shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the earth and says, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.”⁸ Additionally, the Apostle Peter tells his listeners to “be sober-minded [and] watchful...” for “your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”⁹ Satan’s vanity is matched only by his power; therefore, orthodox Christian tradition does not take him lightly.

So how does the devil actually affect or endanger us? He does so primarily by infecting us with his character. We are chronically predisposed to be like Satan. Our hearts are naturally bent towards envy which is the motive upon which Satan's rebellion turned. Envy of God, and the desire for self glorification, was what the devil used to tempt Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. When offering Eve the forbidden fruit in Genesis 3, the devil tells her that "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and *you will be like God*, knowing good and evil."¹⁰

Everyone understands the emotion. Often when one watches a truly great performance, such as a particularly charismatic TED talk or a beautiful concert, one is drawn in and really enjoys it. However, there can be a split second when the heart burns with jealousy, and maybe a little ire, and wishes it could attribute the glory of the performance to itself - a split second, gone and forgotten almost as soon as it arrives because the wish is ridiculous, just as the devil is ridiculous. Why should I begrudge someone else's glory, fame, or skill, especially when I have benefitted from it? It is irrational and absurd to harbor ill feelings towards someone just because they are great or honored. Extrapolating such feelings to the situation in which the creature envies the maker and sustainer of himself and of all that is glorious and beautiful clarifies why the devil was absurd in his claim of injury and why we are absurd when we become like him.

Ultimately, the danger of sharing in the devil's absurdity is that we will inevitably also share in his tragedy. If our attitude toward God is one of injured merit and haughty rebellion, we set ourselves up for misery and slavery rather than freedom. For the tragedy of the devil is this: that in becoming obsessed with the self, one becomes enslaved by the self. The intense desire and need to see *ourselves* glorified and/or powerful is so strong and pervasive that it captures our minds and hearts completely and is able to corrupt everything, even love and virtue. We were not meant to be closed systems or stagnant pools sustaining ourselves. Rather, we were meant to be rivers flowing to and being replenished from that which is greater than ourselves, the ocean.

Although the devil is powerful, and although we are so often tempted to follow his ways and slowly head down the tragic path, away from God and toward slavery and destruction, Christians have a guarantee, not against temptation, but against separation from God. Separation from God is the same as being enslaved and destroyed, for in it we are left to ourselves, to be ruled and dominated by our petty passions and demons and removed from the sustainer of life. "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, ...nor powers, ...nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."¹¹ If we will have him, God will not leave us to ourselves or to the devil. He will save us from our own ridiculous, tragic, and evil selves, bind us to a man, the messiah Satan could not stand, and promise us both glory and freedom from the craving of our own glory. Jesus presents a wonderful paradox to us; the only way to gain glory is to give it up, and the only way to find life is to lose it.

¹Brian Regan, *Cup of Dirt*, 2011.

²Jude 1:6; ESV.

³John Milton. *Paradise Lost*. 1667. Book 5:655-662.

⁴"The Satanic Temple FAQ," *The Satanic Temple*. Accessed 11/25/2016. <https://thesatanictemple.com/faq/>

⁵C. S. Lewis. *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. London: Oxford University Press, 1961.

⁶Niccolo Machiavelli, Tim Parks. *The Prince* (Penguin Classics). London: Penguin Books, 2011.

⁷John Milton, *Paradise Lost*. 1667. Book 1:263

⁸Luke 4:6-7; ESV.

⁹1 Peter 5:8; ESV.

¹⁰Genesis 3:5; ESV.

¹¹Romans 8:31-39; ESV.



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Home.

By Abigail Bezrutczyk

The college transition and seeking the place where we know who we are

I have been missing home.

Don't get me wrong- I love being a student at Cornell. I love the privilege to study here and to learn new things every day. I love the beautiful landscape, of hills, gorges, lakes - it is all wonderful.

But yet, I find myself drawn to a place that exists outside of my reach: my quiet street, my slate roofed house, my Home. When I am there, I am comfortable - not simply because of its familiarity, but because there, I know who I am. I have since swung into the life of college, in which this identity is uncertain. It leaves me seeking that solid ground, that sense of self, that home again. How comforting and life changing it is to know a home with God, that travels wherever we go.

Here we are, in a new place. This change reframes so much of our lives; not simply the change of physical location, but our place in it. As we have grown up, we've defined ourselves

in many ways: by what we do, the things we love, the people we associate with, and where we live. We have created a mosaic of who we are: the student-athlete, the great friend, the music lover. But in the swing from one place to another, especially from home to college, we may toss those things away or lose them.

For the first time, many are far from where we used to live, suddenly alone in a new environment. We are separate from our parents, beginning with a wave goodbye. There is a type of pressure in college to redefine oneself. This may be intentional, coming from a feeling of newfound freedom. You no longer have ties to who you previously were; you are a clean slate. Redefinition, in this way, can be liberating, exciting, and full of new possibilities.

But there may be another redefinition that is forced upon you, that reframes how you think about yourself. Our homes are far, our old friends out of sight. Who are we, without the sports we used to play, the culture that surrounded us, the

things we loved? We lose the puzzle pieces of how we used to imagine ourselves. The new pieces we try to place may have jagged edges, the wrong pattern; simply put, they do not fit. We may feel like we don't fully belong here. It may make us miss what we have left behind: that assured person we used to be with the completed picture of ourselves.

Then, classes begin and our minds are filled with new information. It can be wonderful to learn in this world famous institution- but also overwhelming. We work hard and don't always see the intended result. We sleep in and miss that morning class, we stay up all night to finish that paper in time. And then we must face it: we do not always meet our expectations. The intelligence we prided ourselves on, especially intelligence in comparison to others, we can no longer keep. We loved these qualities when we looked in the mirror. We are forced again, to redefine how others see us, and how we see ourselves.

I would expect it hard to find a person that had no difficulties adjusting to college. Everyone faces them, even if they only admit it in their hearts. Social life eases the transition for most - it fills your mind with new people, new events, maybe even a new family to love. But as I made friends, I found myself putting on a facade. Extroverted, open, ready to take on any challenge: that was the new me. I forced this new imagined person into those little empty holes that the transition had left me with. But I realized my weaknesses, the faults and phoniness in my new persona: this new person could not last.

An image in my mind formed, of swinging over a canyon, with only a vine connecting me with who I was, to whom I was becoming. All I wanted was that solid ground to stand on again - but that solid ground, the place where I knew myself, was hours away: Home.

All I wanted was that solid ground
to stand on again.

I walked to Beebe lake one morning, and sat down to face my thoughts. "I can breathe here," I wrote, "It's not like I can't breathe in other places - it's that the breath then doesn't feel like mine." I looked out, at the reflection of the sun in the water, the breeze on the cat-tails, listening to the buzzing bugs, and I felt at peace. Nature, something I always cherished, had not changed.

I was seeking this ground. This place, where things just seemed to fit, where I knew my place and could simply be myself. The things I loved; running, gardening, and I'll admit it, being smart - all these things seemed far from me. My surroundings had changed, and so much of my life had changed, but I knew inside, something must still be the same. There is some unchanging thread.

I had been searching for a home - a place where I could take my shoes off, be at ease, experience peace and simple joy. Home may not be the place where you grew up. My dorm was not home; my desk told me to work harder, the pictures on my wall begged me to go back in time. No, that was not home. Home feels like a hug to me. It feels like something soft and warm and entirely my own. Home is safe, constant, unchanging, love. Home is where you can be who you truly are.

But there is something here that is deeper than a physical place. Because all the circumstance of my life, can, and will inevitably, change. Beneath all the things I love, beneath the way I define myself, there is one core - the soul - around which everything rotates. And as I tried to redefine myself, it was my soul that told me I was being fake; that the way I defined myself was not truly 'me'. My soul, you could say, is this unchanging thread connecting the past to the present, the vine on which I swing. It remains a core part of me, reacting to the situation around me. It cries out in difficult times, like these times of change. And it is always seeking something - some answer to its deepest questions, some security.

But this story goes deeper than this, because my soul does not belong to the physical world. I cannot touch it, see it, or point to it on a map, but I know it exists as something beyond my bones. We say it ourselves, when we say "I can't live with myself", implying that 'you' and 'yourself' are two distinct beings. But the soul is not of our own creation, or your parents creation, and it did not just form out of random chance. No, my soul was made, my soul is owned, my soul is loved - and has a home. This home is that solid ground that I seek, that has been with me all along. This home, all can share: A home with its creator, God.

Knows Your Soul

We have thought we needed to redefine ourselves. On top of all the stresses in our lives- of homework, schedules, lack of sleep - we face

a crisis of identity. Puzzle pieces lost, pieces placed, pieces forced to fit, and given up. We see ourselves from an external view, defining our place based on our changing circumstances. Our souls are troubled, but in this agitation, the words of St. Augustine resonate: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until it finds its rest in you."¹ We are reminded that while the way we see ourselves can change, the way we are seen by God does not. He knows me, because I am his creation. He sees through the perceptions of myself. He holds the person I am inside, so I am never truly lost. Before him, I am small, and I am imperfect, and I am loved just as I am.

We are reminded that while the way we see ourselves can change, the way we are seen by God does not.

In Control

Change does not come easily. We may try to hold on, try to control, try to stop this force, wishing things would stay the same. Or perhaps, we find ourselves on a path that has an unclear future, so each next step is full of uncertainty. The troubles of our souls again are met with a steady God - not only the creator, but the active and powerful - a God that has control. 1 Peter 5:6-7 says, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in

due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."² God loves us, and so we trust in that love, trusting that he will work our lives for good.

The transition to college raises certain hardships: failure, change, doubt, loss. But all of these weights that we carry around are met with God's love. We can give up our burdens, admitting we are not in control. We are loved so much, by the one who is love. To some, it is an immediate relief to let go of trying to control the changes in our lives - to trust in him. His love is a constant as everything changes around us - through all of human history, through every moment of every life, through all despair. That is my home.

Hope in Home

But there are other burdens that persist with us, bigger than the need to control, deeper than a college transition. These problems existed before college, and they haven't gone away, even if we realize that his love is there for us. For those burdens, we may doubt that a greater power will intervene. We may question a God that lets tragedies occur, that leaves us in confusion and despair.

Even if we turn away from God when our struggles and doubts overwhelm, God never turns away from us. You have a soul, your soul was created, and your soul is loved - so much that his son died to save it. He promises us an



life. That is the hope, of a final resting place, a final Home. With eyes set on that promise, we can see beyond even the worst of our days. Hebrews 6:19 tells us, “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”³ This hope is a knowing hope, that a real home exists at the end of our struggles. For now, we visit home in quiet moments. But someday, Home is where we will live.

We can hold onto a hope of that final home, but our souls may still be troubled. Our situation still has not changed, and we may still be discontented with our lives, even as we know an eternal hope. But we can be reminded by 1 John 4:16, “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.”⁴ Though “living in love” may seem like an abstract solution to a concrete problem, it is still something very real as it reminds us of the greatest commandment: to love one another. And as we abide in that love for others and for God, God abides in us. That is reality.

I know God through his love for me. I can only explain it through the times I have felt it. It is this warmth in my chest that arises when I read his word. It is a feeling of unknown peace before a major surgery. It is evident in the beauty of nature; it is clarity in the face of a tragic death. When I open myself to him, he meets me, as he does for all. There is an experiential reality of what it feels like to be loved by God, and it leads me to love him in return. However, our emotions at given moments can change. These emotions are not what I base my faith in; they are not my anchor to God.

The evidence of his love does exist in our world. It is well documented and told throughout the centuries in the Bible. But reading those words may simply be words unless one has

faith. Romans 10:17 tells us, “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.”⁵ We can read the Bible, we can know it, and then his love can be seen in so many dark corners of our lives. It is given to us freely; our only choice is whether or not we want to take it. In these words, we can have our home.

Home: an unchanging love, an eternal hope. That is what we can carry with us wherever life goes. We may have changed through this transition, adding new pieces into our identities and growing from new experiences. We still face troubles in our lives, but let us not forget the deeper things we are connected to: the roots that give us life. Because another change will come, and I will swing. I know that I am held in the hands of the one who created me, who loves me, who gave his son so that I can live with him forever. And I can keep swinging, from one change to the next, knowing that I am secure. And I will keep swinging through life in his love. I will keep swinging, until I swing home. ☺

¹*Saint Augustine, Confessions, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).*

²*1 Peter 5:6-7 (NIV)*

³*Hebrews 6:19 (NIV)*

⁴*1 John 4:16 (NIV)*

⁵*Romans 10:17 (NIV)*



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NICENE CREED

The Cornell Claritas invites people from all intellectual, philosophical, religious, and spiritual backgrounds to join us in our conversation as we search for truth. We do, however, reserve the rights to publish only that which aligns with our statements of belief.

We, the members of the Cornell Claritas, affirm that the Bible is inspired by God, that faith in Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation, and that God has called us to live by the moral principles of the New Testament. We affirm the Nicene Creed, with the understanding that views may differ on baptism and the meaning of the word “catholic.”

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

A PRAYER

Dear Lord,

We want to think the way you, our Creator, designed us to think—with thoughts after you. In seeking to know you, we also desire to make you known. Thus, we offer this journal of Christian ideas in order to make your beauty known here at Cornell and around the world. These efforts to express and apply our knowledge of divine things are not for the sake of exalting ourselves, but for the sake of seeking you and seeing you glorified. We come to you in the spirit of that which your servant, Notre Dame scholar Mark Noll, has written: “...the search for a mind that truly thinks like a Christian takes on ultimate significance, because the search for a Christian mind is not, in the end, a search for mind but a search for God.”

We pray that in these pages and by these reflections that you would be found. To that end, Lord, bless these writings by your powerful grace so that we might be, as the Apostle Paul prayed, ‘filled with the knowledge of your will, in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.’ (Col. 1:9) Your gospel compels us to seek after you, and there is nothing greater or higher than the knowledge of who you are and what you’ve done for us in Christ. We ask you to bless our efforts to understand you better as we do this together in the pages of the Claritas. Cultivate the way we think—for the sake of knowing you and glorifying you. Amen.

*Jim Thomforde
Ministry Director
Christian Union at Cornell*

AUGUSTINE: CONFESSIONS

Book 1, Chapter 1

“Great art thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is thy power, and infinite is thy wisdom.” And man desires to praise thee, for he is a part of thy creation; he bears his mortality about with him and carries the evidence of his sin and the proof that thou dost resist the proud. Still he desires to praise thee, this man who is only a small part of thy creation. Thou hast prompted him, that he should delight to praise thee, for thou hast made us for thyself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee. Grant me, O Lord, to know and understand whether first to invoke thee or to praise thee; whether first to know thee or call upon thee. But who can invoke thee, knowing thee not? For he who knows thee not may invoke thee as another than thou art. It may be that we should invoke thee in order that we may come to know thee. But “how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? Or how shall they believe without a preacher?” Now, “they shall praise the Lord who seek him,” for “those who seek shall find him,” and, finding him, shall praise him. I will seek thee, O Lord, and call upon thee. I call upon thee, O Lord, in my faith which thou hast given me, which thou hast inspired in me through the humanity of thy Son, and through the ministry of thy preacher.



SUBMISSIONS

If you should like to contribute an essay, review, or artwork, we invite you to contact the editors and discuss your ideas. We also accept unsolicited manuscripts, although we reserve the rights to publish submissions that are appropriate to the mission, tone, and standard of quality of the journal. We also welcome letters to the editor. You can contact the editors or submit a manuscript by emailing cornell.claritas@gmail.com.

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바라보는 당신의 서연은?

