

Spring 2016 | Issue 2

# CLARITAS

A Journal of Christian Thought

*FEATURING*

What Killed Robert Peace

*Introducing Epic Poetry*

*What the Debate on Religious  
Freedom Really Means*



**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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Justin McGeary  
Karl E. Johnson

**Contributors:**  
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# PEACE WITHIN COMMUNITY

Dear Reader,

My grandfather once told me that we must hold on to the moments in life when we experience joy and happiness because life is full of sorrow and suffering. The more I read the news and the more I talk with my peers, the more I see people asking similar questions: why is there suffering? What does it mean to be happy? What does it mean to be human?

According to the Harvard Study of Adult Development, the strength of one's relationships with family and friends has a strong bearing on health and well-being in the long run. Life can be discouraging, but it is better experienced in the company of friends. Dr. Waldinger, the current director of the 78 year and counting study, emphasized the importance of trust in relationships in a statement to the New York Times:

“Those good relationships don't have to be smooth all the time. Some of our octogenarian couples could bicker day in and day out. But as long as they felt that they could really count on the other when the going got tough, those arguments didn't take a toll on their memories.”

At Claritas we believe in the power of community. We believe in asking each other hard questions, like how should we deal with grief? What does it mean to pursue morality? How do we address poverty and deeply entrenched inequality? What is human life worth? The process of finding answers to these questions can easily be disheartening and frustrating. There is comfort, however, in knowing that you are not the only one asking those questions. When life feels most tumultuous, we can find peace in community.

We believe that God grants peace to the one whose mind is fixed on him, and we believe that God uses community to achieve that purpose. We strive together to better understand the world around us in light of the reality of a loving Creator God. We meet up every week with this endeavor. To spur one another on, even to simply affirm one another in the questions we are asking, brings comfort and peace. What you have before you is your invitation into this community. I hope our wrestling with hard questions brings you comfort and peace.

Yours Truly,  
Emani Pollard '17  
Editor-in-Chief

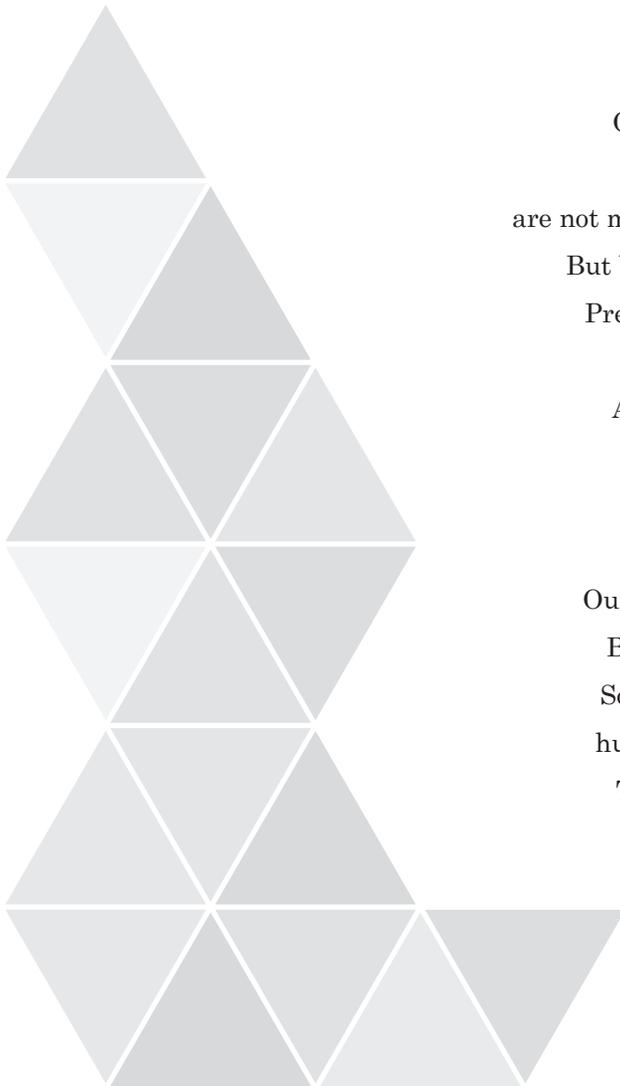
# it is well

Sharon-Rose Alonzo 3.30.16  
In honor of President Garrett

*Author: Sharon-Rose Alonzo is a freshmen 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.*

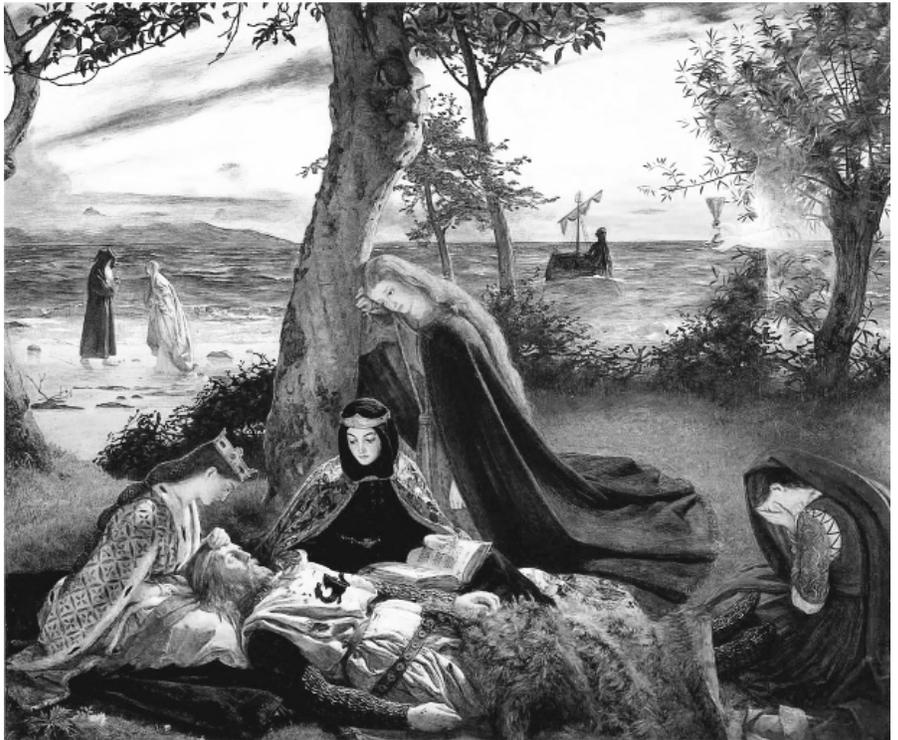


Not with a bang  
But a whisper  
We all must pass on  
But as if the lights over the Hill went out  
Just as jarringly  
You were gone  
Like a thief in the night  
A robber who comes over the wall  
A single breath was reclaimed  
A soul had moved on  
Amongst tears that flowed  
Curiosity, a muted flame  
now blazed  
In chaos where is solace?  
In what should our hope remain?  
When flowers wilt in sudden frost  
And joy is inextricably linked to pain  
It is unchanging light  
we stumble towards  
Hands outstretched  
On our lips, Jesus's name  
Imprints in time  
are not made by hands held up the longest  
But by a hand that is held strong  
President Garrett, your vision  
Shines bright  
And your passion lives on  
Through your memory  
We are blessed and  
Reminded once more  
Our hope does not lie in works  
But in where we call home  
So with steady faith and  
humbled hearts brought low  
Through tragedy we sing  
"It is well  
It is well  
With my soul."



# Introducing Epic Poetry

Epic poetry has had a remarkable influence and impact on human culture and history, however, it also offers deep insight into the nature of humanity. It arises from and calls to desires, identities, and needs that cannot be ignored. Christianity both explains and perfectly answers these things, and provides a view of existence that is as exciting as it is meaningful.



By John Nystrom

The concept of the epic poem is a novelty in today's culture, yet it is as old as the hills. Archaic, mysterious, awful, shrouded in legend, and reaching back to the dawn of human memory, epic poetry is the oldest and one of the most moving forms of poetry. To give one a sense of its cultural and historical weight, examples of epic poetry include *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *The Mahabharata*, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, *The Divine Comedy*, and *Paradise Lost*, just to name a few. An epic poem is a grand and immense tale, wrapped in poignant poetic imagery, often meant to be told or sung aloud, and written on such a massive scale that one poem could take several days to finish reciting. Epic poetry is important historically, culturally, and literarily; yet, its scope extends even to the philosophical and the existential. Epic poetry provides important insight into the human condition, for it tells us of desires, beliefs, and assumptions that are fundamental to our nature and forces us to wrestle with questions about our very existence. The Christian worldview is, in itself, peculiarly suited to explaining and fulfilling the aspects of our character that epic poetry unearths, for it reminds us of what a fantastic, exciting, and meaningful world we live in, and affirms the belief that our stories, no matter how tedious or tawdry, are epically important.

The first thing one must understand about epic poetry is how peculiarly *solemn* it is. The oldest of the epic poems (*The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, etc.), if recited today as they were eons ago, would appear to most as very foreign, very ceremonial, and probably very ridiculous. This is due to a variety of reasons, the primary one being that the institution of the court poet, the original teller of the epic tales, no longer exists. If one cannot imagine the attitude of a court poet, with great pomp and ceremony, lyrically chanting his stories before some ancient king or feudal lord, one cannot grasp the attitude of the epic poem. As C. S. Lewis points out in his *A Preface to Paradise Lost*,<sup>1</sup> the primary flavor of this attitude is solemnity, a concept that has lost much of its meaning in our time. Similar to our modern usage of the word, Lewis says that *solemnity* “implies the opposite of what is familiar, free and easy, or ordinary.” However, unlike our modern usage, “it does not suggest gloom, oppression, or austerity” but rather “the festal which is also the stately and the ceremonial...” *Solemnity* is the moment of silence in memory of those who have fallen, yet it is also the hush in the audience as the groom lifts the veil of the bride, or the respectful silence for the newly coronated king as he walks down the stately aisle. Within the context of the epic poem, *solemnity* places heightened emphasis on the grandeur of the story.

The epic poetic style of the court bards or skalds defined how this solemnity was communicated. It was wreathed in rhythm, and words were chosen with care and thought both to their lyrical effect, as well as to the poetic image they conjured. Patterns such as meter, parallelism, and rhyme combined to produce a chanting, ritualistic quality, highlighting the fact that this was no mere folk tale, or legend, but an *epic*. Poets like Homer would use stock phrases and epithets, reinforcing images and descriptions, letting them fall familiar and repetitive as the strokes of a hammer on the listener. In this way, the listener was molded and carried along by the poem, and made to feel the gravity and power of the fateful epic. More contemporary epic poets, like Milton, on the other hand, emphasized ceremony by shrouding poems in the cloud and mist of lofty, illustrious language. Archaic and ambiguous terms, unearthly, distant proper names, and over-the-top magnificently or morbidly described scenes enchant the reader. Milton's choice of words almost remind one of a catholic mass, and conjure up ideas like splendour and spaciousness, regality, color, and pomp. The epic story was grand, noble, and majestic, and meant to be taken as such. Solemnity was meant to act as a signpost indicating such grandeur. These are no mere tales or adventures; we are not hearing about Jack the giant slayer, or Little Red Riding Hood. No, epic poetry puts the pinnacles of human nobility on display; here we see such characters as Hector and Achilles, Beowulf and Hrothgar, Arthur, Guinevere,

Mordred, Lucifer, Adam and Eve. Solemnity is important because it highlights, and is auxiliary to, the epic story, which is the soul of the epic poem.

The epic story is the secret power of the epic poem. The magnificent plotlines found within epic poetry resonate deep within the human psyche, mirroring aspects of our own character, speaking to our hearts, and inspiring our imaginations. Epic poems directly address the nature of mankind, in all of its thinking and feeling, loving and hating, rising and falling, nobility and corruption. If any doubt is cast upon the ability of epic poetry to strike a chord within the identity of humanity, one need only look at the extraordinary historical longevity, influence, and impact of the poems in our world.

In the epic poem we see the importance of the story in life, or in lives as stories. When we finish reading the heroic epic poem, we see captured, for the briefest instant, the incredible adventure of another person's life. We see it shining and golden, illuminated and immortalized by poetry, and we recognize it as both meaningful and coherent. Reading or listening to epic poetry often inspires us to analyze the individual stories of our own lives. Purpose and plot are immediately assumed and applied to existence. When one reflects upon the past, it is always done within the context of a narrative, and we often ask others about their "stories." It is generally assumed that life is not merely a



random assortment of thoughts and events with no relatedness to each other and no direction, but a continuous and moving plot with beginning, ending, and purpose.

In short, epic poetry brings us face to face with the ultimate questions of life. The fact that epic poetry exists implies that there is an instinctual belief within us that the collection of experiences, thoughts, and feelings called our lives fits a well-defined storyline. Depending on how humans came into existence, this belief is either a supreme delusion or a glorious truth. If a purely evolutionary and materialistic philosophy is held on to with reason and integrity, as it is by so many today, there is no reason for epic poetry other than random chance and evolutionary advantage. One cannot simultaneously believe everything came about from random particles bumping into each other and also that life has meaning; if you came about by chance you are not a story but a phenomenon. You may be interesting, but you are not meaningful.

While epic poetry paints a picture of Man as a willful and reasonable creature, set apart from the other animals and inanimate objects, materialistic naturalism affirms that nothing separates humans from their natural surroundings except degrees of organization, and billions of years of evolutionary selection. The height of evolutionary poetry is that humans come from the dust of the stars, while epic poetry suggests that the stars are nothing but dust when compared to humans.

The height of evolutionary poetry is that humans come from the dust of the stars, while epic poetry suggests that the stars are nothing but dust when compared to humans.

Thus, if the spirit of epic poetry is no mere delusion, another type of explanation must be had. The biblical Christian worldview is such an explanation. There may be the instinct in the reader at this point to groan inwardly, and think of all the clichés of modern Christianity, all of the perceived backwardness of the Church, and to bring up prejudice after prejudice with which to silence even the suggestion of a thought that maybe Christianity is right. My only response against such a reaction is to propose to the reader, in the words of the British philosopher G. K. Chesterton,<sup>2</sup> that “we must try at least to shake off the cloud of mere custom and see the

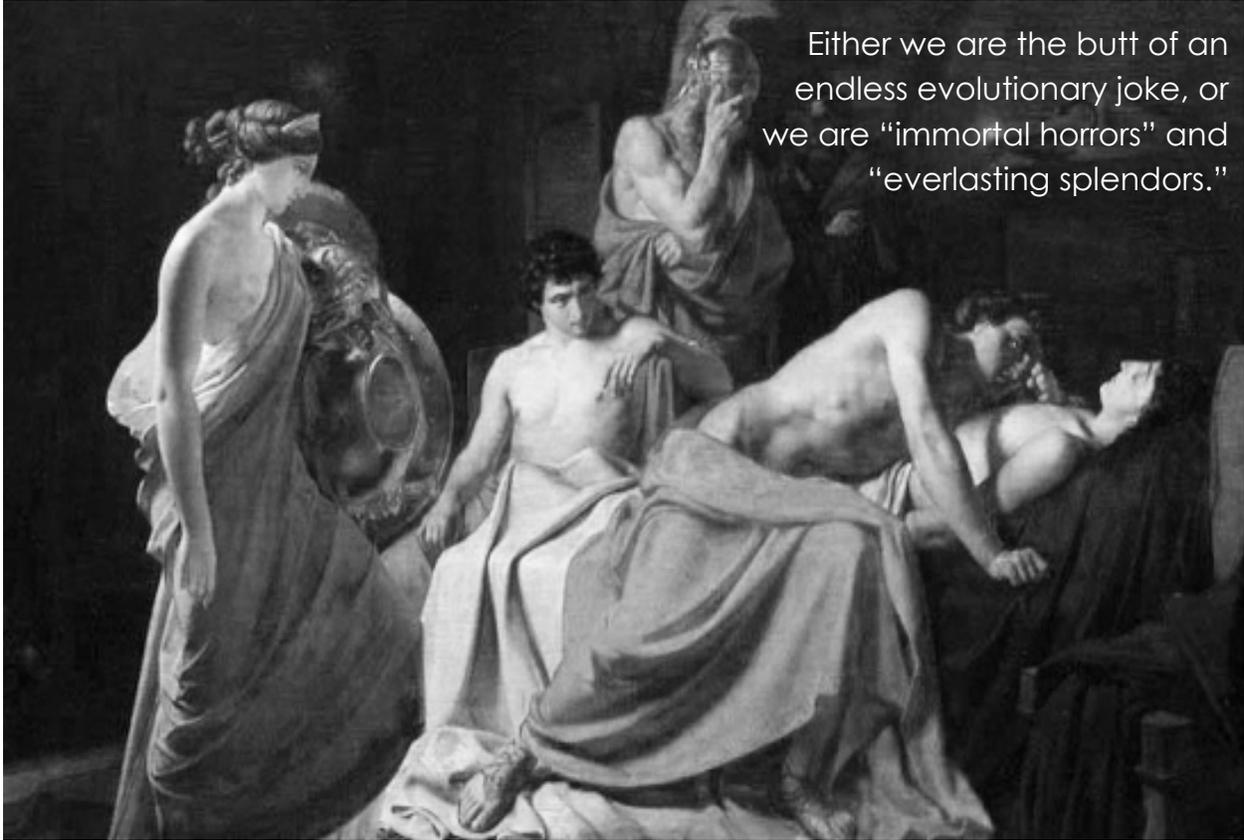
thing as new, if only by seeing it as unnatural.” Familiarity breeds contempt and clouds our vision, and in a discussion as important as this, surely we want our sight and our logic as clear as possible. Maybe you will never be convinced that Christianity is the answer, but I implore you to at least look at it like you’ve never seen it before, to see it rising from the mists of time, as mysterious and alien as epic poetry itself.

The Christian story is an epic story. Reality is exciting, and there is no chance of feeling bored when it is fully appreciated. It tells the tale of God, men, angels, demons, nations, wars, prophets, betrayal, murder, vengeance, victory, love, friendship, and a plethora of other elements. All play a part, and combine to tell a story that is as personal as it is magnificent. It is this paradox that makes Christianity not just the perfect fulfillment of epic poetry, but so much better than all epic poems.

Christianity is magnificent, because it is centered on the magnificent life of Jesus Christ. The Messiah, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the king whose coming all of creation waits for. The whole of the Bible focuses on him and what he did. The crucifixion was the culmination of all of history, and was the fulfillment of the entire Jewish Law and countless Old Testament prophecies. Jesus did not just defeat Satan, the main antagonist of the Bible story; he defeated death and sin as well. He sacrificed himself in the most horrendous way possible in order that his people might be redeemed both from themselves and the punishment they deserved.

In this way, the epic story of Christianity becomes incredibly personal, for Jesus died for many persons, not just one people. Individual lives are touched and transformed and redeemed by Jesus’ death. Furthermore, every life becomes epic in its worth and its significance because of the story in which it takes part. C. S. Lewis says it well in *The Weight of Glory*:<sup>3</sup> “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.”

Epic poetry awakes something powerful in us, something that must be answered. Either we are the butt of an endless evolutionary joke, or we are “immortal horrors” and “everlasting splendors.” Feelings alone are not reason enough to believe in something; the fact that Christianity makes



Either we are the butt of an endless evolutionary joke, or we are “immortal horrors” and “everlasting splendors.”

a great story is no reason to stake your life on it. Yet Christianity can boast of a vast array of great thinkers, logicians, and scientists within its walls, and throughout the centuries, the Church has proven repeatedly that she is as logical as she is lovely. As for me, my mind is satisfied in the Gospel because it sees truth in the story, while my heart is satisfied because it sees a story in the truth. 



*Author: John Nystrom is a sophomore animal science major on the pre-vet track. He is interested in the partnership of livestock and people, and how this partnership can both empower and enhance the lives of individuals around the world. His favorite authors include C. S. Lewis, George MacDonald, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and G. K. Chesterton.*

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<sup>1</sup>Lewis, C. S. *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. London: Oxford University Press, 1961.

<sup>2</sup>Chesterton, G. K. *The Everlasting Man*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1925.

<sup>3</sup>Lewis, C. S. *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*. New York: Macmillan, 1949.

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## Examining how time can free us from the false rivalry of work and rest

If you stop and ask Cornell students about their day, you will often receive responses that evaluate the current situation in terms of time management and productivity, peppered with words like “busy”, “tired”, or “stressed”. Variants of this type of response may be phrased as “I have three prelims, a lab report, and a paper due this week” or “I’ve averaged four hours of sleep for the last six days.” Cornell small talk is permeated with conversations bemoaning how many weeks remain before spring break or calculating the hours until the next weekend while comparing the glories of the previous weekend, be it parties or hours of relaxing with Netflix. These conversations reek of dissatisfaction with the current state of life, a sort of longing, whether explicitly expressed or subconsciously felt, for a change in the current pattern of life. They cry out for a need to shift away from work and towards rest. This longing calls attention to the fact that people do not have enough time in the day to do all of their work and

satisfy their desire for leisure, thus highlighting the finitude of our time.

The extent of this dissatisfaction is so extreme that the university itself also recognizes it and has taken action. While sitting in Mann Library one afternoon, I heard a loudspeaker announcement directing students to a meditation session. I receive emails every week reminding me of dorm events such as a “whine and cheese” study break or coloring book therapy sessions. In a culture so driven by success, Dean’s list, the perfect internship, or a scholarship to graduate school, there appears to be a cry for something

Our unease from our unfulfilled desire for proper rest is due in part from an insufficient understanding of time that reduces it to mere minutes and seconds.

more than simply trying to optimize time in order to maximize returns. Our unease from our unfulfilled desire for proper rest is due in part from an insufficient understanding of time that reduces it to mere minutes and seconds. However, time can be viewed through a more complex lens which values the opportunities time presents. These opportunities add a qualitative aspect to time. With a more robust view of time, we can rest as well as work because both add qualitative value to our lives. Not only is rest necessary for human thriving, but it also is innately good.

To understand this rest, we will first examine two notions of time and then will examine how these perceptions allow us to appreciate rest. In the Greek language, two different words, *chronos* and *kairos*, are used for our English word ‘time’ and stress separate aspects of time. *Chronos*, the understanding most often associated with time, embodies its quantitative aspect, stressing the uniformity of time and answering the questions of speed, frequency, length, and age. It accounts for the seconds, minutes, and years that pass, and it can be seen in the ticking of a clock. In addition, it accounts for the notion of time with regard to change. In his *Physics*, Aristotle discusses the *chronos* notion of time, defining it as the “number of motion in respect to ‘before’ and ‘after’.”<sup>1</sup> This definition expands an understanding of time to include direction or a serial order. For example, one could say, “this morning, I woke up, *and then* brushed my teeth *after* eating breakfast,” showing the progression of these events. Aristotle differentiates time from movement but acknowledges an undeniable connection between the two.

Similarly, in his article, *Time, Times and The Right Time*, twentieth-century scholar John E. Smith describes *chronos* as “allowing for temporal location and the relations between the distinguishable items of experience.”<sup>2</sup> Implicit in his definition is the natural consequence of change. Movement accompanies time, and time always implies change. As time “marches on,” certain changes such as aging, are inevitable, however undesirable they may be. Such a view of time inspires the perception that we are running out of time, that we must achieve as much as we can before our “time is up.” In other words, time is scarce. Our use of “time” in modern English best resembles this *chronos* definition, and this notion stimulates our apparent need to work instead of rest, accelerating our dissatisfaction with life.

In contrast to *chronos*, the ancient Greek language also has a notion of time as *kairos*, defining this qualitative measurement of time as the “special position an event or action occupies in a series.”<sup>2</sup> This definition no longer equates every minute to every other minute. Rather, it sees different moments in time as more valuable or appropriate for an action than others. Notions of *kairos* often arise during crises, when an opportunity arises for an important decision to be made. In his *Seventh Letter*, Plato responds to requests for him to support Dion. He asks for Dion’s policies, saying that he would only support Dion if it were the “opportune” time.<sup>3</sup> In doing so, he makes his choice based on the quality of the moment; that is, whether is it the “right time.”

*Kairos* can be seen as indicating turning points, most clearly seen in political tension that evolves into revolution, the actual turning point. One prime example of such a turning point can be seen in the 1832 French revolt. Political tensions and economic woes had primed the people for action, and the turning point, the peak of *kairos* time, arrived on June 5<sup>th</sup> with the death of General Jean Maximilien Lamarque, a principal advocate of the working class. His death and funeral triggered the Paris revolts and barricade; his death is seen as creating the proper conditions for revolution. The lyrics from *Les Miserables*’ song, ‘ABC Café,’ point to this proper time, when the leader of the revolt, Enjolras, sings, “The time is near, so near, it’s stirring the blood in their veins.”<sup>4</sup> Proper time follows the notion of the ripeness of time, that certain events can only occur at certain moments, primed by other events. This concept of a ripeness of time may also be seen in Ecclesiastes, where the author writes about having a time for everything: to be born, to die, to weep, to laugh, for war, for peace.<sup>5</sup> He does not suggest that certain activities are always good while others are always bad but acknowledges that the world functions with a variety of events that each have their appropriate time to transpire.

Although we can talk about *chronos* and *kairos* separately, they do not exist independently of one another. Often, we construct our *chronos* understanding around *kairos* events. The timeline of history, a very quantitative measurement, is organized around qualitative events. We discuss the history of the West as before or after the Scientific Revolution, Industrial Revolution, or the Enlightenment, all major turning points in the development of much of western culture. In fact, these events

are so interconnected that we say that the Scientific Revolution primed the western world for the Industrial Revolution as well as for the Age of Enlightenment.

When time is viewed solely through a *chronos* lens, an “economy of time” influences our understanding of work and rest. This “economy of time” views rest and work in opposition. It views time towards one as time away from the other, usually implying positive value of time towards work and negative value of time towards rest. It stems from the inescapable finitude of time because we all have a limited number of hours to allocate to various activities. This concept of an economy of time is first discussed in Marx’s *Das Kapital* where he diagnoses how the allocation of time had functioned previously and proposes a new system. Both systems, however, are built on the basis that because time is finite, it must be allocated between different activities.<sup>6</sup> An economy of time paired with the contemporary obsession with worldly success fosters a workaholic culture. A workaholic culture organizes life around work and values only material achievement: a degree, research position, dream job, or desirable friends. This culture sees little value in rest. In fact, rest is cast as work’s antagonist: a necessary evil, a bitter pill that must be swallowed. In the hierarchy of human activity, rest is inherently subordinate to work, seen only as its negation, and is to be minimized at all cost. Rest can be seen only as sleep, a necessary activity to increase work productivity. Alternatively, if time is viewed through a *kairos* lens, life no longer needs to adopt an economy of time and the false dichotomy it implies but can be valued through the benefit of time represented in both work and rest.

Christianity values both work and rest and sees each as an opportunity to honor and enjoy God and thereby live a full life. One example of how Christians value rest is through the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a full day of rest from work originally commanded by God to his people, the Israelites. This day of rest is devoted to explicit worship and enjoyment of God rather than to normal work. We can best understand this commandment in its context. Keeping the Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments God gives to the Israelites after he delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Before giving the Israelites the Commandments, God first recalls to their memory how he saved them from the Egyptians. In so doing, God shows that his commandments give a means by which his people can respond to how he saved

them; it outlines how people can worship God through obedience. Sabbath rest, as the Fourth Commandment, is one of the ways God has laid out for us to worship him, and it therefore should be taken seriously, not just as something that gets the scraps of our time or can be cut out of our daily routine when we have other pressures on our time. Such a view of rest implies that because rest is itself important, a *kairos* view of time should be adopted. Although *chronos* itself takes no stance on rest or work, it often leads to a view of time that devalues rest.

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God himself set the precedent for us when he rested on the seventh day. After creating the world in six days, he rested and declared the seventh day holy.<sup>7</sup> When we see that God established rest when the world was still perfect, we see that rest is good in its own right and is not merely a necessary evil needed to increase productivity. Resting on the Sabbath should not burden us, but rather it should offer a more joyful life within the bounds of God’s vision for human flourishing. We see that we were made not only to work but also to rest. Therefore, using our time towards rest brings us to the way we were meant to live. It brings some of the true happiness we desire.

In the Jewish tradition, the Sabbath starts Friday at sundown and continues until Saturday at sundown. In the Christian tradition, people celebrate the Sabbath on Sunday in memory of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This tradition began in the first church and is recorded in the book of Acts.<sup>8</sup> Aligning everyone’s day of rest on Sunday also allows for people to worship and enjoy God together as a corporate group rather than just individuals. The Sabbath in both the Jewish and Christian traditions affirms the goodness of rest while deepening its value through adding the corporate aspect to it.

Although defining this Sabbath rest may prove difficult because there is no precise formula for it, some habits definitely characterize it. Rest includes fellowship with other Christians to worship God, communion with God through prayer, reading the Bible and meditating on God’s word, and enjoying good gifts like meals and sports. These activities allot time for rest

rather than working for something tangible.

The idea of setting aside a whole day to rest may seem far-fetched at Cornell, where we sometimes feel as if we live under the tyranny of “productivity.” When we adopt a fuller view of time in the *kairos* sense, however, and remember why we can and should take a significant amount of time to rest, it may seem more plausible. We *can* rest because we know that God does not judge us based on our achievements. True fulfillment lies in him and not in amassing accolades. We know that we cannot, by our own efforts, earn the love of God or live a truly meaningful life. Therefore, Christians need not worry about whether they will be accepted to the right graduate school, find the perfect job, or have the ideal group of friends. To do so would approach idolatry. At the same time, our work is also a means to use our gifts and talents to worship and enjoy God and we should therefore be dedicated to performing it well. The Christian rendering of work and rest turns the “work-life balance” upside down; it values both as complements rather than as rivals. Work and life are not weights on a scale but rather to live is to work and to rest. Both use time to honor and enjoy God.

We *should* rest principally because God has commanded it and he has done so with good reason. We were made to tire, to be finite, to need to stop and refuel every so often. Rest is good in and of itself and it requires neither justification nor excuse. It, too, is a valuable use of time, especially when a *kairos* view of time is used. God also built multiple seasons of rest into the Hebrew calendar. In the Old Testament, God *commands* multiple celebrations, which originally totaled about thirty days each year. Adding together Sabbath days and additional feasts, such as Purim and Hanukkah, and factoring in the inevitable wedding and birth celebrations, God set aside over a fourth of the year for rest and celebration.<sup>9</sup> These seemingly excessive periods of rest show that God finds rest an important foundation to a full life that honors him. God holds a full view of time, establishing in his created order both time for work and time for rest. He, too, can see the qualitative opportunities time presents.

The Cornell culture, ruled by the eternal tick, tick, tick of the clock, values only the efficiency of production and the maximization of time. With a fuller view of time, one that sees not only *chronos* seconds but *kairos* quality, we can look beyond the pressures on time and see the goodness and value of resting through the Sabbath. 

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<sup>1</sup>“*Physics*.” Translated by R.P. Hardie and R.K. Gaye. Book IV Part 12. 350 B.C.

<sup>2</sup>Smith, John E. 1969. “TIME, TIMES, AND THE ‘RIGHT TIME’; ‘CHRONOS’ AND ‘KAIROS’”. *The Monist* 53 (1). Oxford University Press: 1–13. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27902109>.

<sup>3</sup>“*The Seventh Letter*.” Translated by J. Harward. 2009.

<sup>4</sup>Schönberg, Claude-Michel, Alain Boublil, Jean-Marc Natel, Herbert Kretzmer, and Victor Hugo. 2003. *Boublil and Schönberg’s legendary musical: Les misérables: the musical that swept the world: in concert*. London: Alain Boublil Music.

<sup>5</sup>*Ecclesiastes* 3

<sup>6</sup>Marx, Karl. “*Das Kapital, Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*.” In *Capital A Critique of Political Economy*, 280. Vol. 1. Translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1887.

<sup>7</sup>*Genesis* 3

<sup>8</sup>*Acts* 20:7

<sup>9</sup>Alcorn, Randy. *Happiness*. Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2015.



Author: Elizabeth Schmucker '19, a proud Philadelphian to the core, studies Mathematics in the College of Arts and Sciences. She can be reached at [ess79@cornell.edu](mailto:ess79@cornell.edu).

# In Pursuit of Morality



What indicative and imperative grammar moods tell us about God's role in Christian ethical transformation.

by Joshua Jeon

In David Brooks' *The Road to Character*, the NY Times columnist examines the way to develop character. By character, Brooks refers to "eulogy virtues," which are characteristics that are talked about at funerals in remembrance of "whether you were kind, brave, honest or faithful."<sup>1</sup> Brooks wrote his book in order to personally "save [his] own soul" and to "build inner character," but also to assist the reader.<sup>2</sup>

In his book, Brooks demonstrates a deep desire for personal ethical transformation—to be transformed into a person of character. Brooks desire is not exclusive to himself; it is universal. For example, the desire for transformation is also shown in the lyrics of Michael Jackson's "Man in the Mirror," a song about a man who sincerely looks to "make a change" in his life, one that will "feel real good," "make a difference," and "change the world."<sup>3</sup> Like Brooks and Jackson, many people desire to live an inspired, good life, a life that will subsequently change the world for the better. In this pursuit, they

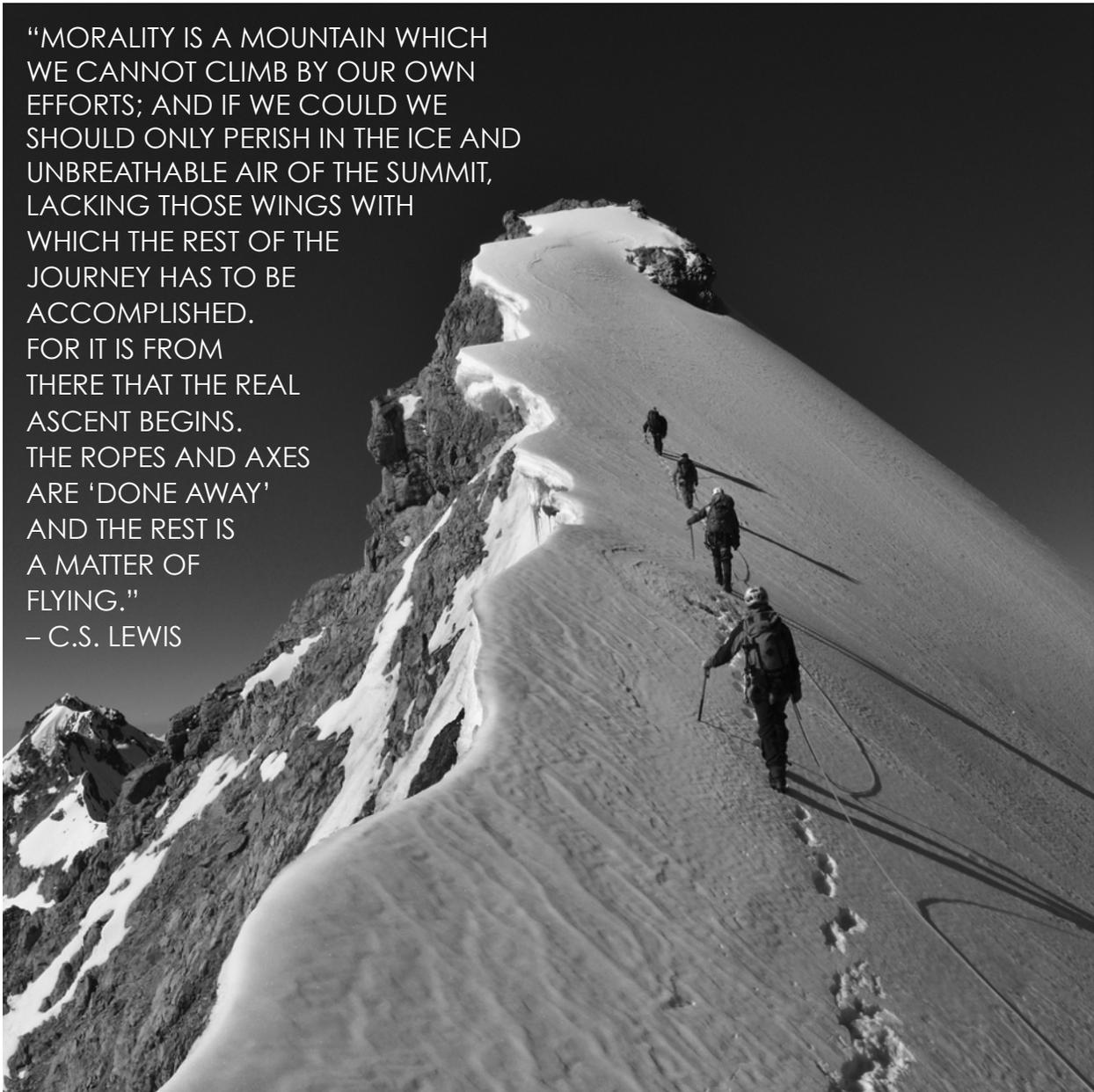


continually ask themselves "How can I become a better person?" Often people will look to the world's religions for guidance in answering this question. Christianity is often approached with this attitude where Jesus is reduced to a moral teacher, the Bible a moral handbook, and the Church an institution to teach ethics, to help me change myself and become a "better me."

However, I disagree with this understanding of Christianity. Christianity, although it gives moral law and ethical instruction, does not merely create rules. Furthermore, Christianity teaches that it is not by one's own strength and ability that one is able to become more moral, it is only through God's power. The theologian G. C. Berkouwer said, "Grace is the essence of theology and gratitude is the essence of ethics."<sup>4</sup> If gratitude should fuel ethical behavior, what does this gratitude mean? By "gratitude" Berkouwer refers to part of the larger overall response a Christian has to God's work in his life. Grace and gratitude reverse the expectations for ethical action. To demonstrate this, I will investigate the structure of indicative and imperative grammar moods in the New Testament of the Bible. The indicative and imperative grammar moods convey the fundamental truth in Christianity that how a person becomes more moral is through the foundational work of God transforming the person.

What is meant by grammar mood? In the simplest sense, mood presents the verbal action or state with reference to its *actuality* or *potentiality*. Mood shows the speaker's attitude to the verbal action, how certain he thinks it is, whether it is actual or potential. There are four moods in Greek: the indicative, subjunctive, optative, and imperative.<sup>5</sup>

“MORALITY IS A MOUNTAIN WHICH WE CANNOT CLIMB BY OUR OWN EFFORTS; AND IF WE COULD WE SHOULD ONLY PERISH IN THE ICE AND UNBREATHABLE AIR OF THE SUMMIT, LACKING THOSE WINGS WITH WHICH THE REST OF THE JOURNEY HAS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED. FOR IT IS FROM THERE THAT THE REAL ASCENT BEGINS. THE ROPES AND AXES ARE ‘DONE AWAY’ AND THE REST IS A MATTER OF FLYING.”  
– C.S. LEWIS



In general, the indicative mood is the mood of assertion, or *presentation of certainty of what is or has happened*.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, the imperative mood is the mood of *intention*. It is the mood furthest removed from certainty and associates with human will and possibility.<sup>7</sup> Thus, commands are often given in the imperative mood. In the New Testament, the indicative and the imperative frequently appear together. They do so in particular sequence and structure that gives insight into how and why Christians can be ethically transformed.<sup>8</sup> For a clear example, in the apostle Paul’s epistles indicatives and imperatives describe the new life that one has in Jesus Christ.

Indicative and imperative grammar structure, fundamentally, describe the believer’s relation

to Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. Essentially, the indicative describes that “those who are in Christ,” Christians, have died to sin and are alive in Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the indicative does not stand alone but sets up the imperative command to “sin no more.” Colossians 3:1-5 illustrates this relationship between the indicative and imperative with regard to Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection:<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. <sup>3</sup>For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. <sup>5</sup>Put to death, therefore,

whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.<sup>11</sup>

Paul first establishes the reality of the indicative, that the believer *has* been raised with Christ. This reality, in the indicative mood, gives reason for following the imperative as indicated by “since.” The imperative command is that the believer should now “set” his heart; he should desire to live for Christ. Verses two and three, and four and five, are similar. The reality is that “you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ,” and the subsequent command is to “Set your mind on things above.” In verse five, the believer is commanded to “put to death” sinful desires in future expectation of being glorified with Jesus. The reality of having died with Christ is the reason for not sinning. It is because the believer has been changed that he should change.

The most obvious and definitive example of this grammar structure and its relation to why one pursues sanctification is in Philippians 2:12-13:<sup>12</sup>

**“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; *for it is God who works in you* both to will and to work for his good pleasure”**

The command to “work out your salvation” is founded upon the assertion that God works within the person, as indicated by “for.” Therefore, the reason the believer works is because of God’s work in the past and in the present. It is not the other way around where God works because the believer has already worked. This order that the imperative follows the indicative is consistent and is not reversed in the New Testament.<sup>13</sup> As the Dutch theologian Herman Ribberdos said, “The imperative is grounded on the reality that has been given with the indicative, appeals to it, and is intended to bring it to full development.”<sup>14</sup>

The reason for pursuing the imperatives has been discussed, but now through what means can they be attained? The answer to this question can also be found in Philippians 2:13: “for it is God who works in you both to *will* and to *work* for his good pleasure” (emphasis added). God works within the believer so that he will have the desire for work and will work. He accomplishes this through the Holy Spirit.

The indicative and imperative are distinct. They pertain to different aspects of ethical transformation in Christianity but are

intertwined. The indicative is the basis on which the imperative stands; however, the imperative is the maturation of the indicative and an indicator that the indicative is true in the believer’s life.<sup>15</sup> If there is a common characteristic between the two, it is that they are both rooted in the Gospel which manifests itself in a person’s life through faith. Faith fastens these two to the reality of one’s life. It is by faith that one has salvation: that the indicatives become indicatives, actual reality in one’s life. Once one is saved, through faith by grace, one subsequently receives the Holy Spirit and it is by the Spirit that one has new life. And it is by faith that one obeys God in light of his future promises and in full trust of his goodness.

It is by faith that one has salvation:  
that the indicatives become  
indicatives, actual reality in his life.

In conclusion, the indicative and imperative grammar mood structure in the New Testament reveals that Christian moral transformation depends primarily on the work and power of God, but involves human volition and cooperation.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the reason for pursuing morality is “gratitude,” response to, or natural continuation of the new life one has in Jesus Christ.

Save for all the discussion about morality and becoming a more moral person, Christianity is not *merely* about becoming a better person. As the British author and apologist C.S Lewis wrote in his essay “Man or Rabbit,” “Mere morality is not the end of life.”<sup>17</sup> Morality, although absolutely necessary and desired, should not be the ultimate goal for which Christians strive.<sup>18</sup> While God intends for a believer’s ethical transformation<sup>19</sup>, the reason this is his will is because it is the absolute best for the believer. Morality is the best for him because it is how God intends the Christian to live as it allows him to grow deeper in his relationship with God. Consequently, the Bible is not a how-to-guide to use to satisfy man’s moral cravings. Instead it is a love letter, intended to help the reader know the lover more. Christianity is not about morality or a set of ethics, it is about a whole new reality.

Christianity holds a reality in which a sovereign, all powerful God loves us enough to sacrifice his son; his son, Jesus Christ, who, fully God and

Christianity is not about morality or a set of ethics, it is about a whole new reality.

fully human, perfectly fulfilled the law that we could never do, and took the punishment for our sin so that we may be redeemed; and his Spirit helps us to have the best life possible, where we love God and grow closer to him as beloved sons and daughters. When this reality is experienced in faith, it radically transforms the individual's life. And it is only when the individual is transformed by the love of Christ that he can truly love God and obey His commandments, the imperatives, *the law* empowered and guided by his Spirit. It is in the context of the indicative, the reality of *Christ*, that we can look at the man in the mirror and truly *change*. ☩

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<sup>1</sup>David Brooks, "The Moral Bucket List," *New York Times*, April 11, 2015, accessed February 10, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/12/opinion/sunday/david-brooks-the-moral-bucket-list.html>.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>Michael Jackson, *Man in The Mirror*, MJJ Productions Inc., 1987.

<sup>4</sup>Michael S. Horton, "The Indicative and The Imperative: A Reformation View of Sanctification," *Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals* (1996), accessed February 10, 2016. <http://web.archive.org/web/20000603061020/www.alliancenet.org/radio/whi/commentaries/whi.com.msh.IndicImper.html>.

<sup>5</sup>Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar Beyond the*

*Basics*. (Michigan: Zondervan), 443-448.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 446.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>*Ethical transformation can be understood, to some degree, as sanctification in the Christian context. Sanctification is the process of becoming more in the likeness Jesus Christ, who for Christians is the ultimate example of a moral person. It is the process of becoming holy or set apart for God. Sanctification is God's will for every Christian.*

<sup>9</sup>Romans 6 or Galatians 2:20 see <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/united-with-christ-in-death-and-life-part-1> for further description of "death to sin, alive in Christ."

<sup>10</sup>Colossians 3:1-5 (ESV)

<sup>11</sup>For easy identification of imperatives and indicatives: Underlined denotes indicatives, bold the imperatives and italics transition words.

<sup>12</sup>Philippians 2:12-13 (ESV)

<sup>13</sup>Herman Ribberdos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans 1975), 254.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>C.S. Lewis, "Man or Rabbit?" in *God in the Dock*. (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans 1975), 108-113.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 112: "Morality is indispensable: but the Divine Life, which gives itself to us and which calls us to be gods, intends for us something in which morality will be swallowed up. We are to be re-made."

<sup>19</sup>Otherwise known as sanctification.



Author: Joshua Jeon '19 is from Fairfield, CT. He is a Biology Major.





# the fallacy of "real" change

By Evelyn Shan

## Why pray when you can take action?

On December 2, 2015, a married couple opened fire on a holiday party to kill 14 people, injure 21, and make San Bernardino, California the site of the deadliest American shooting since the Sandy Hook shooting in 2012. One day later, the front-page headline of the New York Daily News read, "God isn't fixing this."<sup>1</sup> Soon after, "#thoughtsandprayers"<sup>2</sup> began trending on Twitter to criticize the inaction of political figures for their "empty platitudes"<sup>3</sup> and lack of action for gun control reform. In the flurry of "prayer shaming" and rebounding backlash, many have condemned prayer as an apathetic substitute for real action.

Stated another way, the critics believe that prayer is not enough. To them, prayer does not prevent further loss of innocent lives. It does not stop the United States from being the only developed nation to claim a high frequency of mass shootings. It does not change things. In response to the Paris attacks, the Dalai Llama said, "Humans have created this problem, and now we are asking God to fix it."<sup>4</sup>

What, then, can be done to foster legitimate change? The first option that comes to mind is

political action. One tweet in clear support of this reads, "Try this: Stop thinking. Stop praying. Look up Einstein's definition of 'insanity.' Start acting on gun violence prevention measures."<sup>5</sup> In lieu of praying, we can voice our opinions for tightened gun control on social media or go to demonstrations that promote a bottom-up stance. We can participate in legislative procedures and vote for public office candidates who express similar views on the issue of gun control. Beyond the reformation of gun control laws, we can examine causal mechanisms like mental illnesses that play key roles in gun violence and increase healthcare reform.

Evidently, there are plenty of options to pursue change in gun violence, but the effectiveness of these methods is questionable. The first primary federal law regulating firearms was passed in 1968, and a handful of notable pieces of legislation have been implemented since then. However, policy change has been, and still is, slow and nowhere near revolutionary. The 1994 Assault Weapons Ban, a 10-year federal ban on the production of certain weapons, was easily bypassed and not renewed in 2004.<sup>6</sup> The lack of radical reform is partly due to heavy

opposition from interest groups like the National Rifle Association and partly due to inevitable government cleavages. Several states put forth more restrictive laws after the Sandy Hook Elementary shooting, but 20 states followed with pro-gun legislation one year later.<sup>7</sup> At the local, state, and federal levels, transformative policy change seems to be a distant and flickering illusion.

In light of the historical track record, it becomes increasingly apparent that as citizens, we can only effect change to a certain extent. We elect representatives, but those representatives face a stagnant political climate.

Furthermore, we as a nation have become increasingly desensitized to carnage. In response to the Navy Yard shootings that followed Sandy Hook, Dan Gross, president of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, criticized our tendency to push for change only after the latest mass shooting. “Our whole goal is to break the cycle where our collective desire for policy change is driven by high-profile national tragedies,”<sup>8</sup> Gross said. The deaths, broken families, and shattered communities are not normal, and we cannot accept shootings as the status quo in a new era of frightening complacency. Thus, we face the same question again: What can be done to create real change? If federal policy doesn’t cut it, what will?

Let us entertain the prospect of prayer. Though popularly conceived of as a passive gesture of false reassurance, prayer is not intended to be empty. Instead of a substitute for action, prayer is a means to action.

In the face of a loss or tragedy, Christians who pray are actively petitioning God. One demonstration of this is the process of lamentation, in which the prayers express sorrow, regret, or unhappiness. We lament as a cry of pain, an outpouring of grief, a show of confusion, or an expression of being utterly lost. To lament is to ask, “What are you doing, God?” when the pain appears senseless and contradictory to the goodness of God. Lamentation does not construct a negative mindset but breaks down our own failed understandings, so that we might begin to comprehend God’s power.

In fact, to pray is to believe that God will intervene. When we lament, we explicitly confess our lack of power while believing that God is able and willing to help. King David laments often in the book of Psalms. In Psalm 22 he cries, “My

God, my God why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.”<sup>9</sup> These sentiments of abandonment and grief run parallel to our emotions upon hearing of violent tragedies like San Bernardino. When we realize that there is nothing we can do to stop the pain and desperation, David shows us that the proper response is to pray for God to intervene in his power.

Psalm 22 continues with, “But you, O Lord, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid!”<sup>10</sup> David, as hopeless as he is, still expects God to do something. Indeed, he recognizes the power of God in our daily lives, a power that is far more effective than anything we can do. Next to the impotence of our government, our own helplessness is made even more evident. As individuals, we cannot even control the quotidian aspects of our lives, let alone the immense tragedies of shootings and murder. But if we believe that God is sovereign, that he created the world and controls everything in it, then we begin to realize that God’s power transcends our own agency. This is what transforms prayer from empty words into moving action. In submitting our powerless lives to his powerful will, we recognize that it is only through him that our prayers are mobilized.

This is what transforms prayer from empty words into moving action. In submitting our powerless lives to his powerful will, we recognize that it is only through him that our prayers are mobilized.

Our cries to God begin as pain and confusion, but when we grasp God’s ability to work through these cries, our outlook changes. This is illustrated in Psalm 66, where David writes that “truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me.”<sup>11</sup> The end of the psalm is laden with praise and thanksgiving as David celebrates the loving actions of God in his life. Rather than wallow in bitterness and sorrow because of our individual incapacity to effect change, we can rejoice, for God has lifted the burden from our backs. Furthermore, God is both capable and good, and James writes that “every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down

from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”<sup>12</sup> God’s plan for us is one of unwavering goodness, and that is why David turns his cries of pain into shouts of joy.

When we lament in prayer, we come to God in sorrow and helplessness. But when we pray, we bring all of our pain to the omnipotent God, acknowledge his greatness and goodness, and trust him to act for us. Thus, prayer comes to a final destination of hope and trust instead of grief and anger. Looking at this progression, prayer is anything but passive. It is the conversation that allows us to unload our tears, pain, and confusion on God, and trust that God, powerful, righteous, and loving as he is, will respond. ☩

*gestures,” Salon, December 3, 2015.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>*Emma Green. “Prayer Shaming After a Mass Shooting in San Bernardino,” The Atlantic, December 2, 2015.*

<sup>6</sup>*Congress lets assault weapons ban expire,” NBC News, September 13, 2004.*

<sup>7</sup>*Ryan J. Foley. “States expanded gun rights after Sandy Hook school massacre,” AP Big Story, December 13, 2015.*

<sup>8</sup>*Benjamin Hart. “Gun Control Advocates Urge Patience In The Wake Of Navy Yard Shootings,” Huffington Post, September 24, 2013.*

<sup>9</sup>*Psalm 22:1*

<sup>10</sup>*Psalm 22:19*

<sup>11</sup>*Psalm 66:19-20*

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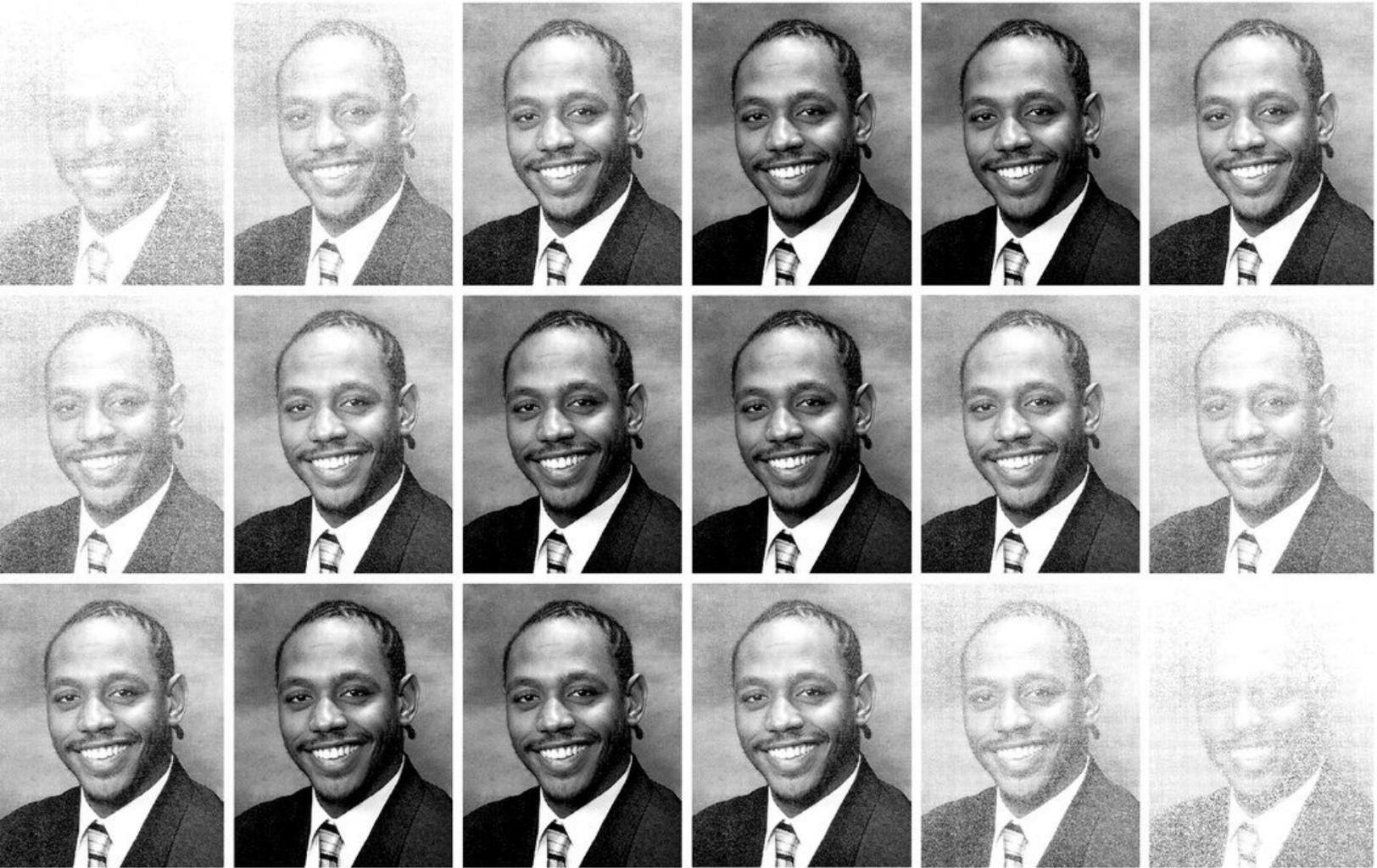
<sup>1</sup>*Rich Schapiro. “GOP presidential candidates offer prayers — not solutions on gun control — after San Bernardino massacre,” New York Daily News, December 3, 2015.*

<sup>2</sup>*Mary Elizabeth Williams. “There is no war on prayer: Stop hand-wringing over “prayer shaming” and confront the hypocrisy of empty*



*Author: Evelyn is a freshman from Indiana planning to study Government and History. She’s a huge fan of lunch dates, late night worship sessions, and cereal for every meal.*





# WHAT KILLED ROBERT PEACE?

By Esther Jiang

Examining the short and tragic life of a  
brilliant young man.

### *What Killed Robert Peace?*

The story of Robert DeShaun Peace should have been one of success. Yet in May 2011, Robert is found dead by gunshot wound, surrounded by cash, twenty-five pounds of marijuana, and the paraphernalia of drug-production—reinforcing the trope of the African American male caught in drug and gang violence.

How did this happen?

In *The Short and Tragic Life of Robert Peace*, Robert's Yale roommate Jeff Hobbs attempts to answer this question by piecing together the story of Robert through memories, observation, and documentation. As the title of the novel indicates, Robert's death is a tragedy, imbued with the bizarre. His life is an enigma—the mind that he employs to study molecular biophysics and biochemistry at Yale is the same one that he uses to create Sour Diesel, his designer strain of marijuana.

To answer the question of what led to Robert Peace's demise, I propose that we must examine the poverty in which Robert grows up and how it shapes his decisions. It is significant to note that Robert is a native to Newark, NJ, where he and over 30% of the population lives below the poverty line. Robert is also raised in a single parent household by his mother after his father, Skeet, is imprisoned for double homicide. Undeniably, the events surrounding Robert's life result in poverty at the individual and structural levels. However, I think that these two theories of poverty—individual and structural—are not enough to capture all that Robert experiences. To create a more comprehensive analysis, we must also examine a third type of poverty: relational poverty. This relational poverty is caused by the sins that Robert commits as well as the sins that are committed against him.

There are two major explanations for why poverty persists in America. The first view is that individuals are largely responsible for their own destiny, choosing in effect to become poor.<sup>1</sup> Poverty is linked to a person's characteristics, choices, and competency (e.g. laziness, lack of effort, and low ability). Related to the individual phenomenon is the theory of "subcultures of poverty", which argues that poverty is perpetuated through the socializations of certain behaviors and attitudes. The term first appeared in anthropologist Oscar Lewis' ethnography, *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty* (1959). In his study, Lewis contends that

systemic poverty has led to the formation of an autonomous subculture as children are socialized into feelings "of marginality, of helplessness, of dependency, of not belonging." These attitudes trap and perpetuate poverty into an inescapable cycle, and poverty is something that individuals are stuck in.

In some ways, Robert certainly did perpetuate his state of poverty through his decisions. Although Jackie tries to remove Robert from his old neighborhood by moving and sending him to a private school, Robert chooses to return and befriend many of his father's friends. They introduce him to smoking and drinking at the age of 13, and he chooses to follow in their lifestyle. Ultimately, Robert makes the poor decision to produce Sour Diesel that costs him his life.

The story of Robert  
DeShaun Peace should  
have been one of  
SUCCESS.

However, a purely individualistic reading of Robert's life would disregard the fact that Robert is anything but lazy, incompetent, and powerless. Robert is remembered as a natural leader, a brilliant student and a loyal son and friend. His mother challenges him to be ambitious, and he understands the cost of her sacrifices, which drives him to be studious, focused, and hardworking. He is a successful water polo player, graduates at the top of his private high school, and is accepted into Yale University. After hearing Robert's speech at a high school banquet, a wealthy alumnus is so impressed with Robert that he gives Robert a blank check for his college tuition. He is a straight-A student at Yale, and rationally, he should have been able to make good decisions.

Perhaps Robert didn't always have the choice to leave poverty. This leads to the second major explanation, which opposes the individualistic phenomenon by presenting poverty as a result of "failings at the structural level."<sup>2</sup> Advocates of this theory argue that most of poverty can be traced back to structural features that are deeply embedded into the economy, the legal system, and/or interrelated institutional environments. For instance, the U.S. labor market is unable

to provide enough decent paying jobs for all families to avoid poverty or near poverty.<sup>3</sup> This leads to the formations of socioeconomic classes, which are reproduced over time as people in each level use their resources to protect their advantages and pass them on to their children.<sup>4</sup> Socioeconomic classes also cross with the segregation of ethnic groups, which inadvertently causes discrimination by limiting the networks and opportunities of certain groups.<sup>5</sup> These and other examples show that structural poverty affects the range of options available to people, and such variations produce predictable rates of events.<sup>6</sup> Oftentimes, we see that the people in lower social classes have fewer choices in solving personal problems.<sup>7</sup>

Structural poverty is built into Robert's life, starting with the fact that he was born into poverty. Robert's father, Skeet, is imprisoned without receiving a fair trial, causing Robert to grow up fatherless. Since Skeet was also a small-time drug hustler, Robert is immersed in a social network and structure inundated with drugs. As the book draws to an end, Hobbs and others seem to realize that Robert did not choose this way of life. Upon hearing the news of Robert's death, Charles Cawley, the benefactor of Robert's Yale education, was

surprised by how unsurprised he was by the news of Rob's passing. . . . He thought of what he had given the boy, not in terms of money but rather in choices, and he wondered how a person as bright and deserving as Rob Peace could have made the choices, beginning on the night of that banquet, that had resulted in this. And he figured that the choices hadn't necessarily begun on that night. Most likely, they'd begun on the night he was born, and not all of them had been his to make.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, Robert Peace is not completely at fault for the turn of events in his life.

Nonetheless, I find this conclusion, as well as the abrupt end of Hobbs' novel, unsettling. Using the structural theory of poverty as an explanation for Robert's life conveys a sense of inevitability: that regardless of Jackie's sacrifices, regardless of his education at Yale, regardless of what happened, Robert would have died in that basement. Such a conclusion does not explain why I continue to feel that the death of Robert Peace is an incredible loss. I am not alone in this sentiment—one glance at the book reviews will show that most readers feel that given his characteristics and opportunities, Robert should

have been an exception to the rule.

To me, this sorrow indicates something that the individual and structural theories cannot capture. Firstly, it acknowledges that Robert had a chance at a better life that was attainable despite the limitations he was born into. It also recognizes that Robert was responsible for his decisions, but he was also the victim of other's decisions. I believe that this sorrow is better explained by examining the relational poverty in Robert's life.

Relational poverty can be defined in many ways, but I will define it as this: a person is relationally poor if his relationship to himself and/or others is detrimental to his mental and emotional wellbeing. As a Christian, I believe that relationships become detrimental because of sin. In Robert's life, he experiences the consequences of sins committed before he was born—from the oppression of African Americans to his own father's involvement with dealing marijuana. The consequences of these sins are many: Robert is estranged from his father, whom he ardently believes was innocent



*Robert and his mother.*

regardless of the many loose and unexplainable ends in the case. He forges friendships with his father's friends, but they betray his sincere trust. He knows that he can go on to graduate school, but he is reluctant to leave his Newark friends, the only family he has. He is resentful of the white man's establishment, yet he cannot see how his own close-mindedness is a barrier to his advancement.

As a result, Robert operates out of the force of anger and desperation. The desperation drives him to succeed in school because, in addition to his natural curiosity, he does not want to disappoint his mother and wants to free his father. The anger causes him to smoke marijuana every day because it helps him forget his anger and stay connected with his Newark roots. Both activities are outlets by which Robert attempts to gain control and define his place in the world. However, in doing so, Robert also faces the ramifications of his own sins—he chooses to spurn the advice of his mother, and he chooses to neglect his academic success to pursue his drug exploits.

Combined with the structural and individual aspects of poverty, we see that Robert's actions are not contradictory but indicators of a defeated spirit. This explains in part why his intellect and hard work could not change the trajectory of his life. He understands the immensity of his pedigree; in fact, he justifies many of his decisions with "I went to Yale; I know what I'm doing." What Robert cannot see is that his actions and thoughts are often motivated by "raw emotion", which makes him susceptible to the same sins time and time again.

Thus, the antidotes to relational poverty go beyond the fixes of individual and structural poverty. Unfortunately, we cannot turn back the clock so that Robert never experiences the loss of his father and all of the subsequent events. Neither can we guarantee that rewriting the past would spare Robert of the hurt inflicted on him and by him. The issue of sin saturates every aspect of poverty, and Robert Peace was both a victim and perpetrator of sin. Therefore, the only way to truly remove the poverty in Robert's life is to remove the sin.

Robert Peace's short and tragic life comes as a shock because many of us assume that poverty can be eradicated with more money, more intellect, more opportunities, and so on. A closer look at Robert's life shows that this is not the case, and this an unnerving realization. Maybe

we need to begin with recognizing that our societal sins are perpetuated by our individual sins. And then we will see that we are all in and part of the poverty that killed Robert Peace. ☹

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<sup>1</sup>E. Philips Davis and Miguel Sanchez-Martinez, "Economic Theories of Poverty," Joseph Rowntree Foundation, June 4, 2015, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/economic-theories-poverty>.

<sup>2</sup>Mark R. Rank, Hong-Sik Yoon, and Thomas A. Hirschl, "American Poverty as a Structural Failing: Evidence and Arguments," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 30 (2003): 4, <http://scholarworks.umich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2936&context=jssw>.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid*, 9-15.

<sup>4</sup>Leonard Beeghly, "Individual and Structural Explanations of Poverty," *Population Research and Policy Review*: Vol. 7, No. 3 (1988): 207, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40229945>.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid*, 214 – For example, people's networks of relationships can determine their work opportunities. Most people find out about jobs informally, through word of mouth, rather than formally from agencies, ads, and other forms of advertisement. Thus, almost everyone relies on their friends, relatives, acquaintances, and extended social networks to find out about jobs. Since different ethnic groups tend to participate in different social networks, segregation solidifies the opportunities available to each group. Without the intent of discrimination, the process of people helping others find jobs causes occupational segregation, income inequality, and poverty.

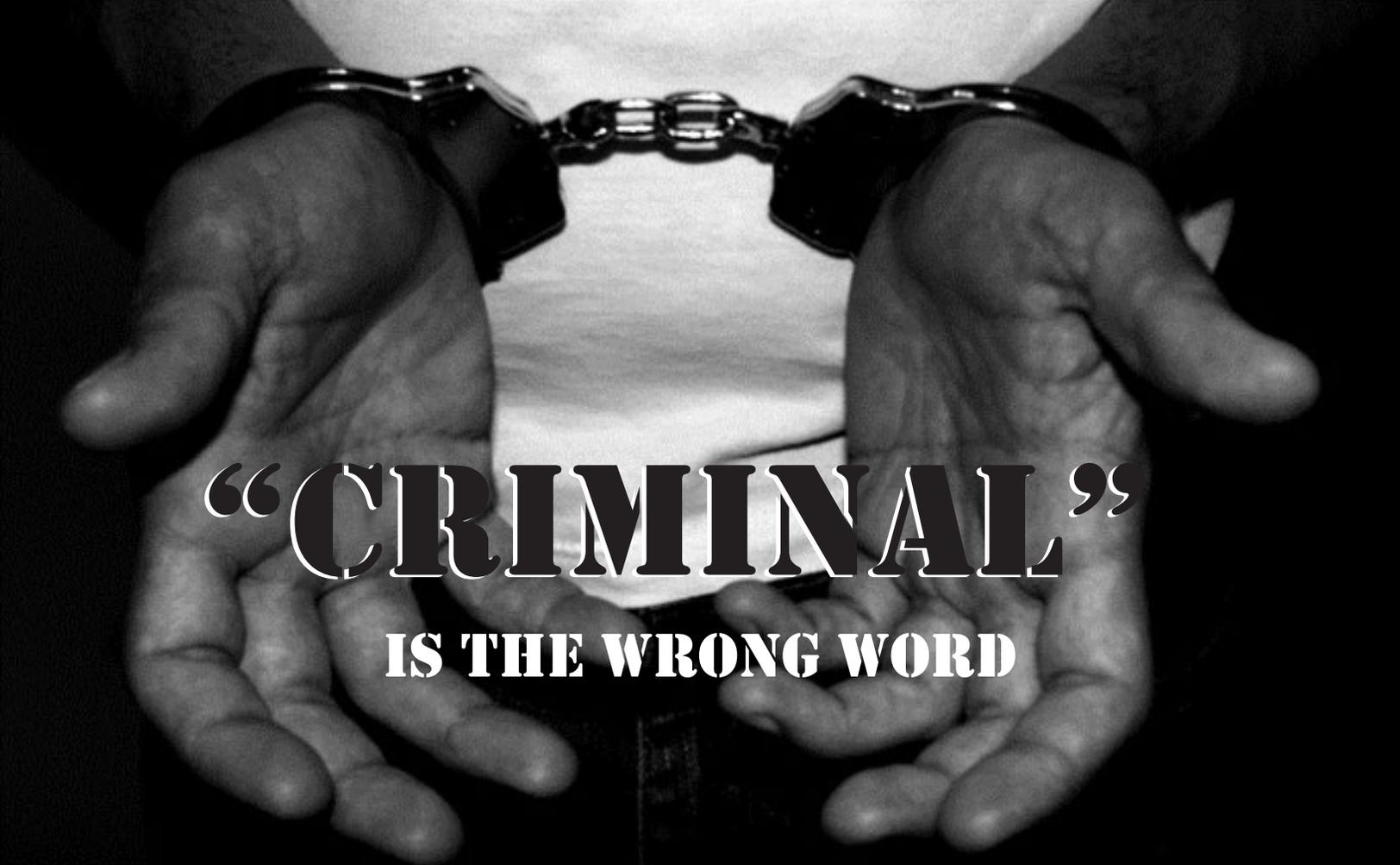
<sup>6</sup>*Ibid*, 205.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>8</sup>Jeff Hobbs, *The Short and Tragic Life of Robert Peace* (New York: Scribner, 2015), 396.



*Author: Esther is a senior in the ILR School. Her intellectual interests include economic development, labor law, and faithful vocation. When she is not (over)thinking, she enjoys going on adventures, trying new recipes, and asking people hard questions.*



# “CRIMINAL”

## IS THE WRONG WORD

By Emani Pollard

Criminal justice reform begins with reforming our language surrounding crime.

More and more people are beginning to realize that there are problems with the modern American prison system. Today, the United States of America represents 5% of the world's population, but 22% of the world's incarcerated population is in an American prison or jail. Black people are eight times more likely to be incarcerated than white people.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, America's modern prison system needs to be reformed, and there are structural and institutionalized inequities that must be addressed.

A third area of inequity can be found in our language. The words we use to describe people inadvertently affect how we treat them. For instance, your opinion and attitude towards “prisoner 24601” is probably different from those towards Jean Val Jean, the prisoner's name. Language is the articulation of our perceptions and beliefs, and by reforming our language we reform the ideas and thoughts that lead to the formation of institutions and structures. In particular, I believe that there needs to be reformation with regards to the way we use the word “criminal” to identify people.

Furthermore, criminal justice reform should be an important issue for Christians because it is an opportunity to show societal outcasts that they are redeemable and that they have intrinsic worth.

Before we think about how language reform can take place, we should try to understand how we arrived at our current state of mass incarceration. In *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander, an associate professor of law at Ohio State University, shows how the war on drugs is one of the main contributors to the phenomenon of mass incarceration.<sup>2</sup> In the 60s, 70s, and 80s, a new narrative emerged that demonized drugs and condemned drug users. Drugs were seen as a deadly threat to communities, and Congress believed that the solution was to enact stricter laws and harsher sentences for those who use and distribute drugs. One result of these policy decisions is that the war on drugs has disproportionately affected persons of color, which continues to be the case. This is due to the pieces of legislation such as the Anti-Drug Abuse Acts of 1986 and 1988, which established

a 100:1 powder to crack cocaine ratio. These laws made it so that a person caught with 5 grams of crack cocaine received the same minimum sentence as a person caught with 500 grams of powder cocaine. At the time these laws were passed the abuse of crack cocaine was increasing. Users of crack cocaine were predominantly located in urban areas, such that this legislation disproportionately affected minorities concentrated in urban areas. Powder cocaine users were less likely to be minorities in urban areas. In 2010 President Obama signed the Fair Sentencing Act, which reduced the powder to crack ratio to 18:1.<sup>3</sup> However, this legislative change did not erase the effects of the war on drugs and the resulting mass incarceration.

Since mass incarceration disproportionately affects blacks and other persons of color, the idea of “criminal” becomes associated with blacks as well. This is shown in Jennifer Eberhart’s study, “Seeing Black: Race, Crime, and Visual Processing.”<sup>4</sup> The study conducted an experiment in which participants were exposed to black faces, white faces, and low-quality images of crime-relevant objects to see who was more likely to be associated with the object. Eberhardt concluded that a bidirectional relationship exists between crime and blackness and blackness and crime.<sup>5</sup> This means that when people think of crime they think of blackness; but it also means that when people think of blackness they think of crime.

This is problematic for obvious reasons; however, I would like to offer a reason perhaps you have not considered. The “Seeing Black” study should be disturbing to us because it attributes an inherent criminality to a people group and the individuals within that group. This breeds division—it causes society to see certain people groups as “others.” I believe this—seeing a people group as an “other”—is the foundation for why it is so easy to be react to crime with stricter sentences.

In considering individual persons, rather than people groups, the results of the “Seeing Black” study are just as sad. It is a mere convenience of the English language to identify someone as “criminal” instead of “a person who has committed a crime.” The adjective, however, subtly transforms our characterization of that person. Implicit in the word “criminal” is an underlying philosophy that dictates that crime is an individual choice deviant from the norm, which is a moral failure that requires a swift, certain, and severe response.<sup>6</sup> It is based on the

underlying assumptions we take for granted that our characterization of a “criminal” is different from that of “a person who has committed a crime.”

Committing a crime does not have the final say for who you are. “Criminals” are certainly not born. Crime is not a predisposed condition. When we label or classify people as criminals, they are seen as deviants who are no longer normal members of a community. This causes us to separate them from society, and this separation moves beyond a jail or prison sentence. To demonstrate this separation, I will give the example of the “black criminal” with some aspects of history and the “Seeing Black” study.

In the Jim Crow era, southern lawmakers passed laws that loosely defined crimes, like grand larceny, which resulted in the arrests of more black people, especially black men. Simultaneously there existed a narrative that black people, mainly black men, were dangerous because they posed a threat to the pure, white southern belle. This narrative, coupled with the illusion of black men committing excessive crime, led people to associate black people with crime, even believing that black people are predisposed to commit crimes. Variations of this belief still exist today. If the silent narrative of our time is that blackness is an indication of crime, this overgeneralization of an entire population is attributing the action of committing a crime to the very essence of persons.

The punishment for a crime is separation from society, and I believe that it should be. It becomes dangerous, however, when that separation becomes semi-permanent through reinforcement. This reinforcement happens in a number of ways. There is the initial separation that happens when a person who has committed a crime is seen as a criminal. This separation, especially when associated with the marker of blackness, can be for life. There is also the separation that hinders “criminals” from reentry into society. For example, the Ban the Box campaign seeks to remove the box from job applications that asks about an individual’s criminal record. The hope of Ban the Box is that a criminal record would not exclude anyone from a fair chance at a job, and that employers would evaluate candidates based on their qualifications, not the mistakes they have made in the past. This is just one example of the collateral consequences of an interaction with the criminal justice system. An interaction with the criminal justice system, such as an arrest,

can make it increasingly difficult for a person to find a job, receive financial aid, receive state benefits (SNAP, TANF, etc.), buy a house with a mortgage, and vote in elections, among other things.

The collateral consequences of committing a crime or serving time in prison are long lasting because we have not truly forgiven or accepted a person's incarceration as penance. Theoretically speaking, committing a crime is punishable, but when the punishment is over, the person should return to society. Our system communicates that even though you may have served time for your mistakes, your sentence was not good enough for forgiveness. We continue to punish crime beyond the walls of prison when we hold a person's actions over their head continually, such that they are reminded of their moral failure every time they are rejected from a loan application, every time a potential employer rejects their job applications, and every election in which they may not vote. By virtue of attributing crime to a person's identity, we are declaring that they are a criminal forever and cannot be changed. It means that when we see a criminal, we always see the threat of crime and the propensity to commit crime. This marks people as an "other," as separate from society and society's norms, forever.

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As a Christian observing mass incarceration and seeing movements for reform emerging, I see an incredible opportunity to communicate God's love to a population of people living in exile. To those incarcerated or living with the collateral consequences of a previous sentence, we have a chance to not only communicate but also actively show to them that they are valued and loved by God. One form of affirming God's love for persons who have committed crimes is advocating for criminal justice reform that addresses the underlying assumption that a "criminal" is a criminal forever. God leaves no

man out of his redemptive plan; neither should we exclude our brothers and sisters though they may have made serious mistakes throughout their lives. The reformation of our language about crime is an important piece of that.

The initial battle for reform is a battle of ideas and thoughts. Much of what makes meaningful reform so difficult is the potent fear of crime and its effects on families and communities. These concerns and fears are legitimate, but they do not excuse overgeneralizing entire people groups or protecting your community at the expense of another. Communities affected by crime are affected by the collateral consequences just as much as the individual suffering. Reforming our language to reflect the truth that a person's identity is not composed of a series of actions is an important first step. No person should be defined by the worst thing that they have done. Defining a person by a series of their actions is lying to them and about them. Thus, the first step to meaningful reform of the modern prison system is to realize that a person has intrinsic value and worth before and after they commit a crime. 

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<sup>1</sup> *Western, Bruce. Punishment and Inequality in America. (Russell Sage Foundation, 2006), 3.*

<sup>2</sup> *Alexander, Michelle. The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness. New Press, 2010.*

<sup>3</sup> *"Report on the Impact of the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010." United States Sentencing Commission. Accessed May 05, 2016.*

<sup>4</sup> *Eberhardt, Jennifer L., Phillip Atiba Goff, Valerie J. Purdie, and Paul G. Davies. "Seeing Black: Race, Crime, and Visual Processing." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 87, no. 6 (2004), 876.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Wilson, James Q. Thinking about Crime. New York, NY: Vintage, 1977.*



*Author: Emani Pollard is a junior in the ILR School at Cornell University. She leads a Cornell Faith and Action (CFA) Bible study and enjoys drinking tea year round.*



# ME, MYSELF, AND ADHD

by Christopher Arce

Hearing the voice of God in times when he seems to be silent

I feel ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) when I am sitting in my comparative politics prelim at three in the afternoon, and the cacophony of pen-clicking, foot-shuffling, coughing, sneezing, and sighing of the 100+ students behind me overwhelms me, distracting me from explaining why I do not agree with Huntington's argument that certain religions are inherently anti-democratic. I feel ADHD as my mind tries to recall statistics about the proportion of women in Indonesia's government, remembering that 17% of the parliament is composed of women, just two percentage points behind Western nations, and I press on. Stressed by the time that is slipping away, I move to finish the last essay with roughly twenty-five minutes left. I feel ADHD when the bad days come around: when my medication sucks the life out of me. I feel ADHD when I am sitting in the Highland Apartments, surrounded by some of my closest friends, and am playing Mario Kart on the GameCube or watching *The Office* yet feeling no joy. I can only sit there. The room

abounds with laughter, full of some of the best people I know, yet I can hardly force a smile, much less muster the enthusiasm to speak. A friend asks me if I am okay. *Not today.*

I have had ADHD since the age of four, and I know that something is wrong with me. I would tell myself: "the doctors don't call it a disorder for nothing." I've read about the experiences of other Christians to understand how they tackled their struggle with ADHD. I only found rosy conclusions: everything is going to be okay in the end. I read verses declaring how God has a plan for our well-being, how loving he is, and how we just need to wait for his will to come to fruition.

Indeed, such Scripture is beautiful and captures the magnificence of God's love. But what does "everything will be okay in the end" mean? What does "okay in the end" look like? What about the journey there? I have had ADHD for fourteen years, and have prayed for my health unceasingly. And *still* I am on medication. I

have not been healed. It is hardly comforting to know that “in the end everything will be okay”, when, for as long as I have known, things have *not* been okay.

And, I don't know if this will ever change. As a Christian, I can take comfort in knowing that in the end, it will be okay because God loves me. Even if the end will be okay, that doesn't mean that I will be healed of my ADHD now. God might not have it in his will for me to be healed of my ADHD, and I am okay, in this sense, with not being okay, because I know that he loves me. Is this hard to believe?

I know the future will be okay because God promises us this in his love, but in the meantime, what can I do as I live with ADHD? I try to count my blessings, find the smallest potential

I was becoming my own worst enemy by further isolating myself: rather than looking to understand God's will, I rejected him, and rejected the possibility that what my will was not necessarily God's will.



sources of joy, and adjust my perspective. The key to my cell is not in my possession, but it still comes around on the many good days. My cell is opened when I'm around the people I love, talking about politics or watching *Cutthroat Kitchen*, when I walk across the Thurston bridge and I am left in awe of the nature around me, when the sun decides to make an appearance in Ithaca, or when I get to eat a burger and an overwhelmingly large order from Five Guys. I get to be free for a while. God provides me with escapes from the difficulty of being on medication and having ADHD; he gives me temporary respites on the days that are particularly hard. I just have to be attuned to them. Being attuned to the good is not always easy, though, especially when it seems like everything is going wrong.

Having the right mindset helps me when I see the bottle of concerta every morning. Having the right mindset helps me when I feel like my mind is being pulled in several directions while I try to write a paper on democratic theory's place in Southeast Asia. Having the right mindset helps me when my medication tires me. But perspective can only do so much. Fear and doubt still find a way to creep in. I can be positive about my ADHD, but that still leaves me with a degree of uncertainty about my health and the future. In this uncertainty, I can truly grasp the centrality of God in my struggle. Regardless of whether we believe in God, we all have our own limitations, but only through God can we find peace in these limitations. I would certainly rather trust God with my medical conditions than anyone else. In trusting God, there is such peace with my ADHD that I do not have to worry about being on medication - ultimately, I might never be off of medication, but that will not define my future.

♫



*Author: Chris is a freshman majoring in Government, a brother of Beta Theta Pi, Cornell Faith and Action, and involved with Student Assembly, the Inter-Fraternity Council, and other humanitarian groups on campus. He loves reading Foreign Policy magazines and spending time with his friends.*



by Gaired E. Jordan

### Finding peace in the midst of troubling uncertainty

Recently, one of my good friends (her name is Jane) received and accepted a job offer. I was thrilled, and I consequently congratulated her. Surprisingly, however, I realized Jane herself was not ecstatic about the job. This was perplexing because the previous day, she was distressed from lack of sleep and mounting coursework. Pessimistically, she was sure she would fail her interview, and “be homeless forever [slight exaggeration].” This juxtaposition (a last semester senior with an assured job, yet still unhappy and unfulfilled) got me thinking about why she showed so little excitement about securing the coveted post-graduation job. Of course, a Cornell education is not particularly amenable to meditating on questions like this, so I quickly forgot about this story as a tidal wave of class work crashed down on my own head. Fortunately, though, during the winter break, I had more time to reflect on this common scenario among college students. In these reflections, I figured out two possible reasons for my friend’s “subpar” response. Even more surprising, upon examining my own heart, I realized that, to a greater or lesser extent, all college students deal with these issues.

The first possible reason is rooted in our past. As students, 75% of our lives have been centered around educational institutions. By the time I graduate college in May, I will have spent 17 out of 21 years of my life in school. First semester,

winter break, second semester, summer break, a continuously repeating cycle for 16 years. It is then no surprise, that so much of our identities are defined by school: what grades we get, what classes we take, what majors we graduate with. Job-hunting then is not just a change of scenery or the beginning of the rest of our lives, as some would coyly put it. Rather, for most seniors, job hunting represents a fundamental break with the identities we hold dear and is consequently tantamount to the birth of an identity crisis. In laying down our old identities forged as students in classrooms, club activities, and sports teams, we seemingly also give up friends, enemies, romantic interests, and social lives. Our food, car maintenance, Wi-Fi; everything was provided by our parents or our academic institutions. Most painful of all, upon graduation all the friends I have made in school will scatter across the globe to their own jobs and fields of interest. Sure, it’s possible a few people will cluster in big cities like NYC or LA, but the friend groups I’ve developed for roughly four years feel like they will slip into thin air. Consequently, graduating and getting a job means finding new friend groups, paying for rent, heater/ac malfunctions, medical bills etc., all without the support of academic institutions and parents. Even as I write this I get a little depressed with what life will look like after graduation because the end of life as I know it quickly approaches. If this strikes you as slightly pessimistic then dear friend, you are



an incredible optimist. These are the challenges graduating seniors around the world will all face, not to mention possible health conditions and difficult family situations. Whether you believe it or not, this will soon be reality.

Continuing from there, the second source of Jane's response stems from a fear of the inherent uncertainty of the future. As people, we know the future is uncertain. We may die tomorrow, our favorite band may break up next week, our institution of higher learning may lose its academic credibility, etc. Although we generally live with this uncertainty, graduating from college adds a new dimension to the unknown that many of us have never felt. Even when we moved away from all of our friends and loved ones as college freshmen, we knew that at least our lives as students would remain essentially the same. However, there is no such post-graduation reference point because now our grades turn into payment and termination; our extensive breaks turn into two weeks per year; tights and sweaters become suits and ties; practices of drunkenness and promiscuity that were praised in college become shameful in the real world. How do we make friends and find romantic interests without fraternities and parties? What do parties with 30+ year olds even look like?

What if I hate my job? How does one become a healthy successful adult? It seems that we are all steadily approaching an abyss of uncertainty. Those of us who are more pessimistic accept job offers with relief yet still withhold celebration because we fear that our "new life" will fail to bring the happiness we were promised.

I hope this resonates with you as much as it does with me, because this is the life I will step into in a few weeks, if I am blessed to receive a job by graduation. If this does grip you, then to some degree, you fear change. You fear change because you can never get a day of the past back and each day of the future is uncertain. The only way I have found to combat such a fear is to find something unchangeable to place your hope, identity, and joy in. This unchangeable object, person, or spirit, must remain constant through all seasons of life, in all weather conditions, in marriage, in having children, and in losing loved ones; it must remain constant. This consistency, I believe, is the Christian God. Throughout all eternity God has faithfully shown his love and care for us. He created man in his image and likeness: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them...And God saw

everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” (Genesis 1:27-31) Then when creation sinned against him he did not destroy creation, but instead went through a multi- millennia process of redeeming and restoring humanity back to him, culminating in Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection: “...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.” (Romans 5:8-9) When Jesus rose to heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that he would come back and complete the redemption of humanity and creation: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” (John 14: 16-18) God loves you, and he cares for you. He never intended for you to go through change alone: “By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.” (Psalm 42:8) He desires to be your anchor so that in the midst of a fading past and unknown future you may have peace and joy: “Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.” (Deuteronomy 31:6) The same God that died and resurrected to save you is the God that will hold you steadfast in love and hope.

But maybe you are skeptical. Maybe you are thinking, “Well, that sounds great, but if I just hold out until I become established in adulthood, I will not need to trust in God, because then my life will be more or less consistent.” To you, I suggest thinking about the ultimate change, death. It is something that is imminent for all created life. We will die, and nothing in our past will prepare us for it. We have no knowledge of what will come afterwards; it is an inescapable despair. But, I will also give you hope. The Christian God tells us that death is not the end. 1 Corinthians 15:55-57 reads, “O death, where is your victor? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” So, when you die and experience the ultimate change on this earth, you can have hope of life with perfect peace, love and fellowship with the God that loves you. Put your trust in the Christian God, because he will be your loving and faithful anchor for all eternity. ☺



*Author: Gaired E. Jordan is a senior environmental engineer who enjoys playing guitar, making rap beats, and long walks on the beach under a starry night. He also enjoys eating scrumptious food.*

You fear change because you can never get a day of the past back and each day of the future is uncertain. The only way I have found to combat such a fear is to find something unchangeable to place your hope, identity, and joy in.



# What the Debate on Religious Freedom Really Means

By Andrew Shi

What religious freedom says about the meaning of liberty.

A florist refuses to provide arrangements for a gay wedding. An adoption agency turns away homosexual couples. A doctor declines to perform an abortion. A small corporation opposes covering contraceptive care for its employees. These are some of the stories that animate the ongoing debate over the meaning and limits of religious freedom. In this paper I categorize criticism of religious freedom into two groups and explore how the debate about religious freedom surfaces competing narratives about the purpose of individual choice. I contend that Christianity presents a positive conception of liberty that views individual choice as empowerment to do good rather than a supreme end in itself.

Most people who raise doubts about religious freedom fall into two groups. The first perceives religious freedom to be backwards and intrusive. It believes that those who cling on to religious freedoms wield a license to exclude and discriminate innocent bystanders who have done nothing wrong—except that they so happen to live in a way that offends religious people. I present two responses to these opinions.

First, religious freedom is not merely an obsolete tradition of the past; it is a right enshrined in the opening line of the 1st Amendment to the Constitution: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the *free exercise thereof*...” The Free



Exercise Clause allows individuals to profess a religion and to publicly practice it. This clause holds important symbolic and institutional value in Court decisions. In *EEOC v. Abercrombie* (2014), the Supreme Court held that it was unconstitutional for the clothing retailer Abercrombie to refuse to hire Samantha Elauf, a Muslim woman who wore a headscarf which violated the employee dress code. Importantly, the Court stated that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 “gives favored treatment to religious practices, rather than demanding that religious practices be treated no worse than other practices.”

This favorable treatment to religious groups is not meant to be discriminatory toward non-religious groups per se. Rather, favorable treatment simply means fair accommodation towards the individual who wishes to freely exercise his or her faith, at minimum expense towards the one making the accommodation. That same year, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of religious freedom for the employer. In *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* (2014), the Court held that it was unconstitutional for Obamacare to force employers to provide their employees with access to contraceptives insofar as doing so would violate the employer’s sincerely held religious belief that life begins at conception. Citing the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the Court stated that freedom of religion entails freedom to exercise religion, to “establish one’s religious (or nonreligious) self-definition in the political, civic, and economic life of our larger community.” The true weight of *Abercrombie* and *Hobby Lobby* lies in the Court’s interpretation that recognizing religious freedom of the individual entails respecting his free exercise of that religious freedom in every aspect of his life. Religious freedom must be able to walk freely in the public square if it is to be religious freedom at all.

Religious freedom must be able to walk freely in the public square if it is to be religious freedom at all.

Second, the argument that religious freedom is a tool used to exclude and discriminate is non-unique to religious freedom. Rather, the criticism belies a deeper animosity towards religion in general and a tendency to label religion as exclusionary and discriminatory. In other words, it presupposes that a religion’s worth is contingent upon how inclusionary it is.

The sentiment that acceptable religion would never exclude beliefs and behaviors is at best misguided. If that were truly the litmus test of the ideal religion, no religion in current practice would pass; in fact, from the assertion that the ideal religion does not make normative (and therefore exclusionary) truth-claims about the world, it must follow that the best “religion” would be no religion at all. But religions do exist, and each offers a unique worldview. Christianity offers quite a narrow worldview: namely, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world, and that the Bible is infallible and the word of God. Because the Bible says that God made marriage between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24) and formed our inward parts in our mother’s womb (Psalm 139: 13), Christians *do* hold an exclusionary view of the nature of marriage and the life of a human fetus. Such a worldview is not a means to condemn others but rather a sacrosanct end in and of itself. This distinction is crucial: Christians are called to love and accept all people, but to discern and not be complicit in certain actions that are contrary to the standards of their faith.

The critics of the first group seem to be the ones leading the assault on religious freedom. To many a staunch “religious freedom” fighter, these are the irreligious who just “don’t understand” or “don’t appreciate” how important it is to be able to practice one’s religion. However, unlike the first group, the second group of critics is sympathetic towards—and even respectful of—religious freedom, but nonetheless believes that religious freedom should not come at the expense of individual choice. I think that more so than the first, the second group presents a formidable challenge to religious freedom in the public square. Its adherents are softer spoken, but they are the ones fueling the ideological battle against religious freedom.

While the second group concedes that religious freedom has strong roots in American history and institutions, it points out that all rights have limits, even the ones we perceive as sacrosanct and categorical. Free speech is a classic example: our right to free speech does not allow us to incite panic by yelling “fire!” in a crowded theater; we cannot spew out hate speech; we cannot distribute child pornography; we cannot defame another person. The basic idea is that our rights are finite insofar as other people may be adversely affected by the exercising of our rights. The “harm principle,” articulated by English philosopher John Stuart Mill, states that individual actions can only be limited for

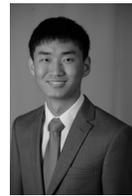
the purpose of preventing harms to other people. This libertarian concept is intuitively appealing because it both recognizes one's rights but also provides the justification to curtail them if and only if they bring unwarranted harm toward others. The second group's view is a careful weighing of rights, a reasonable requirement.

The harm principle of balancing rights with harms is an expression of the libertarian view of liberty. This view is negative: freedom *from* institutions, government, social control, obligations, standards, etc. Not allowing anything or anyone to stop you from doing what you want—that is freedom. Freedom is unhindered individual choice. Everything is permissible so long as it passes the harm principle. In this manner, individual choice is supreme; it is the highest prize and chief end. Individual agency to act and set one's own standards is the epitome of liberty.

By way of contrast, the Christian view of liberty is positive—freedom *to* be and *to* do. Freedom is not about resistance of limits but empowerment within existing borders. The Christian view of freedom is different from self-determining freedom, which is the freedom to do whatever you want. Ironically, the Christian worldview emphasizes positive freedom even as the institution of Christianity as a religion is restrictive. This suggests the notion that it is from restrictions we are empowered to do good. The paradox is simple and yet grand all at once: Christians are constrained by biblical standards on marriage and the sanctity of life, yet it is precisely in those boundaries that they find liberty.

The libertarian notion of negative freedom offers the insight that critics of religious freedom want freedom from a restrictive system of morality. The harm principle is satisfied if no substantial harm results from individual choices. Maximizing choices and minimizing harm, however, do not satisfy religious freedom. It concerns itself with what it truly means to be free.

The conceptions of liberty I discussed in this paper do not end the debate on religious freedom. If anything, they should expose the question to the broader issues underlying both sides of the aisle. I hope that this paper reveals why the issue appears to be so intractable, and why both sides speak from a conviction that rests on little common ground. I urge defenders of religious freedom to focus on the second group of critics I identified in order to grapple with the larger assumptions of negative liberty and the supremacy of choice. As our religious freedom is in the public square, so a winsome understanding of the real debate should be too.



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*Author: Andrew Shi is a junior Government major. He enjoys blogging for the Cornell Daily Sun and leading a Cru community group. He can be reached at [as2589@cornell.edu](mailto:as2589@cornell.edu).*

The paradox is simple and yet grand all at once: Christians are constrained by biblical standards on marriage and the sanctity of life, yet it is precisely in those boundaries that they find liberty.

# WHEN I DIE

Kevin Goh

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Will I see You again?

Better men have  
traversed hills and  
desert dunes,  
risen valleys and  
fire bloomed.

Greater men have  
conquered armies and  
galaxies,  
bested kingdoms and  
parted seas;

Surely I,  
for silver, or praise,  
would stoop so low  
to sin again.

Yet Calvary saw  
my guarantee,  
the best of us  
His promise be:

my weakness,  
Your strength  
makes perfect  
in me.

## 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  
Cornell Faith and Action*

## 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](mailto:cornell.claritas@gmail.com).

## CONTACT US

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