



translations

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FROM THE EDITOR

One early Saturday morning in late January of 2006, two half-asleep, blurry-eyed freshmen decided to create and distribute a Christian magazine at Cornell. A little over a year later, thanks to God's continued blessings, you hold the product of that dream.

What have we been doing for the past year? In the spring, an editorial board was assembled and selected the current faculty advisor, Don Bilderback. We then worked towards fulfilling the requirements to become an organization at Cornell: writing a mission statement, a constitution, and bylaws. This tedious task took up most of the semester, and we would like to thank Allison Danner for creating and revising those documents.

By late April, all we had left to do was pick a name. Easy, right? Not so much. With suggestions like *Rosetta*, *Reflections*, and *City on a Hill*, the decision proved to be difficult and that in part halted our progress over summer break.

Last fall, we reassembled in an agreement: *Translations* would be our name. We feel that the name *Translations* really embodies the mission that God has set before us with this magazine. In transforming Himself into human form in Christ Jesus, God was able to translate His heavenly realm into earthly existence. This translation was the greatest gift because it allowed for our complete reconciliation with God and the restoration of our souls. With God's incarnation as our example of the ultimate translation, as God's servants, we attempt to translate the somewhat elusive, ethereal, and incomprehensible nature of the Kingdom of God into a more tangible and perceivable experience accessible to you, so that you may be touched by God's grace.

We struggled along the way, gathering articles and images that form this issue. Our editorial board changed as some left and others joined us. Many times, we worried over the number of submissions, advertising, and money in general, but we have learned that God provides. And here we are. Here you are. You're wondering, right? "Why did you do all this? What's the point?"

As our mission statement states, we wanted to "produce a magazine that is accessible to all members of the Cornell community, engaging readers to think about Christianity in all aspects of everyday life and, above all, **glorifying God at Cornell.**" That pretty much says it all. We never wanted to give you the answers or tell you just what you wanted to hear, instead we wanted to bring up discussion, make you think critically and ask questions. That's why we've done all this, and we believe we have accomplished our goal. Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith, inspired the creation of this publication, and we hope that through it, you will be blessed.

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SEARCH

Christine Tan

I am a sojourner on earth. Since the day I was born, I have started on a journey called life, but do not know what lies ahead. This uncertainty grows stronger along the journey as I become aware of the brevity of life with the passing away of friends and loved ones. I am frequently seen sitting alone on a slope, pondering the deep burning question inside my heart, that surely there must be a higher purpose for life. My closest friends offer me the answer that it is not for me, a mere mortal, to know such divine things that belong to God.

And so for the last seven years, I outwardly show myself to be happy; indeed what else do I lack? People who know me say that everything is going well for me. I busy myself with the duties and responsibilities in life: to my family, my work and society. But on some nights when even the stars hide away behind the dark clouds, I hide inside my duvet on my bed, lying in the silence so thick that it squirms into my ears. During these nights, I struggle again with my search for meaning in life: the truth, what it means to live, to be human, and who God is to me...

And God, where is God when I break the silence of the night with my weeping? I am so desperate and my search for God is so real. Over the years I have learnt that He is everything to me, but why does He seem so far away when I need Him most?

Have you ever experienced moments when you are so overwhelmed that you do not know what to do? When you so desperately need an answer to a question or a problem?

Have you ever tried to search for "God" on Google? Have you tried e-mailing God@God.com and realized in surprise that you never receive the expected MAIL UNDELIVERED return to your mailbox?

Despite yourself and your human efforts, you know deep inside that there is a "God-shaped" vacuum that



ARTWORK BY JEANNE LEE

nothing and no one else can fill. And the unfruitful night winds up with more emptiness after you turn off your computer.

Often, I longed for the hills and the lakes, the handiwork of God's creation. Perhaps I would be able to find God in nature and be truly happy? The only thing that prevented me from going on a trip was the lack of time – what a curse of the 'modern day' working man! So one day in summer 2003, I did

something willful. I booked a train ticket, packed up my bag and departed for Lake District in England, leaving everything behind.

Alone. How else do you expect to find God? Such a pilgrimage must be embarked upon alone, right? As I looked out of the train at the idyllic scenes of countryside, my heart was expectant with the hope that I will find God.

It was a restful trip, but still I did not hear anything from God. All that transpired were some photographs that reflected my inner state of mind and a deep longing.

Deep inside of me, there is an unsettled feeling. No matter how hard I try, where I go, there is always discontent. I immerse myself in my work, my travels, in different activities in life, but there is an inner cry: I am unsatisfied!

Stephansdom, Vienna. Upon entering the cathedral, an unfamiliar silence enveloped the surroundings. Walking around, I watched other tourists admire the arches and the stained glass windows; I was in no mood to appreciate the inside of Stephansdom.

Are You here, God? I lit a candle to wish for world peace, to pray that I would be able to find You, O God. And also pray that everyone who is seeking you will find You.

"...And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice."¹

Then the Lord called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?"²

Another night. "God, where are You?" It came when I was least expecting Him and startled me, as if God clearly said to me.

"I am waiting for you. I have always been here. But My child, where are you?"

"..."

I wept.

The age old question from God to the fallen Man, "Where are you?" – this was His answer to my search and my seven years of pilgrimage. I had been caught

up in my expectations of Him and the business of life. I used to be the still axis of the globe, watching the world spin by, but slowly I had fallen out of alignment. Just the slightest degree off the axis of rotation, and I was instantly swept into the frantic swirl of life.

Where am I? The problem did not lie with God, but with me: I was not ready. And yet His mercy and grace still extended so freely to me.

God cannot be found by trying to seek Him in nature, or in the churches built by man, or in our vain human attempts to find Him in places where we think He is. He speaks to us in the smallest whispers that can be easily brushed away in the bustle of everyday life or drowned by the inner storm in our hearts. But once we still our soul and catch this divine whisper, our years of searching come to an end, regardless of where we are.

References

¹ 1 Kings 19:11-12 (NKJV)

² Genesis 3:9 (NKJV)

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THE ALL-PURPOSE BIBLE

Morgan Ng

An Inherent Contradiction?

While following the usual rounds of college student procrastination (Facebook, Xanga, Friendster), I came across a friend's blog entry. I've known the girl, now a student at UPenn, since high school.

While many of our conversations have revolved around questions about our Christian faith, this particular entry concerned a more secular issue. She wrote this:

"Sometimes I...find it troubling, all this interpretation-of-the-Constitution business, because the Constitution, often considered a living document, is composed of dead words in ink which are continuously revived and reconstrued according to the meanings that we so desire to imbue them with today..."

Go figure; she's Canadian.

But in all seriousness, it got me thinking. First, about what makes an obviously limited document so important that it defines our entire epistemology—as the foundation and constant reference in our construction of laws and other decisions. Why does the Constitution have less resonance as Truth for a girl or a foreigner than it does for an American?

Second, what are the implications of this for the Bible? Like the Constitution, the literature of the Bible was written long before our time. Its original historical, cultural and political contexts are far removed from our own. Despite these limitations, for Christians the Bible's deity allows the text to have an uncanny applicability to every aspect of life.

Obviously, the two documents are not equal. Not only do they have different sources, but they have different purposes, encompass different scopes, and propose different ideologies as well. Barring its subsequent amendments, the core United States Constitution and its Bill of Rights were drawn up within a period of a few years by a relatively small group of men.

In contrast, the Bible's writings span several

thousand years and by extension, cover diverse cultures and historical eras. Only later were its disparate writings formed into a single cohesive (or at least seemingly cohesive) whole. Furthermore, as Christians, we believe that the Bible has authority in heaven and earth.

I'm less concerned, however, with the similarities and differences between the two documents than with their shared vantage points. Here, I propose a couple of loose terms—"law" and "theory"—to describe the different vantage points through which the documents can be read and how this can alter their authority.

Whereas both Americans and Christians tend to understand their respective documents from the inside-out, I suggest that each can gain a richer understanding through a reading from the outside in. Finally, I explore why deifying the Bible simultaneously subverts the text's own assertions, addressing how defining it as the "all-purpose solution" to our problems makes God less divine.

Beyond the vantage points from which they are viewed, law and theory have no inherent distinction. Both begin by isolating a set of phenomena to study. When peering at it from the outside, this set of phenomena becomes theory. Yet when viewed from an insider's perspective, the set stands as law. The Constitution and the Bible can be understood as either.

As law, the documents make up the full extent of one's epistemology—although the individual can always move around inside this set, interpreting, reinterpreting and shifting around its terms, he or she remains constantly constrained by the extent of phenomena or sum of the terms that can be examined. Within the American legal system, we have the chance to question the legality of our existing statutes and even to propose new ones, as long as we

remain within the bounds of “constitutionality.”

Every statute and every government official ostensibly abides by this constitutionality; by extension, each American citizen must adhere to sometimes contradictory legal and executive powers for as long as they are agreed upon as constitutional. The nature of the Constitution can itself be debated, as its “elasticity” allows for constant reinterpretation to save the document from obsolescence. But while we may rework the terms, the larger framework always remains intact.

Similarly, the Bible acts as supreme authority for the Christian. This authority extends not only to religious matters, but also to social and political issues, and even to scientific inquiry. All matters of life are tested for their robustness against the Word and weeded out if they do not conform. As a result, the Bible takes on the status of total Truth.

To retain such status, the Bible calls on theological reasoning to maneuver through inconsistent histories, cultures and ideologies to produce a single cohesive front. With both the Constitution and the Bible as law, loose interpretation is essential in making the documents relevant.

In this way, despite their inconsistencies or anachronisms, the documents’ material constraints achieve unexpectedly broad significance. Regardless

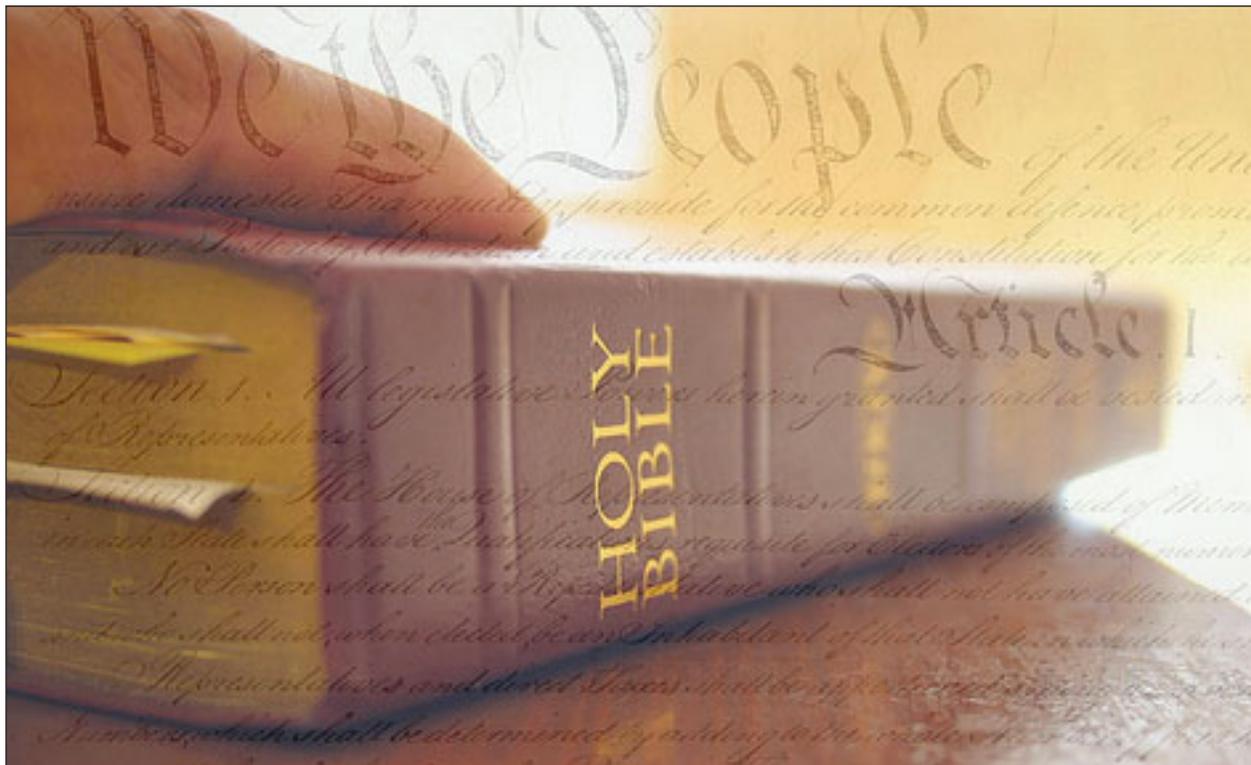
of their purposes, both documents take on an aura of seemingly spiritual sanctity.

In contrast, when read as theory the documents become merely options among various others. A theoretical reading shifts one’s view to the periphery of law so that the set of one’s epistemology becomes increasingly enlarged.

What, as law, was once the extent of one’s epistemology now becomes theory—an object of study which can shift around within an enlarged epistemology. The foreigner, who himself lives under a separate law, lies on the periphery of the Constitution; he sees the Constitution as theory and, therefore, not something to which he should be subject. My friend could consider the Constitution with an outsider’s disinterest and question the very grounds on which it stands.

With the Bible, the same can occur. An outsider may see it either as a strong set of moral principles or dismiss it altogether, but will never see it as Truth. Even Christians, I argue, can read the Bible theoretically. Many, maybe even most, Christians believe that the Bible, if not detailing every aspect of ontology, at least provides a general framework for it.

But the sophisticated Christian can believe that Biblical writings are the result of Spiritually-inspired divine intervention or even as truthful on all counts,



without believing that they constitute Truth in its totality. When the American and the Christian see their respective documents from the perspective of the outsider, they temporarily take on the role of the intellectual.

Like the outsider, the intellectual broadens the scope of what we know as true by constantly questioning what we take for granted as “common knowledge.” This applies not only to the humanities or social sciences, but to the realm of natural science as well. For example, physicists’ research into string theory suggests that our empirical understanding of three-dimensional space constitutes only a fraction of ten or twenty-six space-time dimensions.

Of course theory, when adhered to strongly enough, can become law, as demonstrated by Marxism and Enlightenment philosophy. But the true intellectual never gives his ideas such fixedness, or else the dialogue ends.

When Christians give the Bible an inside-out reading, they unwittingly belie doctrine. To give the document’s hopelessly limited physical, social and cultural phenomena an infinite and deified importance makes a visible contradiction: how does a limited text express God’s totality unless God Himself is limited?

Doctrine argues that God is unlimited and illimitable; His fullness is forever outside our frame of mind. But we reject the fullness of His Creation—the manifold phenomena of our material universe—to give precedence to a limited text written in human language as the explanation for everything we both understand and have yet to understand.

On the other hand, reading the Bible as theory may put its deity in danger—by placing it among various other theories. However, the result is to glorify God all the more, so that the whole of his Creation, not just a limited text, manifests His omnipotence and infinite creativity.

As with any other law, the Bible’s applicability only exists within a closed system. When scientists state physical laws (Law of Thermodynamics or Newton’s

Laws of Motion), they must always stipulate these laws within closed systems or idealized conditions. The laws remain truthful only within a context; outside this context, the rules go haywire.

Similarly, the Bible’s usefulness exists within a closed system. In current debates over the legitimacy of evolution, as was the case 400 years ago with Galileo’s astronomical observations, Christians have tried citing the Bible to prove or disprove scientific ideas. But while the Bible may have relevance in social or religious issues, trying to apply it to science moves it way out of context.

As members of an intellectual community, it’s important for us to understand this. Once we slip into dogmatism, the intellectual dialogues end; but for as long as we keep constant perspective on the

To give the document’s hopelessly limited physical, social and cultural phenomena an infinite and deified importance makes a visible contradiction: how does a limited text express God’s totality unless God Himself is limited?

limitations on our bodies of knowledge, we can hope to see more fruitful academic inquiry.

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WHEN FAITH VOTES

Rev. Steven Felker

As the election has passed, Christians in modern democratic societies have unique questions to wrestle through. Between freedom of the press, freedom of speech, liberation from aristocracy and the privilege of pursuing office, and the ballot box, ours is a very unique position of governed peoples in history.

And with privilege comes responsibility. In the current polarized political climate, one can't miss the appeals from all sides to Christian ethics as policy. From "When Jesus said 'love thy Neighbor', I don't think He meant kill them" to "Abortion stops a beating heart", the gamut of political partisanship seems able to reference Christian texts to buttress their positions. Yet at times these references seem strained, misappropriated, or flat out contradictory.

I have no interest in questioning the sincerity of professing Christians on the left or on the right. I do have a great interest in cultivating a discerning worldview from a diligent and responsible approach to Scripture. With that, I would like to propose and explore the following question:

Does God have a different set of ethical mandates for individuals than He does for governments? And if so, then what?

I believe the answer is yes. The same God, who mandated the death penalty and sent the army of Israel on conquest, said to individuals "Thou shall not kill" and called Christians to be "administrators of grace."^{1 2 3 4} This same God charged governments to be "an agent of wrath" against wrongdoers, including wielding the sword (the ability to put to death).⁵ It seems we must either charge God as invalid by inconsistency, or find a rule of approach that makes sense.

I propose this: that having given them different missions, God has a different set of ethical mandates for individuals and governments.

To individuals God gives a mission of compassion and grace. The excoriating rage of the Minor Prophets is directed at those who had personal power to make a difference for someone in need and did not. Jesus' teaching is directed at personal moral responsibility to meet a human need (Good Samaritan).⁶ In the mirror, we must reckon with his demand that we relentlessly pursue personal holiness - in behavior and heart.

To governments, the Scriptures are less explicit. Nations around Israel are condemned for their exploitation of Israel during her time of weakness, but one must ask whether God is incensed because those nations attack his specially blessed people, or because they exploit a weakened people whose identity is inconsequential?⁷ God claims the nations are his to rule. And he established the rulers of nations. We are to pray for these rulers that we might have peace.⁸ We also owe them honor and taxes.⁹ They are charged with keeping general order, and with affirming the good, battling evil, and modeling integrity.

The complicating factor in our question is what we make of the nation of Israel, as it is rendered to us in the Old Testament. Israel of the BC period was a theocracy. There was no separation of church and state. The tax was 23.3%, with ten percent going to the temple and its functions, ten percent going to support the priestly caste (government?), and ten percent being collected every three years and distributed to the poor. (If this is to be a model for today, we will have to put our government on a diet, and get much more serious about our tithe to the church!) Across the history of Christendom, the just and compassionate elements from the theocracy of Israel have been mixed with political activism in secular states. We have seen the moral outrage of Amos utilized as argument for government redistribution of income from the richest to the poorest. We see the communal life of the early Christian church upheld as the way society should be

conducted.

I believe we cannot generally apply the structures of ancient Israel to the modern day. We are not a theocracy. We are not given eternal clan/family title to the land. Our government is not based on a transcendent religious text. We have no king, no aristocracy.

Consequently, structures such as Sabbath, a ruling lineage and others do not apply. Yet within each of them is an expression of the heart of God, the element which is morally compelling to us as individuals. We have found ways to express some of these in our own legal system. From an open system of rule of law, to bankruptcy protection, to wage & price laws, we have contemporary applications of biblical standards of justice in our civil covenant.^{10 11 12}

But the moral exhortations of Scripture are far

We are not a theocracy. We are not given eternal clan/family title to the land. Our government is not based on a transcendent religious text. We have no king, no aristocracy.

more extensive than these! How do we impose these things on government? (Or on one another through governmental force?) Or should we?

Is income redistribution the equivalent of withholding a man's wages? Does "Thou shall not kill" even apply to preemptive war? Should certain private conduct be outlawed by the state on grounds of moral argument? How do we tread the Biblical sanction of the death penalty with allegations of an imperfect, even biased, legal system?

Let's complicate the question further. In autocratic regimes, Christians have very little to say in matters of state. But in a free democracy, Christians may even have a mandate to speak, run for office, and vote. We have unique capacity to codify our moral imperatives. I believe that a Christian is bound to Christian ethics in their personal conduct as they navigate these social interactions. Yet in the name of justice and

compassion, can we provide some justice at the expense of others, or select some for compassionate intervention at the expense of others?

Without proposing solutions to every quirk of culture, let me suggest some principles for going forward:

1. With a unique capacity for engaging the power structures of our society, every Christian must be engaged. Vote. Run for office. Write your office-holders. Be informed.
2. Distill the principles of Scripture, and note that they may have different weights for how we apply them to our times. A few suggestions for core principles follow:

-Human beings are created in the image of God, and possess from conception to death an inherent value regardless of any available demographic dividing.

-Order and justice are God's structures for his world. Any civil society must have them in place if it is to function, let alone have God's

blessing. Maintenance and enforcement are government's responsibility. Faithfulness to the civil code is a citizen's responsibility.

-Compassion and mercy are humanizing influences. That these are demanded of individuals in their circles of influence is undeniable. However, because bureaucracy is inherently dehumanizing, the effectiveness of compassion and mercy are not seen as much in the aid given as in the relationships cultivated.¹³ These matters are compounded in international relations.

-God may ask actions and sacrifices of individuals that he does not expect to be imposed on a nation at large. As a people draw near to him and are formed in their own values by him, a

significant unanimity should be expected to appear in a culture as to its civil contract. This is the meaning of "blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord."¹⁴

3. Give respect. Even taking just the above core principles, genuinely faithful people will disagree on how they can best be implemented in an imperfect world. This may be a reflection of different people's talents and requires profound humility as we encourage one another.

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- ⁸ 1 Timothy 2:1-2
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- ¹³ Ruth
- ¹⁴ Psalm 33:12

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PHOTO BY WENDY SHAUN

RE: CREATION

Karl Johnson

At first glance, E.O. Wilson's *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth* is hard not to like. It is an attractive volume from Norton, featuring earth tones and outdoorsy-feeling rough-cut pages. And who could quarrel with the project—an effort by a renowned Harvard atheist to reach out to a (fictional) Southern Baptist preacher through a set of letters asking him to collaborate in the cause to “save the Creation”?

At second glance, however, the book fails to live up to its packaging. Wilson's suggestion that Christian hope for the next world has resulted in an atrophied appreciation for this world is no longer as persuasive as when Lynn White, Jr. popularized a similar argument forty years ago.¹

True enough, when environmental consciousness was dawning in the years leading up to the first Earth Day, the church was largely asleep at the wheel. But then so was everybody else, except a few ecologists, environmental preservationists, and, it should be noted, a few theologians. The idea that Christian belief correlates with bad environmental behavior is a testable hypothesis, and sociological surveys have found it to be false.²

As Cambridge paleobiologist Simon Conway Morris put it in his review of Wilson's book that appeared in *Science*, the suggestion that “blame for environmental destruction should be laid at the door of reckless supernaturalists whose only concern is the next world” is a thesis that has “long since been exploded.”³ It is time to stop pointing fingers and finally admit we are *all* sinners in our environmental behavior.

The main problem with Wilson's book, however, is his epistemology. He persists in speaking of science and religion in oppositional terms, suggesting that science and religion constitute starkly different and conflicting ways of knowing.

But this exaggerated conflict between science and religion also has been exploded. Although the

“warfare” of science and religion has seven lives due to the popular writings of scientists such as Richard Dawkins and Wilson, no contemporary historian of science considers the warfare metaphor an accurate description or helpful heuristic of the past.

Historians actually agree that the experimental approach to scientific inquiry that began during the 16th and 17th centuries was made possible by beliefs arising from the Christian milieu of the West—that the world is good, orderly, and knowable by human reason. (Indeed, Christianity is founded on an historical event that is “evidentiary” in nature. The Resurrection is not replicable, but the disciples invoked sense data as their evidence—that which they had heard, seen, and touched.)

The Belgic Confession puts it nicely. God is known by two means—first, “by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe,” and second “by his holy and divine Word.” Historic Christianity, contra Wilson, posits no conflict between reason and revelation.

More importantly still, the opposite of theism is not science but atheism. Wilson refers to his worldview as “scientific humanism.” But humanism is a worldview, and there is nothing inherently more scientific about it than other worldviews, including Christianity.

Simply put, Wilson's philosophical outlook is dated, as would be obvious to anybody who has followed discussions in the philosophy of science over the last half-century. Problems with his philosophy lead to problems with his sociology, as he assumes that scientists and religionists are two distinct sets of people, when in fact they are often the same people.

What of Wilson's main appeal: Can't we all just get along? For the record, the overwhelming majority of Christians are more than willing to join the cause—most already have—and even to work alongside those of other religions or worldviews. The problem lies with Wilson's coercive means of getting there.

According to Wilson the path to collaboration consists in setting aside differences of dogma, ideology, and metaphysics. Not so. The better basis for collaboration is for all parties involved to ground their concern for the environment in their particular worldview or metaphysics.

In contrast to Wilson's assertion that "the defense of living nature is a universal value [that] doesn't rise from any religious dogma," it is rather a value that, like all values, must arise in part from "religious dogma"—i.e., from one's worldview, whether religious or secular. Christians care about Creation because God created it and calls it good. Set aside the narrative and Christians have less, not more, reason to care for creation.

Wilson's values function more similarly to this than he realizes. His own care for creation is grounded not in science but in his humanism. Science gives us data, not concern for the environment.

Conway Morris, who refers to Wilson's thesis as "a thinly disguised programme to hijack religious energy and divert it into the secular arena," makes the same observation. Although well-intentioned, "Wilson's programme is ultimately underpinned by an incoherent metaphysics. Equally important, its scientific agenda carries the real risk of imposing tyranny."

Morris concludes that the failure of Wilson's project lies in "the recurrent inability of materialists to understand that the decision to protect the biosphere can only derive from an ethical imperative that is itself independent of the natural world."⁴

Differences in worldview need not divide, but can actually be the very basis for collaboration. Indeed, mutual respect means acknowledging, not ignoring, each others' worldviews. What does this look like?

Take Bono's support for the ONE Campaign "to make poverty history" as an example. In his address to the National Prayer Breakfast earlier this year, Bono challenged Jews, Christians, and Muslims to come together to fight poverty—as Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Instead of asking everyone to shed their religious identities, he appealed to their various faith traditions, quoting from the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament, and the Koran.

I'm not sure how we got to a place where rock stars demonstrate more nuance than Harvard professors, but it is probably telling that Wilson's preacher is fictional. Apparently Wilson doesn't have any actual preacher friends who could have reviewed his manuscript and

advised him on its several caricatures.

Indeed, Wilson's gesture of goodwill toward Christians is not likely to be taken all that seriously amidst the backdrop of his writings. As physicist Karl Giberson memorably put it, Wilson's attempt to extend the right hand of fellowship is like "Al Qaeda opening a doughnut shop and inviting George Bush."⁵

I hope Giberson is wrong and Wilson is sincere in his appeal for collaboration. If so—if Wilson is willing to break bread and not just push doughnuts—then he will soon cease preaching long enough to listen.

And when he does, he might be surprised at what he hears. He might hear, for example, that Christianity is a religion of hope and renewal, including the promise of a new heaven and a new earth. Historic Christianity teaches that Creation itself will be restored. We are called to be agents of shalom in the world, and that includes being stewards of the natural environment.

Not only the doctrine of Creation, but the doctrines of the Incarnation, the bodily resurrection, Common Grace, and even the Second Coming, all yield a dignity and significance to the material world. Those are first principles worth preserving.

The implications of Christian theology for environmental practice are not quickly grasped by anyone, much less by a longtime atheist. Perhaps what is needed for more substantive dialogue and encounter across worldviews is for Wilson and other secularists to join the National Religious Partnership for the Environment as secularists. Secularism, after all, is not a procedural ethic that somehow transcends particular visions of human flourishing. It is one among many worldviews.

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RETROGRESSIVE PRAYER

Brandon Mills

Recently, I received an e-mail from a local church informing me that the mother of an attendee had recently passed away. As would be expected, we were encouraged to pray for the family of the deceased so that they could have peace and know that any suffering on this earth had ended.

The second part of this request, though caught my eye, was that we also continue to pray for the deceased. I'm no theologian, at least no one would recognize me as such, but I know enough to see that something is not in line with the Word here.

Having grown up in Protestantism, I believe that when our physical body dies on this earth, it immediately passes into the next life, and things are then out of our hands. With this assumption, let's concentrate on our role, if there is one, when a friend or loved one dies.

Do we pray for them, grieve and mourn, celebrate, wonder, pity? And how can we be sure? That was the question I needed to answer. Of course, no research would be complete lest I looked at other religions and worldviews in order to gain a more complete understanding of what other peoples think their role is upon the passing of a friend or loved one.

This thought of definite beliefs became, though, a moot point. Through extensive, and sometimes fierce, debate and discussion with my peers, I now know that this topic, this theology, is not as cut-and-dried as I assumed it to be.

Here is the question that keeps coming up: "If God exists outside of time, isn't it possible for him to change things that in our eyes have already happened?" For example, little Johnny is in a car wreck. Do we pray,

not knowing his condition, that God protect him retroactively? It seems that many of us do. Then I ask, somewhat sarcastically, "Well why aren't we praying that World War II didn't happen?!" I am then met with the response that we can (or should, I'm not sure) only pray about things which we do not know the outcome of.

Wanting to get some points-of-view from less personally known sources, I went to my friendly web browser and did a search using words like 'past', 'prayer', and 'outcomes.' This did not find more than a couple of relevant references, and even these did not suggest any pertinent scripture. This is definitely one of those topics which you cannot find a readily available answer to, not on the internet, not in the Bible.

What the Bible teaches us about praying, especially in the New Testament, is that it is a means of communing with God, growing more intimate with the Father. What it does not share with us about praying is that we should approach it as solely a

means to an end. We mask this by adding "if it is Your will" at the end of every prayer.

Of course, is it really wrong to pray that Aunt Betty, who you just learned was rushed to the hospital, did not have a heart attack but merely has heart burn? In its essence, that is a prayer to modify the past. You are saying to God, I don't know what has already happened, but this is what I want to happen.

What about God having a plan? My pastor back home in North Carolina always claims, "God doesn't have a 'Plan B'" That sounds reasonable enough, doesn't it? God has a plan, and it's going to happen that way. For example, you have a charity car wash



Saturday, so you pray for no rain. It doesn't rain. Did God answer your prayer? Sure. But my question would be: was it ever going to rain on Saturday to begin with?

On a larger scale, say one of our grandparents was praying in the spring of 1945 that the war would soon end, by the year's end let's say, and that the outcome would be for the forces of good to prevail. I guarantee you that people were praying that prayer or something like it all over the world. Does that mean that God acted on those prayers and gave the Allies victory?

If God is always working according to Plan A, then I would say that the outcome was predetermined, just as the entire script of history has been laid out. Yet to us trapped in time, we feel as though because we prayed for x outcome to y event and x happened that God changed the way things were going to play out.

There is still no good answer to this. Even after reading materials, though scarce, and engaging others in dialogue, I have no real assurance that any answer is more correct than another. All I have is more questions, more paths to tread on, more sages to seek out.

But one thing I did learn in all of this is that we as Christians are free to share our ideas, often differing, on these subjects of non-essentiality, knowing that though we differ on the small, we are in unity on the essentials that are directly relevant to our salvation.

When it comes down to it, all we need is to proclaim Jesus as Lord and live our lives accordingly, and then one day we might be able to ask the author why he omitted certain questions we have from The Book. I imagine He'll say probably because it wasn't important.

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SEEKING PURPOSE

Grace Chen

IN COLLEGE

One evening last summer, my high school friends and I realized that our time was quickly coming to an end. In a mere matter of days, we would begin our foray into life as college students. As we discussed our future and our friendships, I happened to see Pastor Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life* on a friend's bookshelf.

I asked my friend, Jane, about her experience with the book, but she said that it had merely been sitting on her shelf. An idea began to formulate in my mind. A local church in town had recently held a church-wide *The Purpose Driven Life* reading, in which members of the church gathered in groups to discuss the 40-day devotional readings of Warren's book.

Knowing that many Christian students stop living a Christ-centered life during the college years, I suggested to my friend that we read through Warren's book during the first 40 days of college together and maintain accountability through the challenging transition to college.

On that summer evening, my friend—now at UC Berkeley—agreed to “meet” weekly through instant messenger, and hopefully grow, if even just a little, spiritually by the end of 40 days.

As of now, we're halfway through (yes, some procrastination was involved!) and we have made discoveries about how to structure a partnered devotion, and how to focus our relationship on Christ.

Week 1: What on Earth am I Here for?

At the close of the first week, Jane, and I found Warren's book refreshing and thought-provoking. We opened with an awkward opening prayer over instant messenger, but slowly we began to hit some deep questions as we considered the opening verse: “For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible...everything got started in him

and finds its purpose in him.”¹

Oftentimes, Jane and I find ourselves wanting to take control over all aspects of their lives, particularly in college. We try to find the “true meaning of life” by seeking achievement and success instead of remembering that God is in control.

The first chapter opened our eyes to an important reminder: “You cannot arrive at your life's purpose by starting with a focus on yourself. You must begin with God.” We discussed ways in which to remember our powerlessness in the face of God's hands, and the fact that He truly knows what's best for us.

Warren ends all his chapters with questions to ponder, and Jane and I began sharing our responses to: “How can I remind myself that life is really about living for God, not myself?” Somehow, our discussion led to the question: “Is it possible to forgive someone who has not apologized?”

The question led to a foundation for giving ourselves assignments in addition to the devotions. We made a plan to find an answer by asking around our respective campuses, and share with one another the following week.

In our devotions, we were reminded that God created us for His plan and purpose, and we must seek to glorify Him in all facets of our lives—even in daily routines.

Week 2: Purpose #1—You Were Planned for God's Pleasure

After smoothing out how we wanted to do our long-distance devotions together during the previous week, we found a chance to dig deeper not only into Warren's book, but into the Bible. While *Purpose* provided messages in clear, simple terms, Jane and I took to heart some of the criticisms of Warren's book and made an effort to remember to search the Bible for more complete words of wisdom.

One of the verses we came across was “the Lord will fulfill his purpose for me.”² Like many young adults, we struggled with accepting aspects of ourselves. But we realized that every aspect of ourselves, be it our talents, physical features, or even our families are part of God’s master plan. Rejecting what He has given us would distance us from Him. The inability to forgive others’ transgressions would also impact our relationship with God.

As a follow-up from the previous week, Jane and I shared the responses we received to our question: “Is it possible to forgive someone who does not apologize?” Her small group leaders had answered, “Ultimately it takes both parties to come together in agreement before forgiveness can occur.”

According to human nature, the ability to forgive those who have inflicted pain upon us (without an apology) is impossible. Yet as my Bible study leader pointed out, all things through Christ are possible. Jesus’ death has compensated for all transgressions, and therefore, through God, we can forgive.

As Jane observed, however, how do we go about forgiving? We decided to search for answers in the following weeks by asking our brothers and sisters in Christ. We ended our devotion with a prayer and plan to go through each day of the week conscious of God and looking for opportunities to glorify him.

Week 3: Purpose #2—You Were Formed for God’s Family

As Jane and I delved into the third week, we both felt that we had found a rhythm to devotions. We opened with a prayer thanking God for the blessings of good weather in the past week. She was grateful for the abundant sunshine at her Berkeley campus, while I was grateful for the beautiful fall weather (without rain!) here at Cornell.

I started the discussion by sharing what I had learned at my fellowship, when a pastor came to visit. The pastor had spoken about the importance of being honest and specific in our relationships with other Christians.

Furthermore, he challenged us to confess our sins and struggles with our fellow brothers and sisters and “carry each other’s burdens.”³ Interestingly, Warren touched on many facets of the pastor’s message in that week’s reading.

For Day 16, Warren stressed the importance of learning to love others in God’s family. He wrote

about how the first step to restoring relationships involves “admitting your mistakes or sin.” Love, Warren said, also meant taking the time to give ourselves to others.

Similar to the pastor’s message on how we need to stop committing “academic idolatry” and focus on building relationships, Warren encouraged us to shift our priorities to focus on sincerely building a sense of community and family among fellow Christians. After the first commandment on loving the Lord with all your heart, Warren emphasized that, “learning to love others is the second purpose of your life.”

Later in our discussion, Jane and I spoke of the times when we felt distanced from God. Day 14 addressed how God sometimes allows us to feel distanced from him in order to develop our faith. Warren used the story of Job to illustrate how we could still praise God, even when we did not understand challenging situations.

A particular verse from the reading struck Jane.



PHOTO BY WENDY SHAUN

Job still managed to praise God, despite losing everything. "He fell to the ground in worship and said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.'"⁴

Jane related the verse to her life, as she shared how the verse reminded her of how quickly God can take away things from our lives. Ms. Crandall, an art teacher from our high school, had died suddenly during our senior year.

As a sophomore, Jane had been able to develop a friendship with her. While Jane was grateful to have known Ms. Crandall, her death—and the Bible verse—reminded her about how many things in our lives are transitory.

Despite the distance we sometimes feel between ourselves and God, Warren reminded us to continually remember God's presence every moment of our lives. In Day 11, Warren brings up the verse in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 about "praying without ceasing."

We were instructed to meditate on God's word every chance we had, instead of wasting our thoughts on worries. Jane and I discussed methods of remembering God's presence and changing our attitudes about devotion time being an "appointment in our schedule."

Jane, for instance, has started posting short verses

on her dorm wall. During my walks to class, I had been consciously praising God in mind as I admired the beautiful tableau He had created on Cornell's campus.

Even in our "amateur" beginnings of working through devotions together, God gave us an amazing opportunity to grow spiritually. As Jane and I closed the third week together, we reflected on how God had still strengthened our relationship despite the 3,000 miles separating us.

As I reach the last half of *Purpose*, I look forward to seeing how God's word will mold our hearts. I also think of all the opportunities we have to read God's Word with brothers and sisters, not 3,000 miles away, but right here at Cornell!

References

¹ Colossians 1:16 (MSG)

² Psalm 138:8 (NIV)

³ Galatians 6:2 (NIV)

⁴ Job 1:20-21 (NIV)

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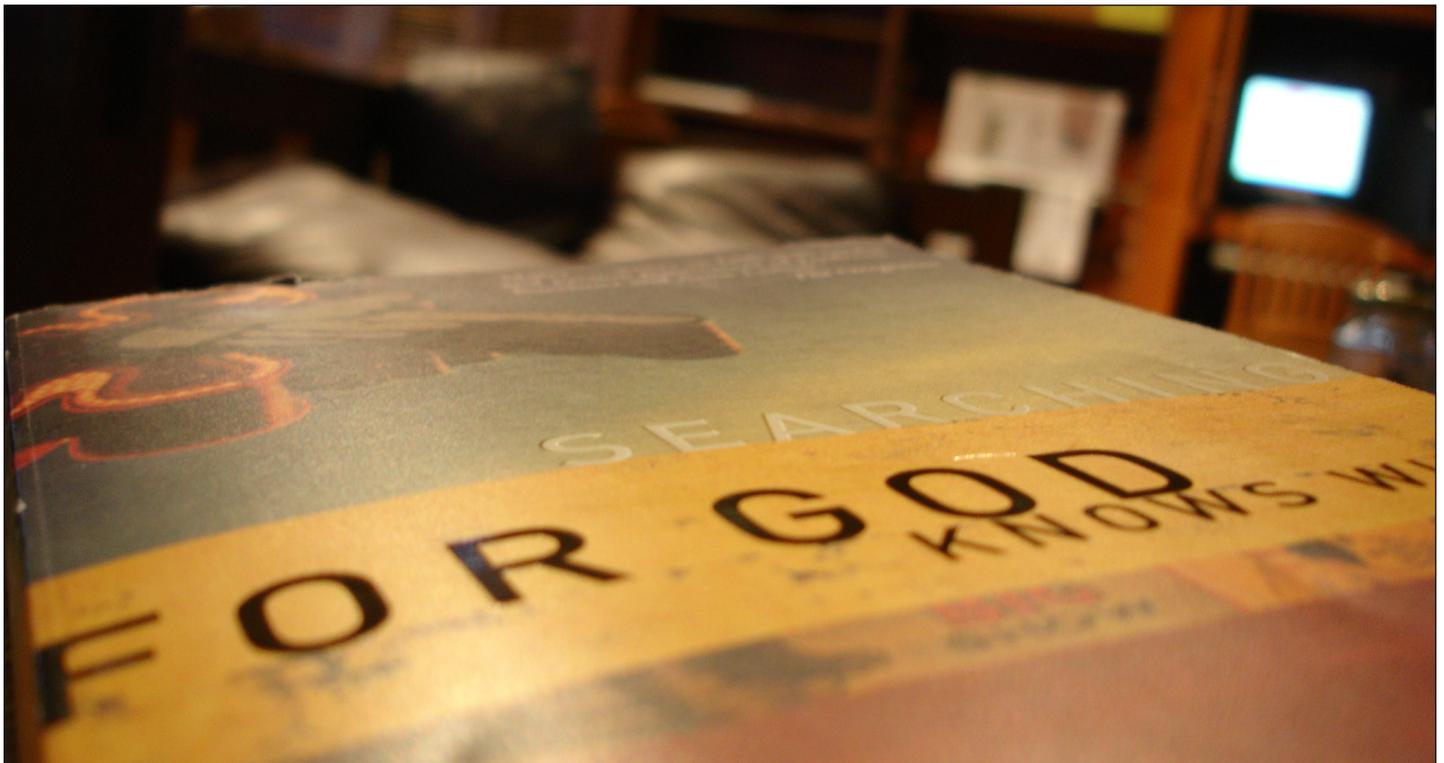


PHOTO BY WENDY SHAUN

A "PURE AND

Simeon Law

FAULTLESS" RELIGION¹

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock.

"And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell – and great was its fall!"²

At the closing of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said to the people gathered, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven."³

This is not to mean that we are saved by our works, but rather that profession of belief that is not followed by discipleship and action is lacking. Jesus uses the parable of two houses, one built on rock and the other upon sand to illustrate the relationship between faith and action.

The house built upon rock, which is like those who hear and act, withstands the rain and the wind. In contrast, the rain and wind destroy the house that was built upon sand, symbolizing those who hear but do not act.

As Christians, we are called by the authority of God into faithful action. In the context of governance, our views on public policy are informed by the heart of God who calls us. Something that is at the core of God's heart, as revealed in both the Old and New Testaments, is the importance of justice for those in vulnerable positions within society.

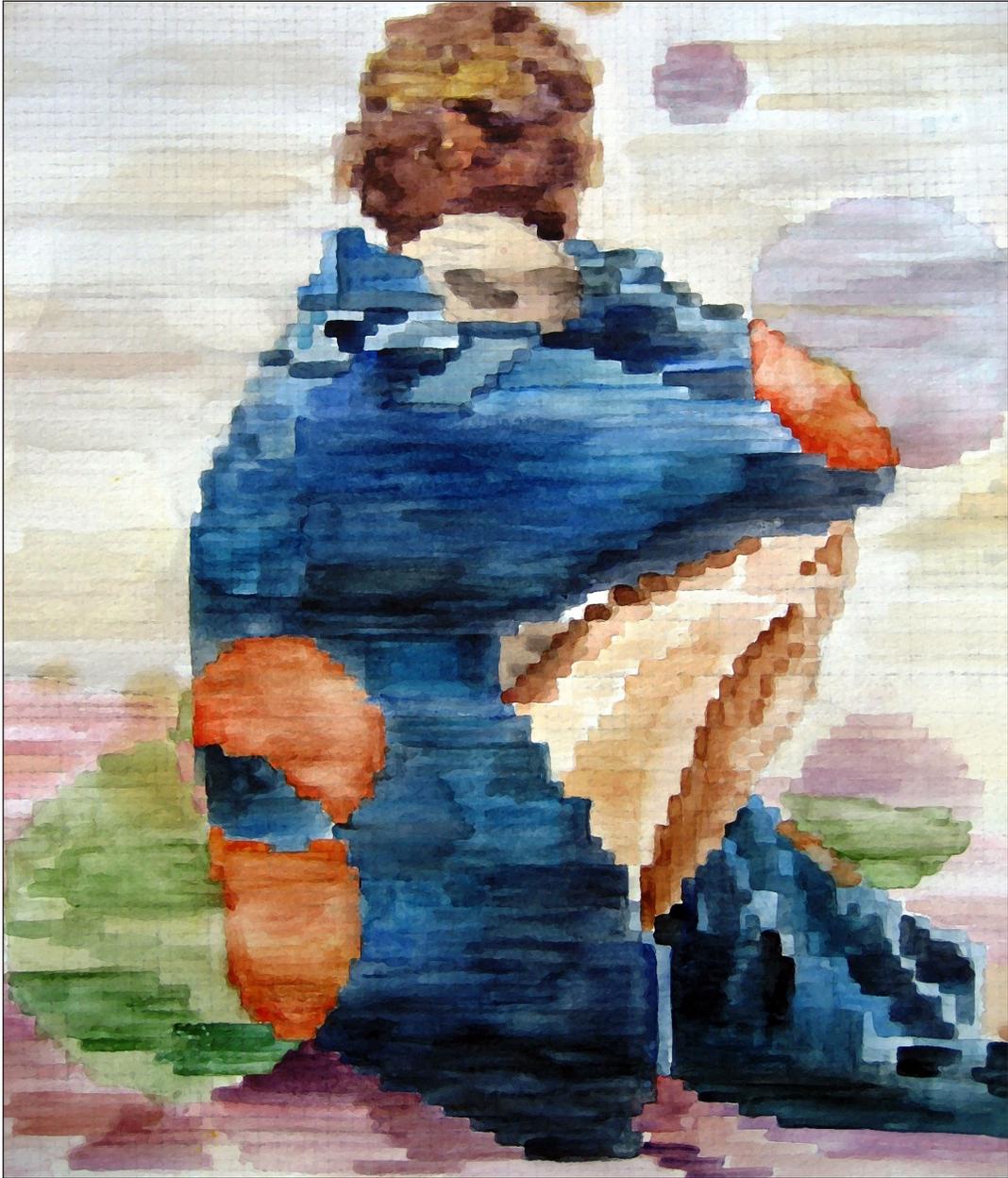
We as Christians fail to act in accordance with God's heart when we are silent about the plight of the poor and others who are vulnerable in the world. Instead of acting compassionately and pursuing justice for the oppressed we often find ourselves on the side of

the powerful, supporting the status quo of a society where there is no justice or relief for the oppressed.

One component of God's call to Christians regarding the oppressed is compassionate action. In the story of the Good Samaritan, a Samaritan traveling along a road sees a man lying beaten on the side of the street.

Moved by compassion, the Samaritan cares for the injured man's wounds and pays for his stay at an inn. Jesus tells us that it is through compassionate action that we love our neighbors.³ In Matthew, Jesus says, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father... for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me'... 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are member of my family, you did it to me."⁵ Jesus reveals that to care for the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, and the least of these is to care for him, and that failure to do so is a failure to care for our Lord. He ends by saying those who had failed to care for the least of these are sent into "eternal punishment."⁶ The strong language that Jesus uses reveals God's deep rooted love for the oppressed and the seriousness of our call act out of that love.

By studying the Psalms, we can come to further understand God's heart for justice for the oppressed and our call to pursue justice. The psalmist sees God as the source of justice in a society where the vulnerable are oppressed and neglected: "He judges the world with righteousness; he judges the people with equity. The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble... for the needy shall not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the poor perish forever."⁷ In this passage we see God as both a stronghold for the oppressed and hope for



ARTWORK BY JEANNE LEE

the poor. The description of God as a stronghold for the oppressed sends us a strong message that God seeks to protect the oppressed. From these verses we also see that God's justice is global and not limited by geographic or political boundaries: "He judges the world."⁸ Thus, as Christians, we are called to pursue justice for the oppressed beyond our national boundaries.

It is important to note that God does not merely offer consolation, but that God's justice means deliverance from those who oppress: "O Lord, you will hear the desire of the meek; you will strengthen their heart, you will incline your ear to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed, so that those from earth may strike terror no more." God through the prophet Isaiah declares to the people: "is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bounds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor in your house when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?"⁹ Our reaction to injustice is both compassion and justice. Out of compassion we are called to provide for the needs of the oppressed: to feed the hungry, to cloth the naked, and house the homeless. In the pursuit of justice, we are summoned to bring down structures of oppression. Isaiah does not call the people to simply help carry the burden of the yoke but rather the phrase he uses is, "to break every yoke." It is not enough to only act with compassion without seeking to address the injustices that oppress.

Seeking justice often requires us to speak against the status quo and rebuke those who are in places of power. The prophet Amos rebukes the Israelites for "selling the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals – they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way..."¹⁰ His rebuke of the entire nation does not come from a position of status and power within the society. Amos is not dressed in royal robes but describes himself as a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees.¹¹ From a position outside of the established authority structure, Amos calls the Israelites to "hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate..."¹² During the time of Amos, the gate was a place where the elders and leaders gathered and made judgments. Thus the call of Amos is directed, but not limited, to those in authority who

have the power and responsibility to act justly. Amos makes a clear connection between injustice and sin. The establishment of justice is a direct consequence of hating evil and loving good. The call to pursue justice inevitably places us in a position to speak out against socially-accepted practices that oppress the vulnerable and to rebuke leaders that support them or do nothing to bring justice for the oppressed.

It is wrong to believe that as Christians we are to quietly follow all authority. The examples of the prophets show the model of a faithful servant of God rebuking the people of Israel, including those in power. Prophets are often seen as the mouthpieces of God. Thus, if we are to believe our places as Christians is to quietly follow instead of speaking up for justice, we are silencing the voice of God in the presence of sin. The respect of authority should never come at the cost of obeying the commands of God. Romans 13:1-7 should not be used as a justification for quietly standing by. Paul's exhortation to "... be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God"¹³ is not an exhortation to disobey the commands of God. This passage is built upon the idea that God uses authorities to establish the justice of God, not subvert it. In Acts, Peter and John are brought before the Council and ordered to cease teaching in the name of Jesus Christ. If we are supposed to quietly submit to all authority even when they subvert the commandments of God, then Peter and John would have walked away and the Church may not exist today. Instead, their response to the Council is, "Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard,"¹⁴ and instead of ceasing to teach they return to their followers and pray for boldness!¹⁵ As Christians in the 21st century, do we have the prophetic sight to see God's truth in the midst of a fallen world, and do we have the boldness to act upon it?

In our modern world, immigrants are often in a position of being amongst the least of these, much like they were in the times of the Old Testament. In America, policies dealing with foreigners and immigration are hotly contested in the public sphere, yet it is an issue of justice that Christians are often disturbingly silent on. The Bible is far from being void of stories about immigrants and foreigners. One

such person is Ruth, a Moabite widow residing in Israel, with a doubly vulnerable status of being both a resident alien and a widow. When she gathers the gleanings from Boaz's field, she is exercising a right provided by the laws given to the Israelites by God. Instead of kicking Ruth out of his field, Boaz reacts with compassion. He tells her to continue gleaning in his field, orders his young men to leave her alone, and to drink the water drawn by them.¹⁶ The story of Ruth reveals laws catering to the vulnerable in society that God gave in the Old Testament.

While most Bible translations lack the word "immigrant," the same concept is captured by various translations as "alien," "resident alien," "sojourner," and "foreigner." The laws that speak about the "alien" give Christians a theological basis upon which we approach governmental policies and church practices that effect immigrants. Leviticus 19:33-34 reads, "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." It is significant that the Israelites are called to treat resident aliens, those from other groups who live among them, as themselves. The command is consistent with the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves but is inconsistent with modern notions of nationality and race which often serve as barriers for equity in both treatment from the Church and in legislation. The command to not oppress the alien is yet another call for us to seek justice on behalf of the vulnerable. In our American context, it includes seeking justice on behalf of immigrants, and other laborers, who are paid off the books for below minimum wage. It also compels us to seek justice for sweatshop workers and other exploited overseas labor employed by American companies. Where is the cry of outrage and the pursuit of justice? The prophet Isaiah seems to be speaking to us when he says, "... [you] oppress all your workers."¹⁷

The commandments regarding resident aliens do not place conditions based upon the legal status of the alien. In our modern context, we are often so easily caught up by the laws of our nation and disregard the laws of God which call us to care for everyone, even those seen as criminals. As Christians in the 21st century we need to wrestle with the reality that God's heart for global justice for the poor does not know

the distinction of illegal and legal aliens.

God's commandments about treatment of the resident alien and the poor are not simply negative, such as "do not oppress," but also positive: "For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard."¹⁸ The Israelites are called to take action to ensure the welfare of the poor, observing a Sabbath year and sacrificing an entire year's of crops. This commandment offers a stark contrast to a discourse on immigration which is focused solely on the maintenance and protection of our own welfare and safety without regard for that of the immigrant. The large economic sacrifices that these passages call for underscore the importance of caring for the poor and other vulnerable peoples and point back to God's heart for bringing justice to the oppressed.

In a more general commandment, God calls his people to leave a portion of every crop for the poor and the resident alien, people who lack the means of subsistence. "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyards; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am your Lord God."¹⁹ In a similar commandment found in Deuteronomy 24, the list of vulnerable peoples is expanded to include orphans and widows. This expanded list points to the fact that what binds these groups of people together is their vulnerable status and that the commandment is not limited to a given set of people but rather all vulnerable peoples.

As the Church, we need to critically inspect our faith and our lives to see what ways we are not in line with God's heart for justice and compassion. A plumb line, a tool consisting of a weight attached to a string, is used to see whether a wall is straight. In Amos, God uses the image of a plumb line that is set in the midst of the people to describe the judgment of the people against the Truth of God. Likewise, we must seek out the places in which our faith is not in line with God's will. Often as Christians on campus we complain of persecution by professors who are openly antagonistic towards those of Christian faith. Yet there seems to be a sickly irony in the reality that we Christians are often the ones who are in the role of the persecutor. We are

the persecutors when we ignore the plight of the poor and, by supporting industries that rely of sweatshop labor, complicit with their oppression. What weight do our claims of being pro-Life have when we are silent about the oppression, starvation, and murder of peoples across the world? The late Pope John Paul II was an advocate of what is often called a Complete Life Ethic. This concept was based in the belief that being pro-life extends beyond advocacy for the unborn to other issues of "life" such as advocacy for refugees, the homeless, the poor, victims of violence, the elderly, immigrants, and opposition to violence. A common adage is that as persecution of Christians increases, the church always grows. What happens then when persecution and neglect by the church increases? One thing is sure, God tells us that when we seek justice and act with compassion, "then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and he will say, Here I am..."²⁰

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- ¹ James 1:27
- ² Matthew 7:24-27
- ³ Matthew 7:21
- ⁴ Luke 10:25-37
- ⁵ Matthew 25:34-36, 40
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- ⁷ Psalm 9:7-9, 18
- ⁸ Psalm 10:17-18
- ⁹ Isaiah 58:6-7
- ¹⁰ Amos 2:6-7
- ¹¹ Amos 7:14
- ¹² Amos 5:15
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- ¹⁵ Acts 4:29
- ¹⁶ Ruth 2
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PHOTO BY RICHARDSON KILIS

THANK YOU FOR SMOKING

Joshua Pothen

Challenging Belief

"Michael Jordan plays ball. Charles Manson kills people. I talk." This quote is one of many witty lines from the movie *Thank You For Smoking*, an independent satirical comedy now available on DVD.

The story revolves around the life of Nick Naylor, a public lobbyist for the tobacco industry. Nick would normally find it difficult to get anyone to like him, whether it be his son, the press, or the public. Yet the film shows him repeatedly walking into situations that should ruin his image and emerging unscathed and idolized, making us laugh in befuddled amazement at how he does it.

The brilliance of the film is that it does not really attack the tobacco industry. Instead, it tackles how poorly we determine what to believe. Nick's job is not really to defend tobacco, but to persuade people to believe him. This idea is encapsulated best in his line about why he works for the tobacco industry: "If you can do tobacco, you can do anything." So when Nick opens his mouth and wows the audience, his methods and logic are hilarious precisely because people use them today to support their beliefs—even if those beliefs are wrong.

One example of Nick's tactics occurs at the beginning of the movie, when he appears on a talk show with Robin, an 18-year-old smoker suffering from lung cancer. Given that this could quickly turn into a losing battle, Nick immediately grabs control of the conversation and asks, "How would big tobacco profit off the death of this young man? It's in our best interests to keep Robin alive and smoking!" Needless to say, by the end of the show he has the audience cheering and clapping.



PHOTO BY NATHAN CHUN

What Naylor is saying sounds wonderful, but there's one problem: he has changed the subject. It's like a young boy with a baseball bat telling you he didn't break your window because he would not want to get in trouble. It does not matter if the boy wants to get in trouble or not. Few people do. All that matters is whether or not he hit the ball into the window. Similarly in Nick's situation, the question is not whether tobacco companies want their consumers to die, but whether their cigarettes cause health problems.

Another example of Nick's spin tactics occurs when he goes to his son's class to talk about his job. As soon as he explains what he does, a little girl quips, "My mommy says cigarettes kill." Nick then asks, "Now, is your Mommy a doctor?" The girl responds no. "A scientific researcher of some kind?" The child answers no again. "Well, she doesn't exactly sound like a credible expert, now does she?" Speechless, the little

girl slumps down in her seat.

Here Nick uses a logical fallacy known as an *ad hominem* argument, which states that a claim made by a person without authority is wrong. Obviously this statement is not true. You do not have to be a doctor to know that setting your body on fire could kill you.

The opposite extreme of the *ad hominem* fallacy is that an expert is always right about claims in his or her field. However, we must consider the possibility that they could be wrong.

If all this sounds abstract and inapplicable, think again. We live in a world where prominent figures are trying to persuade you to their point of view. Al Gore wants us to believe that global warming will destroy the world in another fifty years. President Bush wants us to believe that staying in Iraq is the only way to win. Tom Cruise wants us to believe psychiatry is pseudoscience.

Each of these individuals resorts to logic and/or evidence to prove that he or she is right. But we are so constantly bombarded with both information and "disinformation" that determining what is right is difficult. Thus instead of carefully evaluating their

reasoning and logic, we often side with what sounds right. But as Nick Naylor teaches us, there can be a big difference between what sounds right and the truth.

Now that I've said all that, I hope you all still want to see TYFS, either to do some deep thinking or to have a good time. I've discussed scenes you can see in the movie's trailer so as not to spoil too much for you. So grab some popcorn and some friends, watch, and enjoy. And while you're laughing, think about how to avoid being tricked by the Nick Naylor of the world.

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PHOTOGRAPHY

Whitney Stich

“Kendra’s Hike”, “High Hopes”

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart”

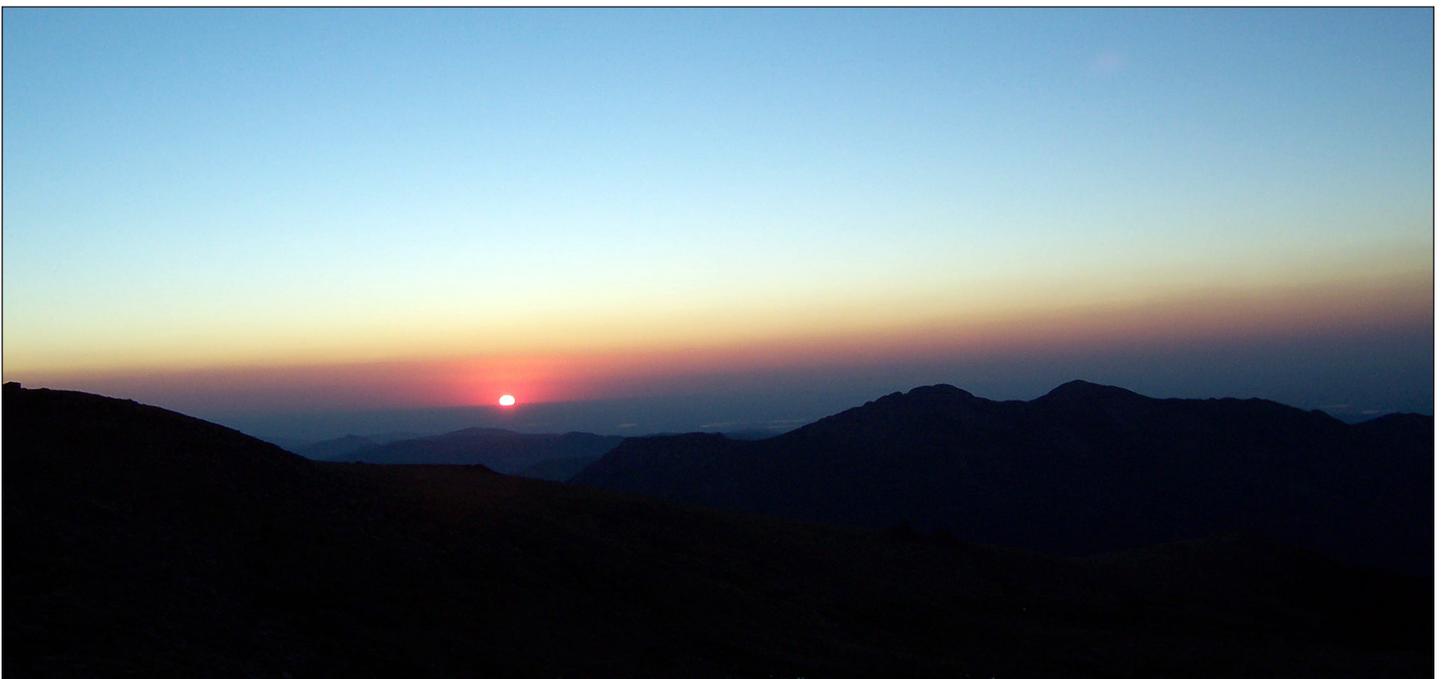
—Jeremiah 29:13

Notre Dame Cathedral,
Paris, France 2005

“I lift my eyes to the hills— where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.”

—Psalm 121:1-2

Rocky Mountain National
Park, 2006



THE GOSPEL CODE

Henry Wen

```
public final class God extends Nothing {
    Sin sin= null;
    Person i= new Person();
    int righteousness= Integer.MAX_VALUE+1;

    public boolean giveOnlySon(Sin mySin, int myRighteousness) {
        if (i.believeInChrist()) {
            this.sin= mySin;
            mySin.close();
            myRighteousness= this.righteousness;
            return true;
        }
        else
            return false;
    }
}

while(i.breathe && !i.believeInChrist()) {
    if ((System.in).equals("Yes"))
        believeInChrist= true;
    for (;God_So_Loved_The_World;)
        boolean myLife= God.giveOnlySon(mySin, myRighteousness);
}
```

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

—John 3:16 (NIV)

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