

Spring 2018 | Issue 6

CLARITAS

A Journal of Christian Thought

FEATURING

Sheeple

The Fault in *The Fault in our Stars*

Dignity Among the Dead Men



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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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde once said “There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.” Wilde’s statement may be from the late 1800s, but it accurately captures contemporary attitudes towards literature. As an English major, I have observed how sometimes, my peers and I are less burdened with assessing the validity of a novel’s truth claims but more concerned with whether its narrative is told cleverly and creatively (i.e. its literary mechanics).

Literature has lost its relevance in the cultural zeitgeist as a useful pedagogical tool to instruct individuals how to live their lives rightly. People care less *what* truths are present but rather focus on *how* they are presented; in other words, it does not matter what the moral message of a book is, so long as it is written well. In this vein, the world is closer to the reality that Neil Postman describes in his essay comparing *Brave New World* and *1984*; when all the focus is on style as opposed to substance, “the truth is drowned in a sea of irrelevance.”

At Claritas, we seek to explore how the Christian gospel speaks to all aspects of culture, including literature. The Christian gospel tells the story of good God who created a good world yet one that became corrupted by human sin. We believe that God reconciled sinful humanity to Himself by sending his son Jesus to die and rise again, and that one day God will fully restore the entire world. Recognizing this reality, we chose the theme of book reviews. Rather than focus on stylistic criticism, we examined the moral messages and truth claims of various texts, from comedies to romances, to see how each compared to and engaged with this Gospel message.

In this issue, you will find an eclectic assortment of texts and authors that unexpectedly speak to and complement each other. It is interesting to note that John Green’s depiction of romance in *The Fault in our Stars* and Mary Roach’s exploration of cadaver use in *Stiff* ask similar questions about the permanency of love and death. Or how imagination and wonder in Madeleine L’Engle’s *A Wrinkle in Time* and questions of evil and faith in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* explore how both the evil and good we experience in this world ignite within us a desire for something eternal that is greater than our present circumstances. Moreover, does Tony Stark’s battle with addiction reveal both the frailty of our heroes and the substances we use to self-medicate? These are among the essays in our journal.

As you read each article, reflect on artwork, or recite a poem, we hope that these engagements will spark spiritual conversations and that through the exploration of these stories, you will see how your own narrative is intertwined with God’s narrative. He invites you to be a part of the greatest story ever told.

Yours truly,
Zachary Lee ‘20
Editor-in-Chief



photo by Jeannette Pang

FAITH BEYOND OUR OWN



by Kurlya Yan

Black Panther, The Brothers Karamazov, and Being Brothers (and Sisters) in Christ

T'Challa stands again in the land of his ancestors, the safari on the screen bathed in purple twilight. Approaching him are the Black Panthers of Wakanda's past, and leading them, his father T'Chaka. He beams at his son as he welcomes him home. Home, a place where T'Chaka is recognized for his authority, a place where he can escape complicated and painful reality (so painful that he's bathing out his coma in ice just to prove it). Suddenly, I am the one jolted back to reality by a voice, no doubt belonging to an avid Marvel fan somewhere below me in the theatre: "No, no, no!" As if taking the cue, T'Challa turns his back on his father's open arms, knowing full well that he is returning to a broken reality, where the future of Wakanda lies tenuously in the hands of his cousin Erik. Fueled by the anger and desolation he has felt since childhood when T'Chaka murdered his father, Erik seeks to subvert the racial hierarchy and create a new world order founded on vengeance and violence. T'Challa knows that he alone can stop Eric and atone for his father's sins. It is this self-sacrifice, this willingness to forgo peace and rest by taking on his father's responsibility, that makes him our classic, Webster Dictionary "superhero." T'Challa is innocent, but out of love for his people and for humanity, he makes the decision to wake from his coma to a world that has turned its back on him. Had he chosen otherwise, who knows what disaster would have befallen on not only Wakanda but the world at large?

This example of heroism seems obvious enough. Yet, in this day and age, does it really take standing ovations, a billion dollars at the box office, and a Rotten Tomatoes rating of 97% to fathom self-sacrifice? We easily overlook history's truest example of heroism: humbly bearing the burden of humanity's sins on the cross, taking on the *ultimate* responsibility, Christ in all his perfection redeemed a world that had no other hopes of reconciliation with its Creator¹. By calling followers to repent and likewise take up their own cross, Jesus promised not only salvation but a personal relationship with God, spiritual renewal, and complete transformation, *metanoia* in Greek². Jesus's sacrifice offered greater promise than T'Challa's could have ever offered Wakanda: the ability to stand faultless before the throne of God, despite the condemnation we deserve for our sins. The problem is, this notion of *metanoia* is often lost in the individual narrative, undermining the fact that self-transformation isn't meant to be self-contained. After all, the Apostle Paul called on Christians to bear witness to the Holy Spirit working in them through works, which is the *outward* expression of their faith³. So if our faith, or lack thereof, is not just our own, who else and what else are we responsible for?

Which finally brings me to Dostoevsky and his last novel *The Brothers Karamazov*⁴. In *The Brothers K*, Dostoevsky uses the mysterious murder of a father to thread the emotional,

psychological, and spiritual narratives of the sons. The struggle of pinpointing responsibility for the murder provides the focal point on which the characters develop. “Verily, verily, I say unto you,” Father Zosima quotes John 12:24 (also found in the epigraph) as he is speaking to the protagonist Alyosha Karamazov, “except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”⁵ Zosima, the novel’s closest embodiment of Christ’s pure and unconditional love, speaks from personal experience. We are introduced to him as a monk who freely gives and freely blesses all those who come to him poor in spirit, never devaluating any individual person’s suffering. However, as he imparts his dying wisdom to Alyosha, he reveals that prior to becoming a monk, he had been a restless youth who nearly murdered his opponent only the day after he beat his servant. Zosima’s transformation, *metanoia* if you will, only came through the conviction of his wrongdoing and the resulting act of humbling himself before all men, even to the point where he placed himself *below all men*⁶. This kind of act removes us from the glorified pedestal around which our little galaxies revolve, and places us instead at the footstools of dwarves. It’s an act that can only come out of tremendous love, such as that of God⁷. Even T’Challa could not have returned if he had not loved his people. Zosima’s brother Markel justified this loving humility by defining a Christian’s role in both the Christian and non-Christian community: “Everyone is really responsible to all men for all men and for everything.”⁸

The clearest antithesis of Zosima’s philosophy-in-action is seen through Ivan Karamazov, the second-born Karamazov son whom Dostoevsky provides as the foil to Christ-like Zosima and Alyosha. “Convinced” that neither a God nor a universal morality exist, Ivan still cannot reconcile his nihilistic atheism with the responsibility he feels for his father’s death. Even if Ivan himself was not the murderer, he eventually goes mad from the overwhelming conviction of his ignorance.

We can only hope that we come to terms with the notion of universal responsibility for sin less wretchedly and in a more timely manner than Ivan, who realizes it only after the far-reaching influence of his beliefs make him complicit in

the murder. By preaching hate and spewing a doctrine of moral relativity, he indirectly incites the real murderer to take immoral actions, even if he was not convinced of his own theology himself. His point of redemption and *metanoia* comes when he dismantles his pride and takes the broader perspective: recognizing that humans are just as capable of spurring one another on towards evil as they are towards good deeds.

The problem is, this notion of *metanoia* is often lost in the individual narrative, undermining the fact that self-transformation isn’t meant to be self-contained.

Dostoevsky uses the example of sowing a seed: “You pass by a little child... with ugly words, with

wrathful heart; you may not have noticed the child, but he has seen you... You don’t know it, but you may have sown an evil seed in him...”⁹ Sure, that kid has parents to teach him otherwise. He can read the Bible himself. For all you know, he could just invest in a pair of Beats to drown out your hateful language the next time you pass by. But Ivan, by relegating God and thus morality to man-made constructs, unwittingly provides the legal justification for his own father’s murder. His words, “everything is lawful,”¹⁰ are the seeds he sows into the murderer’s heart, and what terrible seeds! Ultimately, the child’s actions are a responsibility entirely his own; they are a garden he tends to himself while you can go on living in ignorant bliss. You ignore the minute profoundness of your actions, the weeds that could be choking his judgment and relationships, and you are guiltier than T’Challa had he decided to rest with his ancestors. Thankfully, this is not our only choice; God makes provisions so that our influences can be used for good: As Zosima says, “Sometimes even if he has to do it alone, and his conduct seems to be crazy, a man must set an example, and so draw men’s souls out of their solitude, and spur them to some act of brotherly love, that the great idea may not die.”¹¹ The seeds we sow are tiny but profound.



This idea of mutual responsibility is particularly hard to swallow in a society where the self is a hot commodity and individual sin is already convicting enough. And now, you say, you are telling me that I must bear the cross of my brothers and sisters and still trust God that I can remain standing? That I must sacrifice all the toil I put into preserving my self-image, just so that I can become my brothers' keeper¹², an idea that seems downright degrading?

Zosima's answer would be an unrelenting yes. He says, "Above all, do not lie to yourself. A man who lies to himself and listens to his own lie comes to a point where he does not discern any truth either in himself or anywhere around him, and thus falls into disrespect towards himself and others."¹³ To truly pursue humility, one must pursue self-sacrifice as well. We can delude ourselves into thinking that if we do otherwise, the downstream effects will never reach the extremes that Ivan's did, but the stakes are great when you are dealing with human souls.

However, in God's omniscience, there must be some reason, a wholly good and perfect one, for why He calls us to share each other's yokes. Markel supports this: "If they knew it, the world would be a paradise at once."¹⁴ Following that line of thought, recognizing our unification in not just our fallen nature but in our identity as children of God, recognizing that God purposefully created each human narrative to be a part of an inextricably-linked whole, well, it might not be so bad after all. Only once we humble ourselves before our fellow Creation, do we start to "comprehend" the extent of Jesus's humility--descending from his heavenly throne to wash his disciples' feet and cleanse us of our iniquities.¹⁵

Zosima leaves Alyosha with a last bit of wisdom right before he dies: "[Men] have ceased to understand that the true security is to be found in social solidarity rather than in isolated individual effort. But this terrible individualism must inevitably have an end, and all will suddenly understand how unnaturally they are separated from one another."¹⁶ Perhaps no amount of physical exertion can bring two men's minds closer together, but Jesus's selfless love transcends all man-made divisions (Thoreau). Recognizing our roles in our respective communities with Christ as example, we can truly love and encourage each other, lifting each other up to glorify God.

Throughout the Bible, it is clear that all

those who love God, both Christians and non-Christians included, love His provision of community and follow His explicit command to humble themselves before others. After all, God's children are to "love one another: just as I [God] have loved you."¹⁷ It's quite jarring, I will admit, to be this purposeful in our lives, but it testifies to true *metanoia*, in that we transform the way we consider our lives in the greater context of all God's Creation. However, this insane amount of humility, which requires a change of heart and a broader vision of Creation, is very much possible through God's grace and sovereignty. T'Challa was able to save Wakanda after recognizing the role he had to play. How much more then did Jesus do, and how much more will we do, as we seek to be like Him. ☺

¹Isaiah 53:3-6 (ESV)

²2 Corinthians 5:17-18 (ESV)

³James 2:17 (ESV)

⁴Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York City: Random House, 1996), xii

In the spirit of Dostoevsky: "Well, there is the whole foreword. I completely agree that it is needless, but since it has already been written, let it stand.

And now to the matter at hand."

⁵John 12:24 (KJV)

⁶Philippians 2:3-4 (ESV)

⁷John 3:16 (ESV)

⁸*The Brothers Karamazov*, 301

⁹*The Brothers Karamazov*, 335

¹⁰*The Brothers Karamazov*, 69

¹¹*The Brothers Karamazov*, 318

¹²Genesis 4:9 (ESV)

¹³*The Brothers Karamazov*, 42-43

¹⁴*The Brothers Karamazov*, 311

¹⁵John 13:14 (ESV)

¹⁶*The Brothers Karamazov*, 317

¹⁷John 13:34-35 (ESV)



Kurlya is a sophomore "from" Pittsburgh, PA majoring in Biology. Despite living outside of the city, she is always ready to defend Pittsburgh to her misinformed NYC friends (so don't even try). You can find her in PSB unironically taking Buzzfeed quizzes and most definitely not doing her physics HW.

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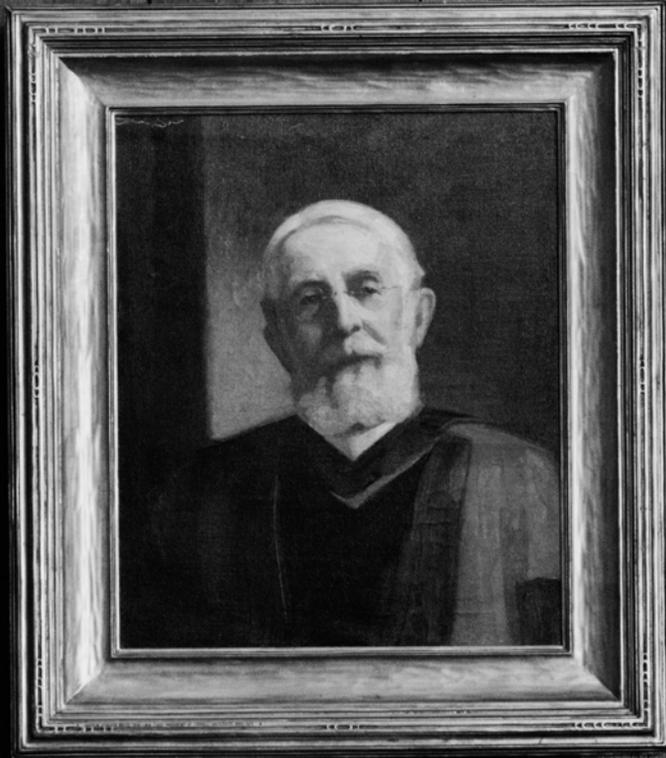


photo by Jeannette Pang



by Abi Bernard

Instant gratification – is it all it's cracked up to be?

If you took AP Literature in high school, Oscar Wilde is probably an easily recognizable name. Many have read a few poems or discussed his sordid life, but few have read his only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. At the time of its publication, *Dorian Gray* was highly controversial, receiving harsh criticism because of its homoerotic undertones and unapologetic references to drug use, debauchery, and unabashed hedonism. It tells the story of Dorian Gray, a captivatingly beautiful young man who charms an entire community with his innocent youth and attractive face. His friend Basil, an accomplished painter, is particularly enraptured by the mystery of Dorian's purity; he devotes himself to making a portrait of Dorian his greatest work, even to Dorian's censure. During the portrait's final sitting, Basil introduces his muse to Lord Henry, an incredibly cynical, worldly, and selfish older gentleman who lectures the young man on what he believes is the chief end of man: beauty and youth. Basil attempts to fend off Lord Henry's poor advice, but as Dorian stares at the unblemished oil paint version of himself, he succumbs to Henry's seductive proposal. He makes the extraordinary promise that he would trade his soul to preserve the beauty of the painting, amusing the older man and shocking the painter.

Dorian's life of hedonism begins with understandable naivete, but it does not take long for his self-gratifying lifestyle to transform and pollute his mind. Every cruel, self-destructive, or lascivious act is quickly cast off with a simple selfish excuse, ridding him of all responsibility and relationships, save the carnal Lord Henry. The once innocent man's vow comes true, and the more he sows vanity, the quicker the portrait reaps his depravity, ultimately morphing into a hideous replication of the real man's darkened soul.

A life of recklessly pursued pleasure may seem alluring – freeing, even – at first glance, but perhaps this desire is not too selfish or grand, but too small.

In some ways, Oscar Wilde's short novel was before its time, painting plainly what a life that ascribes to post-modern society's mantras of "following your joy" and "living your truth" actually looks like. The tragic tale of Dorian Gray begs the questions: Does following your joy actually bring joy? Does creating justifications for any action make it truth? And furthermore,

is there a cost to such a lifestyle? A life of recklessly pursued pleasure may seem alluring – freeing, even – at first glance, but perhaps this desire is not too selfish or grand, but too small. It is evidence that humans need and were *designed* for more than gratification.

Solomon, son of Israel’s King David, lived hundreds of years before the fictional Dorian Gray, yet his life looked very similar. Today, we would say that Solomon was the guy who had it all: good looks, incomprehensible wealth, more women than he could possibly keep track of, and wisdom beyond understanding. He is the author of Ecclesiastes, a book of the Bible grouped in what Christian tradition calls the Books of Poetry. The “Preacher” – Solomon – laments that “there is nothing new under the sun”: the world is a never ending pattern of meaningless realities.¹ One generation comes and dies, being replaced by another; the worker labors, but receives little profit for hard toil; the senses are never satisfied by what they see, hear, or experience; all of nature runs aimlessly in continuous cycles; and anything that seems lasting is quickly forgotten as its allure diminishes. All these things, he says, are “vanity.”

In order to combat his disillusionment, the Preacher attempted to gain satisfaction in knowledge and wisdom, only to find that “he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.”² He then throws himself into sexual and material pleasure, gorging off the spoils of his exorbitant wealth and hundreds of concubines. Whatever his eyes desired he did not withhold from himself, but he then found that this was “grasping for the wind,” meaningless as everything else. Vanity.³ This proved to him that there was a negligible difference between the wise man and the fool – do they not both grow weary? Do they not both feel joy and pain? Do they not both die, forgotten within generations? He spends the rest of the book wrestling with the meaning of the world around him, addressing everything from the prosperity of the wicked and tyrannous, to the meaning of friendship.

Though Solomon did not preserve his youth as Dorian Gray, he too found that selfish hedonism possesses the same despondency as a mundane life. We can see in both of these men aspects of ourselves that we do not wish to acknowledge. Sometimes it is simply craving the days when youth was a ready excuse for ignorance or failure, or wondering why that one thing which used to be your everything no longer elicits any happiness. We are continually searching for

avenues to escape the seemingly meaningless aspects of life, but, more often than not, they are pathetically pale substitutes for what we truly need. For example, by selling his soul to a canvas, Dorian Gray traded the true object of Basil’s affection, Dorian Gray the living and real man, for the shadow – a 2D, hand-drawn, easily flammable, destined-to-fade replica. He missed the intended purpose of his friend’s gesture: *he* was worth treasuring as a work of art, not the painting itself.

Basil comes to apologize to Dorian when he begins to hear rumors of Dorian’s philandering. He asks forgiveness for stoking his vanity and thereby tainting the young man’s innocent youth. But what the painter does not consider is that perhaps he also missed the point. He, enraptured by Dorian’s beauty, attempted to encapsulate it into a personal success, leaving it out in the open so he could daily admire his handiwork. In so doing, he missed an opportunity to be the voice of wisdom in the Dorian’s life, instead leaving him susceptible to the terrible confidence of Lord Henry. Or worse, he missed his chance to enjoy the true Dorian. In this way, he was not far removed from Solomon and Dorian, searching for a way to fill his heart with beauty that was fleeting. Vanity of vanities.

Humans do not find lasting gratification in instant gratification because we were made to be filled, not appeased.

In his letter to the Romans, the author, Apostle Paul, explains that we should not be surprised that humankind’s desires fall short of what their hearts actually need. Humans continually change the glory of “the incorruptible God” into a mere image, like corruptible man.⁴ And yet, despite the fact that we “profess to be wise,” we become like fools, time and again chasing fleeting pleasure only to time and again be bitterly dissatisfied.⁵ After his long journey of failed searching, Solomon asserts that God “has put eternity on our hearts,” which explains both why everything is beautiful in its time and why we do not find lasting satisfaction in merely beautiful things.⁶ Humans do not find lasting gratification in instant gratification because we were made to be filled, not appeased. This realization can easily be perverted into extremes such as gnosticism or asceticism. However, recognizing the inherently fleeting nature of many things in

the world around us does not mean we should not enjoy it. Indeed, Solomon encourages that we “remember” our youth before it is taken from us, before the world grows dim with our heightened awareness of its brokenness. Therefore, it is the heart behind the pleasure, not the pleasure itself, that must be examined.

...finding meaning in the mundaneness of life cannot come from something temporary, otherwise it becomes just as meaningless.

The human heart begs for things which not only have meaning, but also have permanence. If one is without the other, disillusionment and pain is inevitable. Often we try to find meaning in the mundaneness of life from temporary, ultimately meaningless pleasures, whether that be consuming too much food or alcohol; excessive, difficult exercise to take our mind off of our problems; or a casual hookup that leaves us both lacking a meaningful relationship while dehumanizing another. It is no wonder that this simply gratifies and does not satisfy: finding meaning in the mundaneness of life cannot come from something temporary, otherwise it

becomes just as meaningless. Dorian lived a life of lasting, but meaningless pleasure; his soul was constantly being filled, but with destruction, as exhibited by his deformed portrait. Solomon experienced meaningful pleasure, but none of it lasted, leaving him despondent and desperate. Both of these men pursued whatever their hearts desired, and yet found their hearts emptier than when they began.

In the end, the ultimate difference between Dorian Gray and King Solomon was their conclusions to vanity: the former sought to eliminate the “problem” – the portrait, the incessant reminder of his depravity. The latter sought to add the solution: a life founded on true meaning. Solomon looked at every vain thing at which he had recklessly thrown his soul and concluded that if everything under the sun was vanity, then the only thing worthy was to “Fear God and keep his commandments.” “This,” he states, “is man’s all.”⁷ He does not argue that one must spend his or her life huddled in a corner, anxiously awaiting the wrath of God; rather, that he or she lives their lives boldly with a respect for their Creator. She comes before everything she encounters with the firm belief that every good and perfect gift – every opportunity for meaningful, lasting pleasure--comes from above.⁸ And, even when life is mundane, all can find meaning in the One who came not only to



give life, but to give it more abundantly.

Solomon's choice was not the easy one, but a meaningful, incorruptible, and most joy-giving response to a seemingly hopeless life of pleasure-chasing. Our lives are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with tiny, momentarily-gratifying aspects of "our truth" or "our joy"; we will never reach fullness in this way. Why live aimlessly, desperately grasping for vanity when you could be overflowing with abundance? *This* – abundant life – is what we were designed for. The world equates abundance to Solomon and Dorian's lives: money, reckless abandon, and hedonism. This desire is too small. Real abundance is neither temporary nor meaningless; it is in an eternal relationship with Jesus Christ. When we add this true meaning to our lives, seemingly meaningless things become truly pleasurable, as they point us toward ultimate, eternal pleasure. When feelings of meaningfulness and mundaneness come – and they will – it is okay to acknowledge and lament. But this is a confirmation that the Christian life means submitting temporary pleasure for eternal. This is not just pleasure – this is joy. ☺

¹*Ecclesiastes 1*

²*Ecclesiastes 1:18 NKJV*

³*Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 NKJV*

⁴*Romans 1:23 NKJV*

⁵*Romans 1:22 NKJV*

⁶*Ecclesiastes 3:11 NKJV*

⁷*Ecclesiastes 12:13 NKJV*

⁸*James 1:17 NKJV*



Abi Bernard is a junior from Michigan, or, as she prefers to call it, The Great Mitten State. She is always ready to gush over Fruits Basket, Hans Zimmer, and why Haitians make the best rice. If you cannot find her, she's probably taking a nap, or reading her history and government homework in her home away from home, Morrill Hall.

Song of the Lost Sheep

A SESTINA OF PSALM 23

by Sara Gorske

Like a shepherd, he waits
for my skittish hooves to stop
expecting a wrong-skinned predator to leap
out of rippling pastures, wielding jade leaves turned
to blades. The soft-capped cerulean waves part
to reveal my soul's parched longing sated.

Like a shepherd, he sates
my feet's hungry wandering, weighted
with the curse impelling me to depart
from safety even as my chained feet stumble, and stop.
From waylays on well-worn trails, he turns
me onto righteousness's way. On firm soil my gladdened feet leap.

Like a shepherd, he leaps
with rod and staff crossed before me, my satiation
forgotten as the earth's inexorable turn
dips light below the valley horizon, and waiting
darkness stretches a demon's double maw to stop
me, trembling in throes and thoughts of my parting.

Like a shepherd, he parts
the veil cordoning me into a cage, and I leap
through shadows of descending fangs for arms that stop
my many-limbed thoughts from spinning steel bars. Water sates,
but cool oil seeps indelibly into my waiting
fleece, peace warming like shorn wool returned.

Like a shepherd, he turns
me to face the grimace of Janus; my lips part—
the backward gaze waits,
but, held by the forward's failure, cannot leap
to consume me, its greed remaining never-sated
while heart-blood overflows my soul's cup like ruby wine unstopped.

Like a shepherd, he stops,
stoops, to dangle my legs on his shoulders when I turn
back to the fires of Gomorrah, convinced that satiation
might yet lie as a corpse in the smoldering depths, but I part
from thoughts that flee to the smoke as I behold, leaping
as a giddy flock behind its keeper, goodness and mercy waiting

to welcome me to the shepherd's house, where meals ever sate and songs never
stop,
where the pastures ever wait and the waters never turn aside,
where a sheep's chain-crippled legs can ever leap to a shepherd who will never
depart.





Sara Gorske is a sophomore in the College of Engineering majoring in Materials Science and minoring in Art History. When she's not working through endless lines of numbers and Greek letters, she's most likely visiting a fantasy world on a page a few millimeters from her nose.



photo by Jeannette Pang



Losing God amidst an attractive world and a forgetful mind.

By Joshua Hui

*"I'd forgotten."
"What?"
"This."¹*

As Eilis climbed up the cliffs to behold the serene view of the Irish coast, she realized she had forgotten how beautiful her home was. She had forgotten the comforts of living with her mother, the joys of spending time with her best friend, and the charms of having an Irish man next to her. She had been away to America for so long, she had forgotten all this, but now she remembered.

Eilis let the memories of home flood back into her head, not realizing that she was beginning to forget her life in Brooklyn, and her husband Tony awaiting her return.

At first Eilis wanted nothing more than to sail back to America. But she reluctantly agreed stay a little longer to attend her best friend Nancy's wedding. Eilis wanted to tell her about Tony, but decided not to spoil her best friend's happy day. Then, when the kind, vulnerable Jim Farrell asked her to dance with him, she said yes and did not mention Tony to spare Jim from heartbreak. A small compromise to keep everyone happy, she reasoned to herself. She would, in any case, be going back soon.²

But soon, Eilis would find herself so blissfully occupied in Ireland with Jim, that the thought of Brooklyn would come as a jolt in the evening when she noticed the unopened letters from Tony. Suddenly, Brooklyn seemed distant and returning felt terrifying. Suddenly, Tony was a secret Eilis had forgotten, and did not want to remember.

The notion that I might forget the foremost priority of my life is a hard one to believe – at least, when my priorities are set straight. I proclaim Jesus as first in my heart, and after a touching sermon or an extended retreat, when my thoughts revolve squarely around him, he is unequivocally so. To then hear, in my moment of intimacy with God, a plea not to forget him, would elicit my immediate response, "of course I won't." The notion that I might forget him sounds absurd, and the closer I am feeling to God, the more quickly I dismiss his plea.

Yet I, like Eilis, do not realize how forgetful we all are. We do not realize how easily a momentary shift in our attentions can cause our priorities to slip. When the inevitable situation arises where I must take my mind off God for just a moment – to work, to browse YouTube, to have a drink – I think that it is no big deal. When I am finished, Jesus will be right back to where

he is now. Before long, however, this series of small distractions and compromises will have displaced God from where he was days ago, even hours ago.

It makes matters worse that our small compromises are often not sinful – if anything, they might be the right thing to do. Who wouldn't stay home a little longer to see their best friend married, or study wholeheartedly for that crucial exam? But thanks to our forgetfulness, in our diverted attention God quickly slips from the good father from whom we find our strength, to a distant, demanding voice of morality. Then, when we are thrown into temptation – a kiss we should not accept, a video we should not watch, a drink we should not take – in our compromised state the forgotten Jesus is merely a nagging voice in the back of our heads, an annoying guilty conscience easily suppressed.

Thanks to our forgetfulness, by simply making reasonable, rational decisions we may find ourselves, to our astonishment, distant from God.

In our diverted attention God quickly slips from the good father from whom we find our strength, to a distant, demanding voice of morality.

...

“Marry me before you go back,” he said almost under his breath... “if you go, you won't come back.”

“I'm just going for a month, I told you.”

“Marry me before you go back.”

“You don't trust me to come back.”³

When he asked Eilis to marry him before she sailed back to Ireland, Tony sounded – and indeed felt – insecure and afraid. To Eilis his feelings seemed irrational, and his request unwarranted. She was only going back to Ireland for a month to visit her mother, why would he not trust her to come back? Didn't he know she loved him?

Yet Eilis did not foresee that the allure of home would grip her so strongly. It would bring her such felicity through her mother, Nancy, and Jim, that she would forget about Brooklyn and Tony. It would make her hate of the idea of going back. Had Eilis not agreed to marry Tony, perhaps she would never have returned.

How wise it was, in retrospect, for Tony to have asked her to do so.

Consider, then, these eyebrow-raising requests by Jesus that seem, at first glance, unreasonable, untrusting, even heartless: First, to the rich young man: “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”⁴

Then this infamous line: “If anybody comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even their own life – such a person cannot be my disciple.”⁵

Jesus demands nothing short of giving up the world to follow him. That includes the obvious command to stop sinning, but it also includes a command to forego the treasures we have in this world – our money, fame, even family. It is a disconcerting request that begs the question: why must I give up something that is good, that is not sinful but means everything to me, to follow you?

Implicit in my quick dismissal of Jesus' plea not to forget him is a belief that nothing can be more important to me than God. It seems absurd in our moment of intimacy, that money, family or success could ever displace him. Yet just as we fail to realize how forgetful we are, so also we underestimate how attractive the world is. As we walk out of church, we quickly realize that our routines are reliable when God's path is unpredictable. Or, that sex and lust are gratifying when purity is frustrating. Or, that alcohol is freeing when abstinence is boring. We find that the world is incredibly alluring, so much so that we would be willing to trade away Jesus to gain the satisfaction.

The world is, after all, our home. And home offers immediate, predictable comforts that pose a tough challenge to the long, uncertain path to heaven, even for a lifelong Christian like me. The values it has instilled in me through my culture and upbringing are fully capable of pulling me away from God. I am instilled with a desire to be wealthy, for example, because my



family is wealthy and it is nice being rich. I have always overlooked Jesus' warning that "You cannot serve both God and money," believing that money will never challenge the place of God in my heart.⁶ Only very recently, with my future fast approaching, have I realized how strongly I am attracted to wealth, that though I still do not believe it could compromise my faith, it makes sense that I should be careful that it might.

The request for loyalty, to give up everything including home, often appears excessive and untrusting at first. But Tony was wise and God knows all our weaknesses, and their requests are not unreasonable but should be taken seriously. The world is, after all, home. And home is comforting, appealing, alluring.

...

"She has gone back to Brooklyn," her mother would say [to Jim Farrell]...Eilis imagined the years ahead, when these words would come to mean less and less to the man who heard them and would come to mean more and more to herself. She almost smiled at the thought of it,

then closed her eyes and tried to imagine nothing more.⁷

The world is, after all,
our home. And home
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challenge to the long,
uncertain path to
heaven.

Eilis knew, on her way to the ship bound for Brooklyn, the gravity of everything she was leaving behind in Ireland. A mother whom she might never see again. A community with whom she would become distanced. A future with Jim Farrell that she would never be able to have.

She also knew that she would never forget the choice she made. With this decision to return to Brooklyn, Eilis had devoted herself fully to Tony, with no going back. The memory of everything she gave up for him would be her constant reminder

– a solemn reminder at times, perhaps even a regretful one on their worst of days. Yet from this unforgettable sacrifice, Eilis derived a surprising joy and comfort, perhaps because she knew her future was now sealed and secured with Tony.

A paradox exists in Christianity, of salvation

sacrifice. If we need nothing but faith to be saved, why would Jesus demand that we give up the world?

Perhaps it is because we forget God so easily. Because otherwise we would choose the world and sin over and over again, until we don't actually worship him anymore. Because we need a way to stop ourselves from forgetting our allegiance. And God reminds us of him through sacrifice.

Of the Israelites God required sacrifices of money and possessions through the various offerings, of lifestyle through dietary restrictions, of body through circumcision. And now, to Christians, Jesus asks that we give up family, money, and home. Our sacrifice is our reminder that we have decided to follow Jesus, and the larger the sacrifice, the stronger the reminder. The hunger in fasting is an individualized reminder that draws one closer to Jesus for the duration of a fast. The complete surrender of St. Paul to God's call, even to the point of losing his life, is a timeless reminder to millions of the God we love and serve.

As it would be for Eilis, so will our sacrifice be a solemn reminder of our commitment to Christ. Perhaps it will even be a regretful one, in our darkest days when we honestly ask ourselves "why have I chosen Jesus?" But hopefully, even then, we can still find an incredible joy and comfort in the knowledge that, through our sacrifice, our future with Jesus in heaven is a little more secured.

...

"I'd forgotten."

"You'd forgotten! What a thing for –"

"I'd forgotten what this town is like. What were you planning to do, Miss Kelly? Keep me away from Jim? Stop me from going back to America? Perhaps you didn't even know. Perhaps it was enough for you to know that you could ruin me."⁸

I'd forgotten to mention *how* Eilis made the decision to return to Brooklyn, how she remembered where it was she belonged.

She remembered Brooklyn when her future in Ireland suddenly went wrong, when the vile Miss Kelly discovered her marriage to Tony and threatened her with the information. She remembered Tony when her future with Jim was put in jeopardy. In that moment, Eilis chose America, not as a noble and resolute heroine, but rather as an undignified, broken human being.

The truth is that in our compromised state, forgetting God and craving the world, often it is not through our recollection that we remember God, nor through our willpower that we make the sacrificial decision to choose Jesus. Rather, it is through a prospect failed, a relationship collapsed, or a reputation damaged, that we are almost forced to choose God. Sometimes, it takes God turning our world upside down for us to realize, "I'd forgotten."

Then, when I come crawling back to Jesus, I would be grateful that he has not forgotten me.



¹Nick Hornby, *Brooklyn*, Finola Dwyer and Amanda Posey (London: Wildgaze Films Ltd., 2014), 88.

²Colm Tóibín, *Brooklyn* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 274.

³Tóibín, *Brooklyn*, 242.

⁴Luke 18:22 (NIV)

⁵Luke 14:26 (NIV)

⁶Matthew 6:24 (NIV)

⁷Tóibín, *Brooklyn*, 305.

⁸Hornby, *Brooklyn*, 102-103.



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art by Sophia Jeon

In Colorado Springs

By Anne-Sophie Olsen

It was in the clouds I saw the monstrous,
Doubled over mountains, crawling down
The sky as it sat low and waiting, waiting —
Wait for me, oh sprawling majesty.
What is hidden in your terrible splendor?
Veiled within this beauty should be peace —
Souls expectant find their solace here.
Truth instead is what's unveiled — no peace
But yearning battered by a prideful heart.
In the clouds and mountains I found shock.
Humility would have shock yield to awe,
But pride was monstrous majesty, and reigned,
Skulking low and patient in the mountains.



“The law of each is in the mind of its composer; that law makes one man feel this way, another man feel that way. To one the sonata is a world of odour and beauty, to another of soothing only and sweetness. To one, the cloudy rendezvous is a wild dance, with a terror at its heart; to another, a majestic march of heavenly hosts, with Truth in their centre pointing their course, but as yet restraining her voice. The greatest forces lie in the region of the uncomprehended.”

— George MacDonald



Anne-Sophie Olsen is a slightly over-caffeinated sophomore studying English and Philosophy. Some of her favorite writers include Donna Tartt, G. K. Chesterton, P. G. Wodehouse, and Ray Bradbury. She is a native of St. Paul, Minnesota, but does not want to talk with you about Garrison Keillor.



photo by Jeannette Pang



DIGNITY AMONG THE DEAD MEN

Why respect is eternal

By Carley Eschliman

Every Sunday at 9pm EST/8pm CST, I knew that all communication with my best friend Hannah had to cease. Her weekly rhythms were centered around the airing of her favorite show, *The Walking Dead*, and nothing – not even my best attempts to bribe her with freshly baked goods – could prevent her from putting on her pajamas and plopping herself down in front of a television tuned to AMC. Hannah was serious about this show: she had at least three t-shirts (and a wall calendar), took “Which Walker are You” quizzes in lieu of doing homework, and discussed plot nuances on online forums. And, at her worst – or, in her opinion, best – she began calling me “Carl,” solely so that I could remind her of her favorite character from the show. Now entering into its ninth season, *The Walking Dead* continues to bring life to its audiences – and to its characters (even the dead ones). Fans cannot get enough death; week-to-week, the show is the most-watched TV drama and has consistently broken records for cable television. In fact, *The Walking Dead*’s closest competitor – *Game of Thrones* – is surpassed in viewership by a 67% margin.¹

For existing within a culture that is often hesitant to even mention dying, *The Walking Dead* and its morbid, even graphic, depictions of death has done exceptionally well. This success, I’d argue, is due in part to this truth: humans wish to believe that there is life after death. Death cannot really be the end, can it? Answers to this question – if you choose to ask it – are provided by many sources: the media, popular culture, world religions, hushed conversations around the dinner table... the list goes on.

Mary Roach, with her 2003 work *Stiff*, is yet another voice adding to the discourse on life-after-death. However, Roach’s approach differs from most. Throughout all *Stiff*’s three-hundred-odd pages, Roach cuts through the spiritual and often ethereal elements of the afterlife to look solely at the physical ways in which our bodies can “live” after they have died. *Stiff* is a book concerned with telling the stories of cadavers – how they are seen, used, and valued by a diverse population. In each chapter, Roach highlights a new dimension of the world of death, from information on cadavers’ use in everything from cannibalism and crash test “dummies” to cremation alternatives. By the end of the book, Roach has thoroughly convinced even the most committed of skeptics that life after death is possible. However, in Roach’s explicitly physical approach to the afterlife, she fails to fully answer

the question of what happens to us after we die. Focusing only upon what we can see leads Roach to discuss – and then, ultimately judge – cadaver practices based upon their perceived utility. But, utility alone cannot be the sole measure of analysis. This is a truth that cannot be achieved through Roach’s line of reasoning. Alternatively, by viewing humans – and cadavers – through a Christian lens, a framework for judging cadaver practices can be found, one that combines both respect and intention.

Most of Roach’s arguments for cadaver usage rely on the practices’ function: Are cadavers being used optimally? In a way that progresses science or the world as a whole? If the use is able to satisfy these questions, Roach lauds the practice. And, for good reason; utility is and has been the backbone for cadaver practices from the days of “body snatchers” to the present. In her chapter on organ donation, Roach describes the organ retrieval of a recently deceased patient. Under the blade of a skilled surgeon, enough viable portions of the patient were acquired to end the wait of three people on organ transplant lists. This patient, unbeknownst to her, was able to enhance the lives of multiple long-suffering individuals.² Roach also discusses the implications of cadaver use in medical school gross anatomy labs.

While many schools have shifted away from using actual cadavers – they rely on models, advanced tech, and surgery observation – schools that still have cadaver labs do valuable work in the field of medicine. Students who are able to learn on a human body are, according to medical professionals interviewed by Roach, better equipped to handle live bodies once in a professional setting.³ She also leaves the medical sphere with a chapter on the use of cadavers in ballistics testing. The wear and tear that these cadavers endure aids in the construction of better safety restraints, air bags, and impact absorbing designs. While formal car crash testing uses mannequins, cadavers must first be used to determine the amount of force needed to break ribs or a limb in a particularly gnarly accident. With every broken bone, cadavers are adding to the wealth of anatomical knowledge and helping manufacturers create truly safe equipment.⁴

However, utility cannot provide the sole heuristic for judging cadaver practices. By taking a solely functional approach to her topic, Roach has no option but to look for the utilitarian goodness of even the most inhumane practices she presents. In her chapter on cannibalism, after taking

Death
cannot
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can it?



some time to delve into the history and culture behind the practice, Roach spins this barbaric practice into a useful way in which the East practices medicine. In her argument, she posits that because human parts were being used to heal – albeit with varying levels of success – the practice of cannibalism served an important function.⁵ The consumption of human remains, in her opinion, was permissible merely because it was reinforced by cultural standards and was believed to serve a physical and measurable purpose. However, most people would not agree with Roach’s argument. Cannibalism is one of the ugliest dimensions of human society – something that humans are driven

And yet, when a cadaver's utility is separated from a person's right to respect, actions such as cannibalism can be defended as decent, even acceptable.

to when without any hope of survival (think of the infamous Donner party). And yet, when a cadaver’s utility is separated from a person’s right to respect, actions such as cannibalism can be defended as decent, even acceptable.

As a result of this flawed logic, another ground for judgement must be added: respect. A gross lack of respect for human remains in the case of cannibalism leads most to vehemently oppose the practice. However, in the first three practices discussed—organ donation, medical school cadaver labs, and ballistics testing— respect is coupled with their particular uses. Various manifestations of respect are highlighted again and again throughout *Stiff*, although not formally recognized by Roach as an integral portion of cadaver use. The first element of respect discussed by Roach is anonymity. Cadavers’ faces are usually covered to respect

their identity – in the case of the organ donation and cadaver labs, a simple sheet covers the head; in the ballistics lab, the cadaver is outfitted with a simple cotton hood.⁶ Names are changed or even converted to impersonal numbers to protect the cadavers. Secondly, each of these practices are also enforced by extensive legal frameworks. The law recognizes the significance of donating a body to science – a significance that is lost without the inclusion of respect – and offers several opportunities for surviving family members to opt out of body donation. Finally, Roach discusses in detail the generally respectful manner that professionals employ in the presence of cadavers. In one of Roach’s interviews with a medical student, the young woman – mid-scalpel incision – confesses that “[cadaver’s] hands are hard... because you’re holding this disconnected hand and it’s holding you back.”⁷ Medical students’ surreal, often-difficult, interactions with cadavers are not without psychological ramifications. To recognize the importance of each donated cadaver, the University of California, San Francisco Medical School holds a memorial service at the end of each anatomy lab year. These services are voluntarily attended and include everything from musical tributes to original poetry recitations.⁸ In addition to the memorial ceremony, UCSF also requires a pre-course workshop on how to handle cadavers respectfully. There are already underlying and extensive elements of respect

that couple with utility in organ donation, medical school labs, and ballistics testing. But, why? What

about cadavers demands such respect? Christianity provides an answer. A central belief in the Christian tradition is that humans are important. In the creation story provided by Genesis, the first book of the Christian Bible, it is written: “Let us [the Triune God] make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”⁹ While many truths are brought to light by this verse, two in particular closely relate to the treatment of cadavers. Firstly, God made humans in His image, the *Imago Dei* (translated as Image of God). And, due to having this unique status as image bearer, humankind has been tasked with the role of stewardship; in brief, we are to curate and rule over the world in which we have been placed. In the Christian tradition, humans are

not randomly created nor are they equivalent to other species; mankind and mankind alone has been made as a formal, visible, and understandable representation of who God is and what He is really like. The Imago Dei, while not explicitly stated by Roach at any point in her work, cannot be separated from any of the cadaver practices she discusses. Seeing bodies as more than just another dead thing is such an inherently obvious element of death that a practice without components of respect and reverence is seen as barbaric. However, more than just the Christian belief of the Imago Dei is apparent in *Stiff*. Another central Christian belief is that death is not the end. In 1 Corinthians, a book in the New Testament of the Christian Bible, the following is proclaimed:

“Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength.”¹⁰

Although death may make one’s body weak – or in the case of Roach’s chapter on decay, covered with maggots – Christians believe that death does not have the last say. The Christian faith boldly states that believers can look forward to “a resurrection like [Jesus Christ’s]”; that is, a physical continuation of our bodies even after we die.¹¹ Yes, our physical bodies left on Earth may rot, but we are equipped with new, tangible, physical bodies after death. Christians believe that there is tremendous value in the physical; our ability to tangibly experience the world is not merely a symptom of our time on earth but rather a divinely mandated portion of our existence. While this Christian belief was, again, not explicitly stated in Roach’s work, the very idea of the continuation of the physical provided by Christianity is what allows her to even write her work. Inherently, we can sense that death is not the end physically. For Christians, we can rejoice in the physical fullness promised for us; for Roach, she can rejoice in what goodness is being provided by cadaver practices on Earth. These two beliefs – that humans bear the Imago Dei and that death is not the end – are intimately connected with mortuary science: humans are unique and valued, and this value does not end with death.

While still a unique and innovative approach to life after death, Roach’s *Stiff* makes a major

error by approaching only the physical aspects of death. Concerning oneself with the tangible alone leads to an unhealthy, destructive view of dead bodies’ function. If other aspects of death are not also contended with – the aspects that

And, due to having this unique status as image bearer, humankind has been tasked with the role of stewardship; in brief, we are to curate and rule over the world in which we have been placed.

are intangible – utility is seen as the chief end, and all other factors are ignored. However, we see again and again that function is not the sole heuristic by which humanity judges acceptable cadaver uses. A concern for human respect/dignity both before and after death permeates humanity’s consideration of the body. Through the application of a Christian framework which emphasizes the importance of this human respect/dignity, we can see a meaning larger than just the physical behind the question of “What happens to us when we die?”¹²

¹Rick Porter, “Here’s Just How Huge ‘The Walking Dead’ Has Been in the Ratings,” *Zap2it*, 21 March 2018, <<http://tbythenumbers.zap2it.com/more-tv-news/heres-just-how-huge-the-walking-dead-has-been-in-the-ratings/>>.

²Mary Roach, *Stiff: the curious lives of human cadavers*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 23.

³Roach, 43.

⁴Roach, 45.

⁵Roach, 72.

⁶Roach, 12, 18, 51.

⁷Roach, 25.

⁸Roach, 37.

⁹Gen 1:26 (NIV)

¹⁰1 Corinthians 15:42-43 (NLT)

¹¹Romans 6:5 (NIV)



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photo by Jeannette Pang



by Phoebe Lee

There can't be a perfect love, right?

The New York Times wrote that John Green in *The Fault in Our Stars* “shows us true love,”¹ and it is easy to see why. The novel’s protagonist, Hazel Grace Lancaster, fights cancer alone, feeling that no one — not even her parents — truly understands her. But then, she meets Augustus Waters, a lively cancer survivor who constantly goes out of his way to stay by her side. Throughout the novel, John Green showcases a common conception of “true love” in the characters’ passionate words shared through ups and downs.

This idea of love appeals to readers because people want to be understood by someone who accepts all their good and bad characteristics. In relationships, people feel understood when another person can easily comprehend or even mirror the way they think. When someone knows and does what makes us feel empowered and happier, even if it requires sacrifice, we are more comfortable in revealing our vulnerabilities.

This idea of love appeals to readers because people want to be understood by someone who accepts all their good and bad characteristics.

At first, it seems that Hazel and Augustus find exactly that. Their deep connection is shown in three ways: they are comfortable talking to each other about everything, accept each other despite imperfections or unfortunate circumstances, and make sacrifices for one another.

Whatever the subject, conversations between Hazel and Augustus seem completely natural. At one moment, Hazel will tell Augustus that she feels like a grenade because of how her death will devastate her parents, and in another moment, the two will joke about Augustus’ terrible driving. Around Augustus, Hazel does not worry about rejection because he listens to and embraces what she says. Because of Augustus’ understanding, Hazel knows she can be, and therefore is, completely honest with him about her worries, dreams, and anything else that crosses her mind.

Additionally, even though Hazel has stage 4 cancer, Augustus does not abandon her. She may not be the perfect or healthy “ideal” partner for most people, but he pursues her anyway, knowing that her condition will make their lives more difficult. Throughout the novel, Augustus makes it clear that he views her illness as just one part of her, the person he loves. Similarly, when Augustus reveals that his cancer has relapsed, Hazel does not break up with him. Instead of being mad that Augustus did not tell

her sooner, she insists that she will stay with him until his impending death.

Augustus also seems willing to do anything for Hazel. He reads her favorite novel to relate to her, waits outside the ICU for several days when she is admitted, and physically meets with her when she is suffering from a breakdown. Also, Augustus uses his “wish,” an opportunity for child cancer patients to get one experience they want, to make Hazel happy. Because her favorite novel ends in the middle of the sentence, one of her dreams is to go to Amsterdam to meet the author. However, she cannot afford to go, so Augustus decides to “wish” for a trip to Amsterdam and takes Hazel with him. There, she is able to meet the reclusive author to find the ending and spend time with Augustus as well.

Though the openness, acceptance, and sacrifices in their relationship may look perfect, when we dig deeper into their relationship, human imperfections come to the surface.

Despite the trust that Hazel developed with Augustus and that he should have returned, Augustus was not fully honest. When his cancer relapsed, Augustus knew that he would die sooner than Hazel, yet he feigned total recovery and health. Fearing that Hazel would leave him

if she knew the full truth, Augustus waited to reveal his condition only after they were in a relationship. He “trapped” her in love, thought she knew him only partially but thought she knew him fully. Augustus asked Hazel to be completely vulnerable and honest, but he did not do the same, though he pretended to. Throughout most of their relationship, his lack of complete honesty shows his human shortcoming.

Augustus was also led by selfish reasons to love Hazel. Though his actions were definitely generous and considerate, they were driven by his desire and his own gain: to find someone who understands him and makes him feel important. By “confiding” in Hazel as a close friend and partner, Augustus found someone to listen to him and to help him in difficult circumstances. Meanwhile, Augustus also gained self-value through his role as Hazel’s confidante. Augustus acted seemingly selfless toward Hazel because he did not want to lose self-verification or the boost to his perception.

In fact, even Augustus’ “wish” sacrifice was not truly selfless. By going to Amsterdam together, Augustus ultimately gained more time with Hazel. He knew he was not “killing” his wish by using it on Hazel, but instead was taking a chance to live it with her. Even more than meeting her favorite author, Hazel wished to be



with Augustus for as long as she lived. In their relationship, it was thought that she would die before him because of her condition, but he ended up passing away first, leaving her with the pain of his death and the memories of their relationship. Although she wished to spend all her time with him, he was unable to fulfill this wish for her.

Though *The Fault in Our Stars* is filled with likeable characters and an engaging romance, it is also teeming with selfishness and exploitation that is inherent in all human beings. After knowing this, it becomes difficult to enjoy the boy-meets-girl love story about mutual understanding as a reliable representation of love. Instead, it leads us to think about the *real* meaning of love. Is there true love? What is it? And, if no longer this novel, what can be considered the greatest love story?

Though it is not classified as a romance, my answer is the Bible. Like those shown in *The Fault in Our Stars*, human imperfections are also revealed throughout the Bible. However, the Bible does not just leave them there but it adds a message of encouragement. The Bible shows us that even though we are imperfect as individual humans and our shortcomings are evident from the way we love others, God's love for us is greater because it makes up for where we lack. God's love for us is better because the Bible shows us over and over again that He completely understands us, even in our flaws, and loves us anyway.

The difference between God's love towards us and Augustus' love towards Hazel is that Augustus uses his to "trap" her in the relationship. He tries to get her to love him first so that she is less likely to leave him after she finds out about his relapse. However, there is no entrapment with God. Once we realize that He really loves us, we "will know the truth, and the truth will set you free," as stated in John 8:32.² Unlike Augustus' chaining love, God's love solely sets us free.

In addition, since God already knows everything about us, we can be completely honest with him through prayer. It may seem scary that someone knows us better than we know ourselves and it may lead us to want to hide from Him, but the truth is that by doing so, we create a burden on ourselves. If someone completely understands us, why do we need to hide? Why would we *want* to hide? When we know that He loves us *and* completely understands us for who we are, we do not need to find that acceptance in a person

anymore. Instead of trying to find someone to complete us, knowing who God is and how He understands makes us feel most complete. His love is not something that is burdensome but something that is uplifting.

Augustus loved Hazel because he wanted her to love him back, but that is not why God loved us.

Additionally, God's love for us is more selfless than Augustus' love for Hazel. Augustus loved Hazel because he wanted her to love him back, but that is not why God loved us. Rather, He loved us first and always loves us, even if we hurt him. Matthew 18:12 (ESV)³ states: "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?" The verse shows us that even when we leave God behind by not accepting Him for who He is, He continues to pursue us.

Augustus, on the other hand, loved Hazel because she was the best person he could love, given their mutual understanding of one another. In a way, he knew that it would not be difficult to form a relationship with her. However, God is different because He does not go for the people that are going to hurt Him the least; He strives for the people who hurt Him the most. Even when people may keep rejecting Him over and over again, God is persistent in running after us.

For example, in the book of Hosea,⁴ God was ready to bring about destruction and judgment on Israel for their sins; God knew about their wickedness and was prepared to destroy them because their actions, such as murder, villainy, and faithlessness, hurt Him multiple times. However, He chose not to, declaring "I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath" in Hosea 11:9 (ESV). Here, we see that even though we were difficult to love and deliberately hurt Him, God purposely chose to continue loving us.

To the average reader, what Augustus did for Hazel might be grand. After all, he gave up his one "wish" so that she would be happy, even if it was not for the purest of reasons. However, as great as his sacrifice may have been, God made

an even greater — if not the greatest — sacrifice because He loved us, people who should have died, by giving up Jesus to die (John 3:16).

While Augustus died by the end of *The Fault in Our Stars* and left Hazel behind, Jesus conquered death in the Bible. God is stronger than death, shown through Jesus' resurrection. God's love for us is more fulfilling because He sends Jesus to be with us even until today. Even after his death and resurrection, Jesus is "with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20, ESV).⁵

Human love is not completely evil or malicious but it can be a beautiful, precious gift.

Human love is not completely evil or malicious but it can be a beautiful, precious gift. But once we know about God's love for us, how could anything else be our ideal? By pursuing a relationship with God first to even know what perfect love really is, we can improve our earthly relationships. We should not neglect the relationships we have with our friends or family because God gave them to us as a gift, but in them, we should always remember His love for

us and reflect that love onto others. Our ability to love each other might die when we die, but God's love for us is both real right now and forevermore. 

¹Standiford, Natalie. "The Tenacity of Hope." *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, 13 Jan. 2012, www.nytimes.com/2012/01/15/books/review/the-tenacity-of-hope.html.

²John 8:32 (ESV)

³Matthew 18:12 (ESV)

⁴Hosea 4-11 (ESV)

⁵Matthew 28:20 (ESV)



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SAINT JOHN ALONGSIDE GENESIS

by John Nystrom

Cool and diluvial, the darkness surged
And from the primordial void emerged
A fullness, formless, fraught with meaning
But features lost to view.

Titanic melodies launched and rang
And through the pregnant thickness brang
A host of massed realities wand'ring
Pond'ring something new.

Then a bursting brilliant action
And explosion of intricate abstraction
Pierced the nameless, numinous night
Demanding to be heard.

No melody sweet, suggestive, soaring,
Compared to this, the rising, roaring
Glory and articulation
Of the spoken word.

The darkness sundered as by lightning,
Splendor thundered, growing, heightening,
Defining truth and letting reason
Loose to have its say

In order that the fullness hidden
Might be drawn out, brought out, bidden
To be perceived and seen and savored
In the light of day. ☩

Genesis 1:1-3

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God



John grew up in Northwest Arkansas, is currently a senior studying Animal Science, and will be attending Cornell's College of Veterinary Medicine in the fall. His favorite pastimes include talking about goats, drinking tea, writing poetry, and napping in public places on campus.



photo by Jeannette Pang



THE GREAT UNSEEN

Faith meets imagination in *A Wrinkle in Time*.

By Abigail Bezruczyk

I can't help but feel like a fifth grader as I title my page "*A Wrinkle in Time*." After all, the Time Quintet is for children, right? While my choice for this book, and the other children's literature I've read recently, has sprung out of the familiarity of a childhood favorite, I've really come to appreciate the story with fresh eyes. I wanted something absorbing, fast, adventurous, and meaningful. L'Engle provides that for all ages.

Whether you've read it as a child, a young adult, or have seen the new movie, you must be awed

by L'Engle's imagination, grounded in the real world. She tells a captivating story of a misfit girl set on a quest to save her father, and later brother. There is tenderness, there is fear, there is hope: compellingly familiar things all within an admittedly weird universe.

I think the weirdness of the story hit me the most as a kid, as much as I enjoyed reading it. A giant brain? What's a medium? Why does Charles Wallace have super powers? On this re-read, however, perhaps 10 years later and a little wiser, I could see more deeply into the tale.

Fantasy has a particular power to stretch our imaginations, to help us visualize worlds unseen. And like all stories, children's fantasy can help the reader see the real world with new eyes. L'Engle's story does this by infusing fantasy with Christianity, helping us to understand Christian truths, even if the recently released movie glosses over this foundation. Her fantasy story can also aid faith by helping us to exercise our imaginations, as we can use our imaginations to contemplate the truths and stories in the Bible.

Both L'Engle's work and the Bible are based in stories, but using the term "stories" doesn't imply falsehood. An obvious but important distinction must be made: some stories are true, and some are fictional. The Bible tells true stories and historical events, no matter how fantastic they may seem, whereas *A Wrinkle in Time* tells fictional stories and events. But even the fictional events have elements of truth that connect the story to the real world. Take the basic message of a story: the morals and values are not invented by the author, but instead draw on values that we can identify in the real world. It is these connections that make the wildest fantasies relatable, and it is from these elements that we can learn.

Storytelling is an important device in the Bible: every chapter from the creation story to Jesus' resurrection and beyond, to parables, to the arc of the Bible in general, is told by story. This is good news for us: stories are easy to remember, to relate to, to be a part of. Imagine for a moment that the Bible were written in the format of your chemistry textbook. Each page of facts, figures, and lists of rules would still be important, but remote. Instead, the Bible presents a living story.

Any story, whether true or false, fictional or otherwise, requires imagination. Imagination is not just visualizing the make-believe worlds of

your childhood or conjuring up images of Mrs. Whatsit, Who, and Which. Imagination happens when you think about anything that isn't directly in front of you. You imagine how you slipped on ice last winter, you imagine how your meeting will go tomorrow. You can imagine the atom, you can imagine the ancient Egyptians. It can be things that really did happen or will happen. Imagination is limitless, and more importantly, it is not confined to fantastical, made-up events: it can illuminate everything.

Imagination then plays a role in true stories, because imagination aids in visualization. We can't even imagine not having the power to imagine and visualize (go ahead, try it). Without our ability to visualize the apple or the cross, there is no story, no meaning, only words in an old book. How much richer are Bible stories with our ability to visualize the events that happen in them!

For some, it may be tempting to separate *A Wrinkle in Time* from its Christian foundations. It is, after all, an enjoyable piece of science fiction. But there is something of more meaning behind that, that shines through L'Engle's imaginative universe, that hinges on the truths of Christianity. The whole story is a quest to fight the encroaching evil darkness, following the example of Jesus. In the novel, Jesus is acknowledged as one who fought the darkness, with the phrase, "the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not," appearing both in the Bible and the novel.¹² Note the image that comes to life in these words, the hope that is given, because we can picture from the novel that the darkness will not win. The same metaphor of light and darkness is used repeatedly in the Bible. As the characters also find their purpose in this fight against darkness, they follow the one who defeated darkness, and take us, the readers, along on that journey. This is the power that *A Wrinkle in Time* can give to how we imagine the Bible and the real world, and an immense depth is lost when it is separated from the Christian story.

These stories can develop our imaginations. And if the stories have Christian roots, this developed imagination can help us to understand the truths of the Bible more fully. Children's fantasy such as *The Narnia Series* and the *Time Quintet* all have clear, powerful, and refreshing

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messages. They present creative interpretations of a world beyond our own. For any age, they can fill us with a proper sense of wonder long after we've grown up, allowing us to become like a child seeing the ocean for the first time—a realization that there is so much more to the world than what we've already seen. And these Christian-inspired stories, while not biblically allegorical, create a universe in which biblical-style miracles happen.

Imagination in fictional stories can enhance how we visualize the Bible. But more than that, faith can be enriched by the power of visualization that comes from this imagination. Faith requires us to trust in the unseen, to imagine events that took place hundreds of years ago, to imagine a new world. In one scene in the novel,

Meg talks to Aunt Beast, an alien of a species that has no eyes. They discuss how they perceive the world differently, and Aunt Beast of course relies entirely on senses other than vision. In talking about their differences in perception, Aunt Beast says, "Good helps us, the stars help us, perhaps what you would call light helps us, love helps us... We look not at the things which are what you would call seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal. But the things





which are not seen are eternal.”³ This is almost a direct translation of 2 Corinthians 4:18 (KJV).⁴

Faith is connected to what we do not see; it requires imagination. One doesn’t have faith that it’s raining, one knows by experiencing it. In contrast, “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”⁵ Faith is trusting what is said, even when our visual-loving, logical minds might disagree.

How do we love an invisible God, or keep our minds on eternal things, have faith, when it is so much easier to focus on what is right before our eyes? L’Engle understands that it’s difficult to understand the unseen. It’s impossible for the logical, intellectual mind to comprehend.

C.S Lewis was familiar with this conflict between faith and reason, explaining, “Such, then, was the state of my imaginative life; over against it stood the life of my intellect. The two hemispheres of my mind were in the sharpest contrast. On the one side a many-islanded sea of poetry and myth; on the other a glib and shallow ‘rationalism.’ Nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless.”⁶

Like Lewis, we may often be conflicted between the intellectual and imaginative. I must be

honest; I don’t understand Christ’s miracles. I want to rationalize them with my scientific mind, or rely on my eyes, like Thomas who didn’t believe the resurrection until he saw Jesus and his wounds.⁷ Our rational minds are gifts, but they can’t do it all. Jesus doesn’t say “If you think about this long enough and figure out how everything makes sense, then you may follow me,” Instead he says, “have faith.”

And these Christian-inspired stories, while not biblically allegorical, create a universe in which biblical-style miracles happen.

Lewis also once wrote, “Reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning.”⁸ This adds another dimension to our understanding of imagination: it provides meaning that complements our rational reasoning, instead of conflicting with it. In this way, the meaning that we get from imagination works with the reasoning and logic within the story. The two combine to form our understanding of stories and the world around us.

The beauty of the unseen eternal world is that there is so much we don’t know and cannot comprehend. We cannot wrap our heads around it, we cannot rationalize, we can only imagine. And this is where our imagination has been trained, by works of fiction, to encounter truth well. The joy for the Christian is that she can imagine, with faith, a world where they will one day be with the ultimate imaginer, God.

faith can be a difficult concept to grasp. How can anyone write about something they don't fully understand? But Lewis and L'Engle have the right idea: they take inspiration from the truth, not seeking to confine it or rationalize it, but create worlds that have windows to it. Their use of storytelling brings the reader into a new world, and then releases them back to reality with new ways of imagining the unseen. They don't argue for faith; they guide the reader through an imagined world where faith is integral. When the reader closes the cover and returns to reality, and to the true stories of the Bible, to the question of faith, the unseen world seems a little closer. 

¹Madeleine L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*, (New York: Square Fish, 2007), pg 100.

²John 1:5 (KJV)

³Madeleine L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*, (New York: Square Fish, 2007), pg 205.

⁴2 Corinthians 4:18 (KJV)

⁵Hebrews 11:1 (KJV)

⁶C.S.Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, (San Francisco, HarperOne, 2017), pg 207

⁷John 20:24-29 (KJV)

⁸C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (San Francisco, HarperOne, 2015)



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photo by Jeannette Pang



Bondage in a Bottle

By Brandon Daniels

When the mettle of mankind gives way, what is the answer to our faulty foundations?

Imagine you are trekking through the Middle East and along some dusty, timeworn road, you and your party are viciously ambushed by a militant terrorist cell. In the ensuing chaos, only you survive. Unfortunately, this means you alone are apprehended by the enemy. Injuries sustained in the ambush leave you with little chance of long life apart from modern medicine, and there is no hope of rescue. Your captors, apathetic to your wounds but aware of your prowess, demand you use what time you have left to enhance their technology, and leave you to the task, alone, “in a cave with a box of scraps.”¹

What do you—a proficient person in a formidable dilemma—do? For Tony Stark, the answer was, as would be for most, to conquer this quagmire—to escape. In Tony’s case, this meant building a suit of robotic armor and blasting out the front door.

This is the origin of Iron Man—a self-made superhero. Millions of fans love watching Robert Downey Jr. portray the Armored Avenger on the silver screen, though he was originally conceived in the pages of Marvel comics in 1963. The arguable secret to his literary longevity is purely his humanity. Alongside a pantheon of living legends and veritable gods, Tony Stark stands undeniably relatable as a man who simply uses his wit and intellect to try and change the world, something almost everyone can resonate with.

One of Tony Stark’s greatest displays of vibrant humanity is in the gripping graphic novel *Iron Man: Demon in a Bottle*. The story commences with Iron Man already distraught by the approaching takeover of his company, Stark International, by his supposed allies at S.H.I.E.L.D., a clandestine government agency. The gut-wrenching betrayal by those Tony saw as friends weighs tremendously on him, but he has no time to dwell on personal pain when the plane he is riding in is struck



in midair and begins plummeting. Following this tense opening, Stark is bombarded with a constant barrage of overwhelming issues—his suit begins to malfunction, his villains nearly kill him, and his armored alter-ego is framed for murder. Confronted with problems too heavy to staunchly bare, Tony turns to alcohol, that “demon in a bottle,” for support. Fortunately, through the lucid perspective and helping hand of his girlfriend, Bethany Cabe, Tony realizes the depths of his desolation and endeavors to change, thwarting his addiction and maintaining his responsibilities as business man and butt-kicker.

Though sprinkled with fanciful elements, Tony’s narrative is a familiar one at the core. When challenges of life, those welcomed and those unforeseen, become too arduous to doggedly handle, what do we do? To whom or what do we turn for aid? Addiction is broadly defined as “persistent compulsive use of a substance known by the user to be harmful.”² In a way, the existence of addiction speaks to a brokenness within every human being. Romans 7:18 expounds upon this: “For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.” The Lord’s Prayer even states, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one,” or, as idiomatically translated by Eugene H. Peterson from the original Greek of that passage, “Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.”³ Addictions often offer respite from hardships, but they are ultimately a flawed form of escapism. Frankly, without intimacy with the

ultimate Definer of freedom, we are doomed to squander what little agency we have by indulging detrimental, self-centered desires. Galatians 5:13 informs us we are “called to be free,” but not

When challenges of life, those welcomed and those unforeseen, become too arduous to doggedly handle, what do we do?

to use our “freedom to indulge the flesh.”⁴ Famed American writer and poet Edgar Allan Poe echoed similar sentiments as a cautionary tale: “I have absolutely no pleasure in the stimulants in which I sometimes so madly indulge. It has not been in the pursuit of pleasure that I have periled life and reputation and reason. It has been the desperate attempt to escape from... a sense of insupportable loneliness and a dread of some strange impending doom.”⁵

Imagine you are trekking through a semester at Cornell, and in some rudimentary class, you are viciously ambushed by a major project. Without warning, a second class smothers you with multiple papers while a third increases the difficulty of its problem sets. What do you—a proficient person in a formidable dilemma—do? You probably attempt to conquer the quagmire. However, in our broken state, we need support in such endeavors, and all too often, this support is detrimentally chosen. Fundamentally, addiction is a faulty support system. When dealing with monumental burdens, Tony turned to liquor. Others use drugs, partying, shopping,

outcome of unaddressed addiction is the destruction of one's life—relationships, finances, academics, career, and more. The solution, however, is rather simple: rely on a better support. Hebrews 4:15-16, speaking about Jesus, says, "...we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Jesus is this better support. In truth, Jesus is the best support system we could ever have. Additionally, 2 Corinthians 1:3-

4 expresses the active role of God the Father in our tribulations: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles." 1 Peter 5:7 distills this concept further: "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

Even with those who do not directly rely on Christ as their support, we see grace evident through the people placed around those struggling. These supports are conduits of love from an All-loving God—impressions of what Christ perfectly offers. We need look no further for a patent example of this than the man who has played Iron Man on film, Robert Downey Jr.

Introduced to drugs at the age of eight by his father, Downey developed a full-fledged addiction as he headed into his 20s.⁶ His addiction led

The best of us, even the "billionaire, playboy, genius, philanthropists," will eventually be overwhelmed by the weight of the world and the weight of our own flawed nature.

to multiple arrests and the near destruction of his career in the early 2000s. Desperate for a helping hand, Downey's friend Mel Gibson and future wife Susan Levin encouraged him down a healthier path in 2003, and Downey was forever changed.⁷ Firmly grasping this fresh start, he went on to play numerous other roles in cinema, most notably Tony Stark in 2008.

The stories of Iron Man and Robert Downey Jr. are ones of freedom afforded to them by the aid of those around them. Paralleling this fresh start which friends and family help provide, Jesus Christ—the progenitor of the love they show—provides something unattainable on

Fundamentally, addiction is a faulty support

our own and vastly greater than simply a fresh start: a new life. "For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."⁸ The

strength afforded by support groups and loved ones is essential, though limited. Only when we complete our foundation with God, the "ever-present help in trouble" who knows us each perfectly, can we perfectly live anew.⁹

When faced with these truths, we see the key issue of addiction is the trading of the complete sufficiency of God for unsatisfactory, deceptive substitutes. This occurred among the ancient Israelites and was addressed by God in Jeremiah 2:13: "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water." The best of us, even the "billionaire, playboy, genius, philanthropists," will eventually be overwhelmed by the weight of the world and the weight of our own flawed nature. Relying on God, we are guaranteed the ultimate support system. Our hope for complete sustenance, support, and salvation is Jesus Christ, the one who enables those who rely on him to conquer their quagmires better than anything in a bottle ever could: "The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in

a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail."¹⁰ 

¹Arad, Avi, et al. *Iron Man*. Paramount Pictures, 2008.

²"Addiction." Merriam-Webster.com. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 21 Feb. 2018.

³Matthew 9:13 (MSG)

⁴Galatians 5:13 (NIV)

⁵Whitman, Sarah H. *Edgar Poe and His Critics*. New York, Rudd & Carleton. 1860.

⁶"Robert Downey Jr." *Biography.com*, A&E Networks Television, 28 Apr. 2017, www.biography.com/people/robert-downey-jr-9542052.

⁷Cohen, Rich. "Robert Downey Jr.'s Epic Saga: Addiction, Family Life, and The Judge." *HWD, Vanity Fair*, 16 Nov. 2017, www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2014/09/robert-downey-jr-addiction-children; "Robert Downey Jr." *Biography.com, A&E Networks Television*, 28 Apr. 2017, www.biography.com/people/robert-downey-jr-9542052.

⁸*Titus 2:11-13 (NIV)*

⁹*Psalm 46:1 (NIV)*

¹⁰*Isaiah 58:11 (NIV)*



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photo by Jeannette Pang



As a teenager, I learned that deciding to do something just because other people are doing it was probably not the best way to determine a course of action. An age-old example is a young man or woman trying desperately to justify their disobedient or perhaps dangerous actions by stating that their friends are doing “it” too. In response, a concerned parent utters something to the tune of, “well, if your friends jump off of a bridge, are you going to do it too?” I’ve heard this statement many times before, but it was not until recently that I realized such a statement is an example of a prominent theory in the study of persuasion and social influence called social proof. Renowned author and psychology professor, Robert Cialdini fathered social proof, one of six theories of social influence. He states that we often “view a behavior as more correct in a given situation to the degree that we see others performing it.”¹ When we are uncertain about how to act, or when we desire to abide by social norms, we look at what other people are doing and adapt to their behaviors.

If our friends are “jumping off of a bridge” or engaging in reckless behavior, it seems obvious that it’s not a good idea to follow them. Regardless, we follow anyway. John Darley and Bibb Latane conducted a study in which male undergraduate subjects (people unaware of the

It’s easy to brush the test subjects off as ignorant or naïve, but in reality, we are no different.

experiment) and several confederates (people aware of the operation) sat together in a room while researchers slowly pumped in smoke.² The researchers wanted to see whether the subjects would sit still while the smoke seeped in or run out to report the smoke based on how the confederates reacted. The subject was either alone, had two passive confederates with them or had two fellow subjects with them. The experiment displayed shocking results: when alone, 75% of subjects left the room to report the smoke, but when sitting with two confederates who paid no attention to the smoke (passive), only 10% of subjects alerted someone of the circumstances!³ People that did not report the smoke expressed, after the experiment, that they saw no reason to act based on their interpretation of the situation. The main component of their understanding was the fact that people present with them, who were actually in on the experiment, did not move as smoke filled up the room.

It’s easy to brush the test subjects off as ignorant or naïve, but in reality, we are no different. Another group of people that I identify as “just like us” are the Israelites, a nation of people descended from Abraham, the patriarch or father of many nations. The existence of this nation is mostly verified through archaeological



excavations, secular historical accounts, and the Bible.⁴ Nevertheless, the story of the Israelites, whose descendants likely live among us today, is entirely relatable as these people continuously show their faults, impatience, and lack of trust.

An example of their imperfection is found in Numbers 13 and 14 as the Israelites react to the negative report of 11 out of 12 spies from each of 12 tribes sent out to survey the promised land of Canaan.⁵ Just to provide a little bit of context, God had previously promised the Israelites' forefather Abraham that his descendants would possess Canaan.⁶ In addition to having that promise as assurance, the Israelites had also seen some of the wonderful ways in which God had worked in their favor. For example, God parted the Red Sea so that they could run on the dry ground away from their enslavers, the

As human beings living in today's postmodernist society, we must be aware of how trusting in subjective social norms, or the views of just any person can affect us.

Egyptians. He also provided drinkable water to them in the middle of the wilderness.^{7,8} Despite having all of that information and experience, the Israelites were still influenced by people's opinions because of uncertainty, specifically concerning what the land looked like, who lived there, and how they could conquer it being the

small and displaced nation that they were. The people, as a whole, were not able to see the land for themselves. Thus, the reports of powerful people in the area, large, fortified cities, and giants freaked the Israelites out.⁹ How many times have we listened to our siblings or friends instead of the parents or mentors who've lived for much longer than we have or have experienced more than we have? Many times, our disobedience comes from a lack of trust in our parents or mentors' wisdom and guidance.

Although social proof applies to specific actions or failures to take action, it can also refer to viewpoints. As human beings living in today's postmodernist society, we must be aware of how trusting in subjective social norms, or the views of just any person can affect us. In the book of Galatians, Paul, a Christian leader and former persecutor of the church, expresses his disappointment at the Galatian church. The believers of the Galatian church "[deserted] him

who called you in the grace of Christ" due to false teachers "troubling" and "distorting" the gospel.¹⁰ The quick timing of their falling away from the truth signifies that Paul had preached to them earlier (before sending the letter) and had thought them to be stable in the faith. However, they were led astray and convinced

by others to believe something contrary to the gospel of Christ. The “gospel” of the false teachers involved an exclusive community in which only circumcised Jews could be saved. The true gospel teaches that Jesus Christ atoned for our shortcomings and brought us back into relationship with himself by coming down to Earth, living a perfect life and both dying as a sacrifice and resurrecting soon afterward.

Navigating modern society’s multiple definitions of truth and morality can be confusing. One of the greatest things we can do, and, in fact, are commanded by God to do, is love. Nevertheless, the words or actions of an unfortunately large group of people may persuade us to hate our brothers and sisters based on race, ethnicity, gender, age, and other factors, either in word or deed.¹¹ As humans, God has commanded us to be good stewards of the Earth, caring for the environment and all living things, yet there are a large group of people who may persuade us to engage in selfish actions at our planet’s expense.¹² The Bible calls us not to be anxious about our futures, for God takes time out even to feed the birds of the air as well as the grass of the field that will be here today and be gone tomorrow.¹³ However, many may persuade us to worry intensely about how to find the right career, achieve a 4.0 college GPA, or be “successful,” whichever way society defines it.

In the midst of these pressures from societal norms, God has equipped us with ways to use social proof positively. Robert Cialdini expresses that social proof is, for the most part, helpful. We read reviews from people before seeing certain movies or buying products which in turn allows us to avoid wasting money on a lousy experience. Laugh tracks or “canned laughter” causes us to chuckle at jokes on shows like the Big Bang Theory that may or may not have been funny. Depending on your view of this subtle coercion, such a phenomenon increases our enjoyment of these shows. We may begin to follow an unusual or exciting page on social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram because of the number of followers that the page has garnered.

The Bible also provides several examples of

positive social proof. First, Paul establishes that we are all a part of one body in Christ.¹⁴ Although we have different nationalities, speak many languages, and have been blessed by God to use different gifts, we are similar in that we are all members of the same body unified by a belief in God and his goodness. Because we exhibit that critical aspect of similarity, it is easy for us to encourage one another when we are uncertain in our beliefs or in how to trust God through tough times. We can help one another cast our burdens on God because he will sustain us.¹⁵ Even in the midst of trying circumstances, Paul also encourages believers to,

“draw near [to God] with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”¹⁶

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Because Christ lived the perfect life on Earth, never sinned, and so served as the perfect sacrifice for our sin, we can be assured that we are washed clean and are just in his eyes. We are now able to have a personal relationship with Christ and “with confidence draw near to the throne of

grace.”¹⁷ God’s Word expresses no uncertainty on that matter. In the book of Hebrews, Paul continues to express that meeting with each other is important. Meeting together should not be neglected, for all people in the body of Christ need encouragement and a “stirring up” to love and good works.¹⁸

I don’t know if Paul knew it, but in effect, he was laying out a perfect plan for combating the negative social proof that led to doubt in the case of the Israelites and the belief of false doctrine in the case of the Galatians. Simultaneously, he was promoting the positive aspects of social proof that lead us to love other people and have full confidence in the grace and mercy of Christ. If we are to allow people, the media, our friends, or our family to persuade us, let it be towards good things: love, hope, joy, perseverance, and dedication. We are, in every way, equipped to do good on Earth, not just as individuals, but as a body of people, a community, a family, moving towards a brighter future. ☩

¹Cialdini, R. B. (1984). *Influence: the psychology of persuasion*. New York, NY: Collins.

²Latane, B., & Darley, J. M. (1968). Group inhibition of bystander intervention in emergencies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 10(3), 215-221. doi:10.1037/h0026570

³Ibid.

⁴Jarus, O. (2016, August 16). *Ancient Israel: A brief history*. Retrieved March 13, 2018, from <https://www.livescience.com/55774-ancient-israel.html>

⁵Numbers 13:30-14:1-4 ESV

⁶Genesis 15:18-19 ESV

⁷Exodus 14:26-31 ESV

⁸Exodus 15:22-27 ESV

⁹Numbers 13:25-33 ESV

¹⁰Galatians 1:6-7 ESV

¹¹Matthew 22:39 ESV

¹²Genesis 1:28 ESV

¹³Matthew 6:25-31 ESV

¹⁴Romans 12:3-8 ESV

¹⁵Psalms 55:22 ESV

¹⁶Hebrews 10:22-23 ESV

¹⁷Hebrews 4:16 ESV

¹⁸Hebrews 10:24-25 ESV



James Seaton is a junior from Long Island studying communication in CALS. If he's not rapping, writing poetry, or leaping into a sand pit, he's probably terrorizing his friends with awkward facial expressions.

The Good Fight

— A POEM ECHOING 1ST & 2ND TIMOTHY —

by Olivia Simoni

Fight the good fight of the faith.

Not of blood and bone but of endurance,
For the tranquil road leads to the furnace.
We fight for life; **we toil and strive**
Because we have our hope set on the

Living
God.

A God who's heart not only beats but causes ours to echo in response.
I am alive because he made me so.

He was manifested in the flesh,
Vindicated by the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Proclaimed among the nations,
Believed on in the world,
Taken up in glory.

I am made of this flesh,
Leaning on the Spirit,
Blind to angels,
Wandering among the nations,
A vapor in this world,
And yet, I too,
Will be **taken up in glory.**

I am new because he made me so.

Like Paul, I'm free.
Made blind to see,
For **Jesus came into the world**
To save sinners,
Of whom I am
The foremost.

And so I boast in my weakness.
It is for weakness' sake that he came.

I am redeemed because he made me so.

See,
I was your enemy when you rescued me.
I was your foe, and you still chose me,
I was your rival when you gave me the bible, your word, and told me:

Your salvation is my utmost joy.
**It is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior,
Who desires all people to be saved
And to come to the knowledge of the truth.**

I am his because he made me so.

So I will take hold of the eternal life to which I have been called
Enthralled by my final destination,
Branches extended towards the sky,
But roots planted firmly in creation.

Ready to be in the world but not of it.
I desire to leave nothing behind but a shell, and a tombstone that reads:

**I have fought the good fight,
I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith.**



Olivia Simoni is a freshman from France and Dubai, majoring in English Literature. Among her greatest loves are curly fries, dogs with tiny legs, 'Reckless Love' by Cory Asbury, and snow storms.

Artist Inspiration

When I first heard about the overarching theme of “The Gospel According to...” and how writers impose their own worldview, I immediately thought of a book propped open and the Earth coming out of it. The book represents all the novels the Claritas writers will explore through the lens of the Gospel—our worldview—which is illustrated through the Earth. My hope is that through this painting, people will remember the author of all authors, the Lord Himself, who has revealed unto us His worldview—His love for His people on this Earth.

I wanted the back cover to carry a similar ambiance as the front’s, but I wanted to emphasize upon a facet of the theme: the vastness of literature yet its bigger picture. I drew many books to show the grand number of novels, then I made the books into leaves of a tree to acknowledge the Claritas writers’ bigger picture and message that they were trying to communicate—the Gospel.”

- Watercolor artwork 



Sophia Jeon is a freshman majoring in physics and minoring in education. Her ideal hangouts consist of tea dates, long drives, and movie nights. She loves spending time with people, hiking, running and anything with nature!

This series of photos suggests a way to view and approach space. By creating a dialogue between space and light, man-made and natural, they inspire awe of what God made man capable of and how God’s design takes a central theme in man-made objects.

an-made and natural, they inspire awe of what God made man capable of and how God’s design takes a central theme in man-made objects.

- Photos around Cornell Campus 



Jeannette Pang is a fourth-year majoring in Architecture and minoring in Theatre. She enjoys traveling around the world and creeping up on her friends with her camera Cacao, which is named after her favorite food.

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

KURLYA YAN

Crime and Punishment by Fyodor Dostoevsky

ABI BERNARD

Far From the Madding Crowd by Thomas Hardy

SARA GORSKE

The Tales of Goldstone Wood series by Anne Elisabeth Stengl

JOSHUA HUI

A Gentleman in Moscow by Amor Towles

ANNE-SOPHIE OLSEN

Pity the Beautiful: Poems by Dana Gioia

CARLEY ESCHLIMAN

Drunk Tank Pink by Adam Alter

PHOEBE LEE

Ready Player One by Ernest Cline, *Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell

JOHN NYSTROM

The Napoleon of Notting Hill by G. K. Chesterton

ABIGAIL BEZRUTCZYK

A Wind in the Door by Madeleine L'Engle, *The Horse and His Boy*
by C.S. Lewis

BRANDON DANIELS

*The Harbinger: The Ancient Mystery that Holds the Secret of America's
Future* by Jonathan Cahn

JAMES SEATON

Influence: Science and Practice by Robert Cialdini

OLIVIA SIMONI

The Case for Christ by Lee Strobel

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.

CONTACT US

Visit us online at www.cornellclaritas.com to learn more, subscribe, and join the conversation. You can also reach us at cornell.claritas@gmail.com.

