volume 5, number 2
winter 2009

the harvard ichthus

a student journal of christian thought at harvard college

An Interview with Francis Collins

Questions by the staff of *The Ichthus*

On Not Being Narrow-Minded

Nick Nowalk

Features:

A Little Bit of Immortality:
The Mysterious Redemption of Karamazov

Opinion:

Untainted, but not Untested •
On The Timelessness Argument Against
Theological Fatalism • A Heroic Joy

Poetry & Fiction:

Small Things • The Poet's Corner #80 •
The Solar Hour

Last Things:
Façades

the fish tank

the blog of the harvard ichthus.

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a student journal of christian thought at harvard college

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the harvard ichthus is made possible in part by contributions from the Cecil B. Day Foundation, the Undergraduate Council, the Memorial Church, and generous alumni

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Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae

Editor's Note

The Vision

For my last-ever editor's note, I'd like to tell a story about why The Ichthus*'s mission is important:*

My sleep last night was not its usual dreamless gray, and instead I saw an angel in vivid Technicolor, so much more saturated and heart-achy than it ever could have been in eyes-open-real-life. She was just like Updike had told me she would be: "weighty with Max Planck's quanta, vivid with hair, opaque in the dawn light, robed in real linen spun on a definite loom." She interrupted my dream-within-a-dream and coughed loudly until I stirred.

"***," I muttered, rubbing the sleep out of my eyes. "You're an angel."

"Mhm."

"And you've been sent by He who made all things?"

"Mhm."

"Then tell me why He wakes me this night," I said. "Am I to proclaim as prophet the fiery tongues of His word? Does the Living God bid me serve as king over all I see? Will my pen speak Christ-inspired words to his people?"

"Maybe, maybe not." Her glow seemed dimmer now. "But know this: You are called."

"Maybe? Is there nothing definite to be done? Are all God's children free? Is Nineveh saved? Is there no Ark for me to build? If this is to be my burning bush, then let it be!"

Suddenly her hair turned to flames and lit my bedroom. Tongues of fire kissed the books on my shelf, singeing them. The blazing angel looked bored. She reached over to my bedstand and took my glass of water, pouring it over her head and putting out the fire. "Enough of that," she said.

"Sorry."

"These," she said. The angel gestured to the stacks of books on my desk: Barth, Calvin, Bonhoeffer, Augustine, Luther, Edwards, Aquinas, Schleiermacher, Tertullian. "Your calling. Speak to these dead men and see what kind of God-talk you can dredge up, both old and new. What you will make will fuel the rest of the human enterprise. It will make sense of yourselves in this grand, cosmic waltz. And it will send humanity forth with an awareness of its place and purpose in all history. Most importantly, you will be a steward of hope in a life that disciplines your kind into only seeing the world as it is and not re-imagining the world as it could be. Theologians — and artists and poets and inventors and musicians and dreamers of all stripes — are the greatest enemies of the status quo. They create the conditions of a new and coming world over and over again. This will be you."

"No. Tell Him I can't," I pleaded. "I'm a sham. I'm a fool. I can't write. I haven't the mind for it."

"God loves your mind," she said. "Learn to use it."

Samir Paul
Editor-in-Chief

Small Things

Maria Xia

Many small things would move me to remember
that once on an hour, young, I prayed to God
Asking for health, and such greased wheels of life
that would make the going easy as we aged.

I saw, once, a bird inside a warehouse,
and another time, a living snake left open
on the road. I remembered, then, the weeping,
a silent chorus. That was a prayer of sympathy.

Other times I was magnanimous.
In hot rage I'd push my face against
the wall and crush into my palms the words
Forgive them for they know not what they do.

And when the water, churning, pounded cliffs
and mountains threw the sunlight into poles,
and just one drop of dew on grass reflected
the Western sky, I said, *Amen*, as well.

But today, this day, is mild and is slow.
There is no want, no grief, that I remember.
I start to hear a prayer, very soft,
Our Heavenly Father, but there it ends.

Again, I hear, *Heavenly Father*,
and nothing follows. Once again,
Heavenly —
And then, *Father* —
And *Father* —
once again.

Maria Xia '11 is an English concentrator living in Mather House.

The Dispatch III: W

Anne Goetz — Harvard *Ichthus*

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42).

The reasons for gathering as a church have not changed since the first believers were inspired at Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit. When we gather together, we are still to devote ourselves to teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of the bread, and to prayer. Three of these are easily understandable — of course we must learn how to live the Christian life from those more experienced than us, support each other in this great undertaking, and reach out in prayer to our Creator and Redeemer.

But why the breaking of the bread? Why is this so tremendously important? The Eucharist can seem like a relic of pagan ritual meaninglessly preserved into the present. Firstly, the Eucharist is a physical memorial of the concreteness, the bodiliness, of Christ's death and resurrection. Mystery surrounds what happens during the breaking of the bread, but at the very least, physically eating reminds us that Christianity is not just a religion of airy philosophizing, but is founded on material facts about something that happened to one particular body two thousand years ago. And if the Eucharist is something more than a memorial, then here, too, there is another intermingling of the material and the spiritual and ultimately holy. The bread and the wine do not just touch our bodies, but touch our very souls, transforming us with God's living power.

Secondly, in eating and drinking the Bread and the Wine, which literally, spiritually, or symbolically have become Christ's Body and Blood, we enter into the body of believers that spans across the world and time. We join with all who have ever received the Eucharist in remembering Christ's death, celebrating his resurrection, and awaiting his coming in glory, united in our single hope under our single Lord. Because the great mystery of our faith, our salvation, was accomplished by a bodily death and resurrection, the whole physical world has been charged with significance. As we eat the bread and drink the wine, we look forward to a time when the whole church will be perfectly united, and Christ will be all in all.

Anne Goetz '11 is an English concentrator in Pforzheimer House. She is the Books and Arts editor of The Ichthus.

Jessica Jinju Pottenger — Princeton *Revisions*

As humans, we suffer from forgetfulness and unfaithfulness. Without discipline and cultivated habits, our hearts stray from our commitments and we often find that our own willpower is not enough to keep us from sin. We need community to keep us accountable to ourselves and to the God in whom we profess faith.

The author of Hebrews knew that human nature was unfaithful when he wrote, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25). The Christians the author of Hebrews was addressing were suffering terribly, and needed a kind of support that could only come from the Spirit and from each other.

In today's world, those struggling with spiritual matters often find themselves in a similar situation to that of the early Christians in Hebrews. Life is difficult, and it is impossible to endure it alone. Without having a community that meets regularly, it is tempting, often too tempting, for individual Christians to wish they were back in Egypt, to wish they were not wandering the desert waiting for God to deliver them to the Promised Land.

Going to church is, in short, a necessary part of Christian living because living cannot be done alone. Living for Christ often means enduring untidy, tangled relationships with each other, and lovingly working them out. Going to church is a necessary but not sufficient condition to such a lifestyle, as the mere act of going, while important, should only lead up to the climax of getting involved with each other and in each other's lives so that we can truly encourage each other towards Christ. Just as iron sharpens iron, so too do members of a community sharpen each other – and it is only out in the messy and difficult world that God can work to break us and make us like His Son.

Jessica Jinjiu Pottenger '10 is majoring in the Woodrow Wilson School of International Relations and Public Policy at Princeton University. She is a senior contributor to Princeton's Christian magazine Revisions.

Why Go To Church?

Sarah White — Dartmouth *Apologia*

"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:46-47)

Since the days of the early church as recorded by Luke in the book of Acts, the church has had both an internal and an external orientation. On the one hand, the church has served to present the gospel as well as to minister to the worldly needs of the entire community. On the other hand, the church has a special ministry to its members to encourage their growth in relationship with Christ. This can be seen in the verse quoted above, which describes both the intramural fellowship of the believers and the fruits of their outreach. Attending a weekly church meeting can be beneficial to seekers who are interested in learning more about God, and it is also important for Christians desiring to grow in community with other believers.

In the modern world, one of the best places to hear the gospel message is at church. Through sermons and other Bible studies, the church provides gospel teaching for those who are unacquainted with the message as well as for those who seek continuing growth through the study of God's word. It is also important for Christians to have fellowship with one another. Many Christians interact with other believers only at church, while most of their time at work and in their communities is spent with those who do not believe. In order to meet, interact with, and build relationships with each other, it is often necessary for Christians to purposefully seek each other out. The church is just such a purposeful community, where Christians can not only interact with and encourage each other, but also build relationships where they can disciple one another and help each other grow. Furthermore, the church organization is an effective way for Christians to gather together in order to serve each other and the larger community. As Christians strive to follow Christ in the world, it is essential that they meet together as His body to learn, disciple, encourage, and serve.

Sarah White '11 is an English major and Russian minor. She is the Managing Editor of the Dartmouth Apologia.

Michael Giuffrida — Yale *Logos*

For me, the question "Why go to church?" is, on the surface, easy to answer. I am a Catholic, and we Catholics are required to attend mass every Sunday. All Sundays are holy days of obligation, and observance by attending Mass is mandated by Canon Law. Skipping Mass when one is able to attend is a sin.

This is all true, but not very insightful. Clearly, church should not be solely an obligation. In fact, we, most of whom are no longer persecuted for our Christian beliefs, ought to see church as a privilege.

Until Constantine's Edict of Milan granted freedom of religion, Christians were put to death for celebrating the Eucharist. Yet Christians still regularly participated in worship, risking their lives for the opportunity to meet and celebrate the Eucharist, an opportunity we take for granted and sometimes pass up. Either our forebears in church history were insane, or there is something in this mode of worship worth dying for.

Church is a great opportunity to gather with fellow believers, worship together, and introduce neophytes into our community. But, more importantly, by sharing in the Eucharist, we share and become members of Christ's Body. We take part in the sacrifice on Calvary through the Eucharistic liturgy. By obeying Christ's commandment to "do this in memory of me" (Luke 22:19) we are redeemed. To achieve this redemption and eternal life in Christ, early Christians risked and sometimes sacrificed their earthly lives.

Not to risk our lives to meet in church, not even to devote an hour of our week to God, not to wish to partake regularly in this act of redemption, is tantamount to turning our backs to Christ, which is precisely what we do whenever we sin. If we understand the redemptive power of the Eucharist, and if we hear Christ's commandment, then we will not only attend church regularly, but do so willingly and eagerly.

We are baptized into a community, the Body of Christ, the Church. With these members we must worship, and "not stay away from our assembly... but encourage one another" (Hebrews 10:25). We go to church because we all comprise the Body of Christ, and we wish to say Yes to Him.

Michael Giuffrida is a sophomore Computer Science major in Calhoun College. He is the Executive Director of the Logos.

An Interview with Francis Collins

Questions by the staff of The Ichthus

You are well known for advocating a view called theistic evolution. Could you tell us briefly what theistic evolution is and what guiding principles led you to this view? What is the relationship between God and evolution? Did God somehow "guide" it? What would you say to Christians who don't believe in evolution? How certain is the scientific evidence for evolution? Is it a "cop-out" not to interpret the Genesis creation story literally?

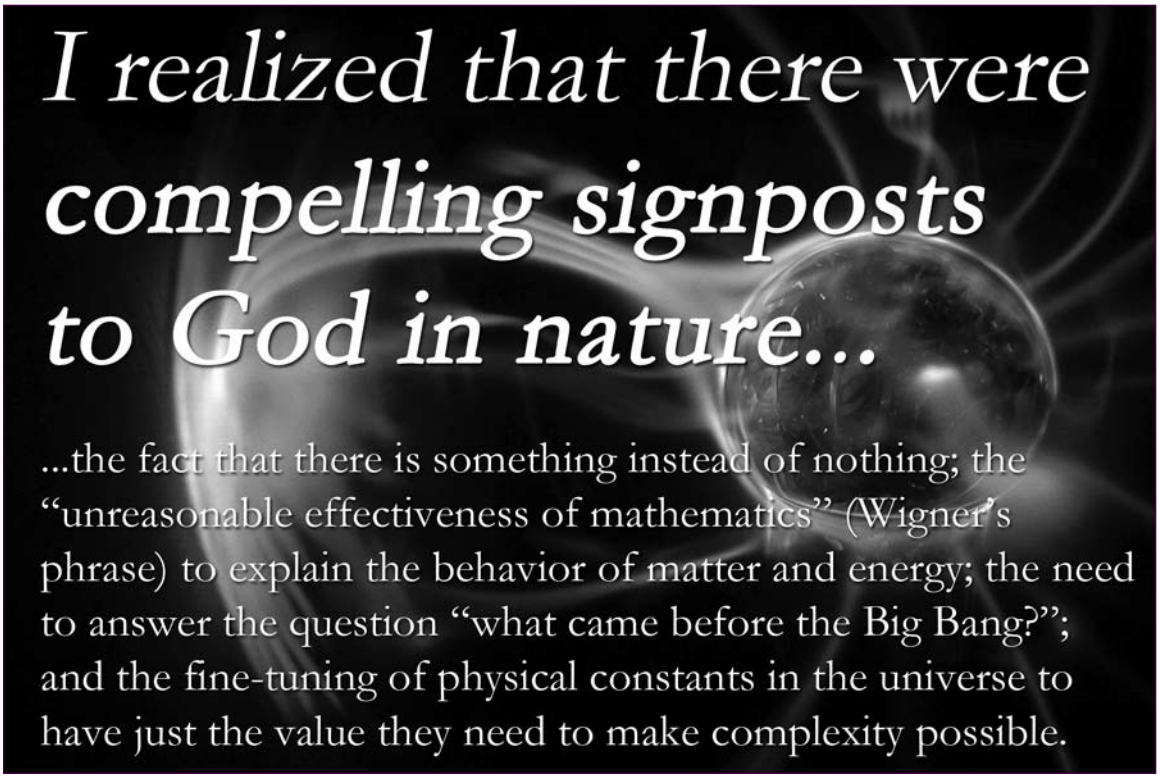
Theistic evolution, or BioLogos as I prefer to call it, embraces the evidence of biological evolution. That evidence grows more overwhelming every day, especially on the basis of the study of the genomes of many organisms, providing the kind of digital record of descent from a common ancestor that Darwin could never have imagined. But that answers the "how" question about the marvelous diversity of life on earth, it doesn't answer the "why" question. In my book The Language of God, and soon to be further explored in a web site addressing the most frequently asked questions about science and faith (www.biologos.org), the case is made that evolution was God's mechanism for creation, including the ultimate development of human beings. As for the marvelous and profound Genesis creation story, it has much to teach us about the nature of God and the nature of humans. But thoughtful and highly educated believers like Augustine in 400 AD did not consider it appropriate to interpret Genesis 1 and 2 literally, so it is perplexing indeed that many conservative Christians have found it necessary to do so for the last 150 years.

Can you describe the argument for a moral law that drew you to Christianity? Why was it so convincing? Do you think that evolution can adequately account for morality? What would the consequences for faith in God be if evolution could account for morality?

One of the most notable characteristics of humanity, across centuries, cultures, and geographic locations, is a universal grasp of the concept of right and wrong, and an inner voice that calls us to do the right thing. This is often referred to as the Moral Law. We may not always agree on what behaviors are right (and this is heavily influenced by culture), but we generally agree that we should try to do good and avoid evil. When we break the Law (which, if we are honest, is frequently), we make excuses for ourselves, only further demonstrating that we feel obligated to the Law.

Evolutionary arguments, which ultimately must support reproductive fitness as the overarching goal, may explain some parts of this human urge toward altruism – especially if your sacrificial acts are offered to your relatives, or to those from whom you might expect some future reciprocal benefits. Martin Nowak has recently extended those models to show that evolution could even favor altruism directed at all members of your own group. But these evolutionary models all require hostility to outgroups within your species. Somehow we humans didn't seem to get that memo – in fact, we especially admire examples where individuals act sacrificially for

others from outgroups that they don't even know – think of Mother Teresa, or Oskar Schindler, or the Good Samaritan. Dismissing these acts of radical altruism as some sort of evolutionary misfiring, which is the usual response from an atheist, ought to at least be viewed skeptically as a bit of a "just so" story. And if these noble acts are frankly a scandal to reproductive fitness, might they instead be a pointer toward a holy, loving, and caring God, who instilled this Moral Law into each of us as a sign of our special nature, and as a call to relationship with the Almighty?



Don't get me wrong, or interpret this argument as an example of "God of the gaps". If evolutionary mechanisms turn out to be sufficient to explain the Moral Law, that still doesn't rule out God's hand in the process. After all, if God is the author of evolution anyway, it would make sense that a holy God who cares about good and evil would have used the evolutionary process to instill the Moral Law into humanity.

In your book, The Language of God, you explain how your intellectual quest to confirm your atheism resulted in belief in the God of the Bible. What were some of the most significant turning points along this journey? Why did you leave atheism for Christianity?

I realized that there were compelling signposts to God in nature. Here are just a few examples: the fact that there is something instead of nothing; the "unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics" (Wigner's phrase) to explain the behavior of matter and energy; the need to answer the question "what came before the Big Bang?"; and the fine-tuning of physical constants in the universe to have just the value they need to make complexity possible. With my eyes opened by the first chapter of C.S. Lewis's book "Mere Christianity", I also realized that there was no simple materialistic explanation for the existence of right and wrong, nor for our universal human calling to be moral beings. While these are not proofs of God's existence, and I believe no such proofs will be found, the combination of these arguments led me to realize that atheism is the most fundamentalist and least rational of all of the worldview options. In Chesterton's words, "Atheism is the most daring of all dogmas, for it is the assertion of a universal negative."

Having come to the point of seeing the existence of God as a compelling conclusion, I then was curious to discover what God was like. For that purpose I studied the world's religions to see what they had to say. When I encountered the person of Jesus Christ, my life changed. I could see that this was a man like no other – who not only claimed to know God, but to be God. I was astounded to learn that the historical evidence for Jesus' life, death, and resurrection was compelling. And I realized that Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross provided a solution to my increasing distress at never being able to approach a holy God because of my own unholiness.

Francis Collins is a former leader of the Human Genome Project, current director of the National Institutes of Health, and founder of The BioLogos Foundation.

Untainted, but not Untested

Roshni Patel

God crafted man with the unique ability to make choices, infusing meaning and life into his otherwise mundane existence. Choice is the essence of our being; it defines who we are, illuminating the complexities that lie in the depths of the human heart. Every choice is a vessel of divine potential waiting to be unleashed; our capacity to choose is the collision of all that is good and all that is evil within us, the possibility of our virtue. In 1644, John Milton argued forcefully against censorship in *Areopagitica*, one of history's most influential and impassioned philosophical defenses of free expression. Milton exposes an often-overlooked consequence of choice: evil. Duality, he argues, is the very nature of choice, and virtue is contingent upon the presence of evil.

Choices appear so simple and so ordinary that we often fail to recognize their complexity and the enormity of their consequences. Noah's act of building the ark defined his righteousness and enabled him to save mankind. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son defined his faith and made him the father of a nation. But for every decision to obey, for every act of faith, there exists a corresponding decision fueled by man's catastrophically potent ability to disrupt and to destroy. Adam was banished from the Garden of Eden for eating the forbidden fruit. Cain was marked a wanderer after murdering his brother. The Israelites were continually subjected to foreign powers as a result of their moral degradation. The prevalence of murder, rape, and abuse (by no means limited to the Bible) quickly reminds us of the incredible evil of which man is capable. Choices present a paradox; they are a beautiful source of life, showing us the incredible capacity to love that resides in the human heart; yet at the same time, they are the avenue to destruction and devastation. Why? Why would God allow us to make choices, knowing the consequences they inflict? Why would He equip man with such destructive potential?

The heart of Milton's argument is the idea that righteousness must be the fruit of a preceding choice. He writes, "Many there be that complain of divine Providence for suffering Adam to transgress. Foolish tongues! When God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had been else a mere artificial Adam, such an Adam as he is

in the motions." The essence of Adam's humanness lay in his free will. Though the forbidden fruit was the source of his downfall, it also constituted his virtue because it allowed him to make a choice. There can be no virtue in abstaining from evil when the abstention is simple mindless obedience, when it is the only option. Milton continues, "God therefore left him free, set before him a provoking object almost in his eyes; herein consisted his merit, herein the right of his reward, the praise of his abstinence. Wherefore did he create passions within us, pleasures round about us, but that these rightly tempered are the very ingredients of virtue?" Similarly, our own merit rests in our ability to make the choice to resist evil. Denied choice, we become mere puppets, artificial beings that act in mechanical obedience. Without choice, virtue vanishes into intangibility.

The complexity of choices results from the fact that they are nexus of evil and good. Milton writes that good and evil "grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is… involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil." He continues, "It was from the rind of one apple tasted that the knowledge of good and evil, as two twins cleaving together, leaped forth into the world. And perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evil, that is to say of knowing good by evil." Good and evil are two faces on the coin of humanity. They cannot be separated; they are the essential components that fabricate each choice. It is quite interesting that in Genesis 1 alone, "good" is mentioned seven times, with no mention of evil. Despite the fact that everything that God created was "good," evil rose to facilitate man's choice. Man could not legitimately choose God's good in the absence of a contradictory force. The fact that we cannot know good without the existence of evil by no means thwarts God's providence; rather, it explains why a wholly good God would permit such evil to exist. Evil, therefore, becomes the least expected ingredient of righteousness.

Society must directly engage and embody the complex and contradictory realities of this world rather than attempt to avoid and transcend them. Personal virtue demands knowledge of sin. Milton exposes the foolishness of those who attempt "to remove sin by removing the matter of sin." He concludes, "He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian." Virtue does not result from thoughtlessly doing what is good, but rather from purposefully resisting what is wrong. The man who is surrounded by the tempting pleasures of immorality but still consciously abstains is the man with legitimate virtue. God allows people to be surrounded with tangible temptations that can either lead to sin or to virtue. Milton explains, "Our faith and knowledge thrives by exercise… Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary." As Christians, we tend to shy away from the reality of sin. We tend to segregate, to eliminate all that is a source of potential evil. Yet in doing so, we cripple our virtue. I am by no means undermining the significance of group worship and study; however, I am pointing to the danger that lies in mechanically repeating a routine simply because it is considered the right thing to do. We become automata because it is easier to comply with what is right than it is to choose what is right in the face of adversity.

Denied choice, we become mere puppets, artificial beings that act in mechanical obedience. Without choice, virtue vanishes into intangibility.

Our greatest influence is transmitted through our choices; yet, in our attempt to eliminate sin, we have eliminated the choices that give substance to our virtue, and as a result we have become static. We are driven by fear of sin rather than by faith in God. Fear of sin causes us to be stagnant, whereas faith in God empowers us to be dynamic. True virtue is purified by the trials it confronts, not by the trials it avoids. A sheltered virtue is not worthy of respect because it is not merited by the choice to do evil; in order to develop, virtue must be tried. If sin is eliminated, choice is eliminated. If sin is eliminated, virtue is eliminated. The fundamental matter of good and evil alike resides in choice, and if you strip a man of his ability to choose between the two, you have removed both sin and virtue. Sincere virtue requires man to do that which is right in the face of evil. We are to remain untainted, but not untested.

Roshni Patel '13 lives in Canaday.

On The Timelessness Argument Against Theological Fatalism

Jordan Monge

"But that which God foreknows, it needs must be,
So says the best opinion of the clerks.
Witness some cleric perfect for his works,
That in the schools there's a great altercation
In this regard, and much high disputation…
Whether the fact of God's great foreknowing
Makes it right needful that I do a thing -
By needful, I mean, of necessity
Or else, if a free choice he granted me,
To do that same thing, or to do it not,
Though God foreknew before the thing was wrought;
Or if his knowing constrains never at all,
Except by necessity conditional."
William Chaucer in "The Canterbury Tales"

"If God is omniscient, ar

If God is omniscient, are our actions truly free? The Bible leaves no question of God's omniscience or our free will. Yet if God's knowledge is perfect, then it seems that He must know everything we will do before we do it. And if we have no alternative but to do what God already knows we will do, it looks like we have no choice in the matter. We are thus presented with a problem. The thesis that "infallible foreknowledge of a human act makes the act necessary and hence unfree" is known as theological fatalism.[1,2]

The argument for theological fatalism goes as follows:

1. God knows, with certainty, everything in the past, present, and future.
2. Therefore, at time t = -1, God knew that Jack would go up the hill at time t = 1.
3. Because the past is unchangeable, Jack cannot change God's knowledge at t = -1 that he would go up the hill at t = 1.
4. If Jack cannot choose to behave in a different way, then he does not have the ability to freely exercise his will in the matter.
5. Therefore, Jack cannot go up the hill freely.

A typical response to this problem is to declare that God is timeless and thus not capable of being understood within our conception of time. As C.S. Lewis puts in *Mere Christianity:*

> "Suppose God is outside and above the Time-line. In that case, what we call 'tomorrow' is visible to Him in just the same way as what we call today. All the days are 'Now' for Him. He does not remember you doing things yesterday, He simply sees you doing them: because, though you have lost yesterday, He has not. He does not 'foresee' you doing things tomorrow, He simply sees you doing them: because, though tomorrow is not yet there for you, it is for Him. You never supposed that your actions at this moment were any less free because God knows what you are doing. Well, He knows your tomorrow's actions in just the same way – because He is already in tomorrow and can simply watch you. In a sense, He does not know your action till you have done it: but then the moment at which you have done it is already 'Now' for Him."[3]

In the context of the above argument, it seems that Lewis denies the second premise because he believes that God's timelessness means He cannot be described as being (or knowing) *at* a particular time t. Perhaps this response even seems reasonable considering that God *created* the universe of space-time and thus (we might think) must exist outside of it. Yet Lewis's explanation of the nature of God's timelessness fails to resolve the issue because it is based on an inadequate understanding of God's perspective. It depends on the idea that God experiences everything in the present, *in* the now. Yet if He is *beyond* the time-line, then He isn't experiencing all

events as "in the now"; He should instead be seeing all of the points on the time-line at once. And if He is observing all the points on the time-line, then the points must be fixed in place. If the points are fixed in place, then it seems that it is outside

re our actions truly free?"

of our power to change them. God may not "foresee" our actions from his perspective, but he certainly "foresees" them from ours.

Although Lewis rejects premise 2 from God's perspective, it is still true from Jack's and our perspective. The claim is that because God is timeless, He cannot be characterized as knowing future events at a prior point *in* time. That is, God only knows what occurs at time t = 1 because he observes it happening at that time. Yet because He lies *beyond* the time-line and can observe the actions at all points on it, He should see the events at time t = 1 before they occur. A better characterization from our time-bound perspective is that God knows all the events at *all* points. At time = -1, God does know what Jack will do. At the point at which Jack is deliberating whether or not to go up the hill, God already knows the outcome he will choose.

There are a few ways to try to escape this problem. Lewis could reject the first premise and claim that God *chooses* not to observe the time-line beyond the particular point in time that Jack is experiencing. He could claim that even if God *knows* all of our actions, He does not *force* us to choose the particular action that we take. Yet both of these solutions would require arguments beyond God's timelessness. The argument by timelessness alone cannot resolve the apparent contradiction of foreknowledge and free will.

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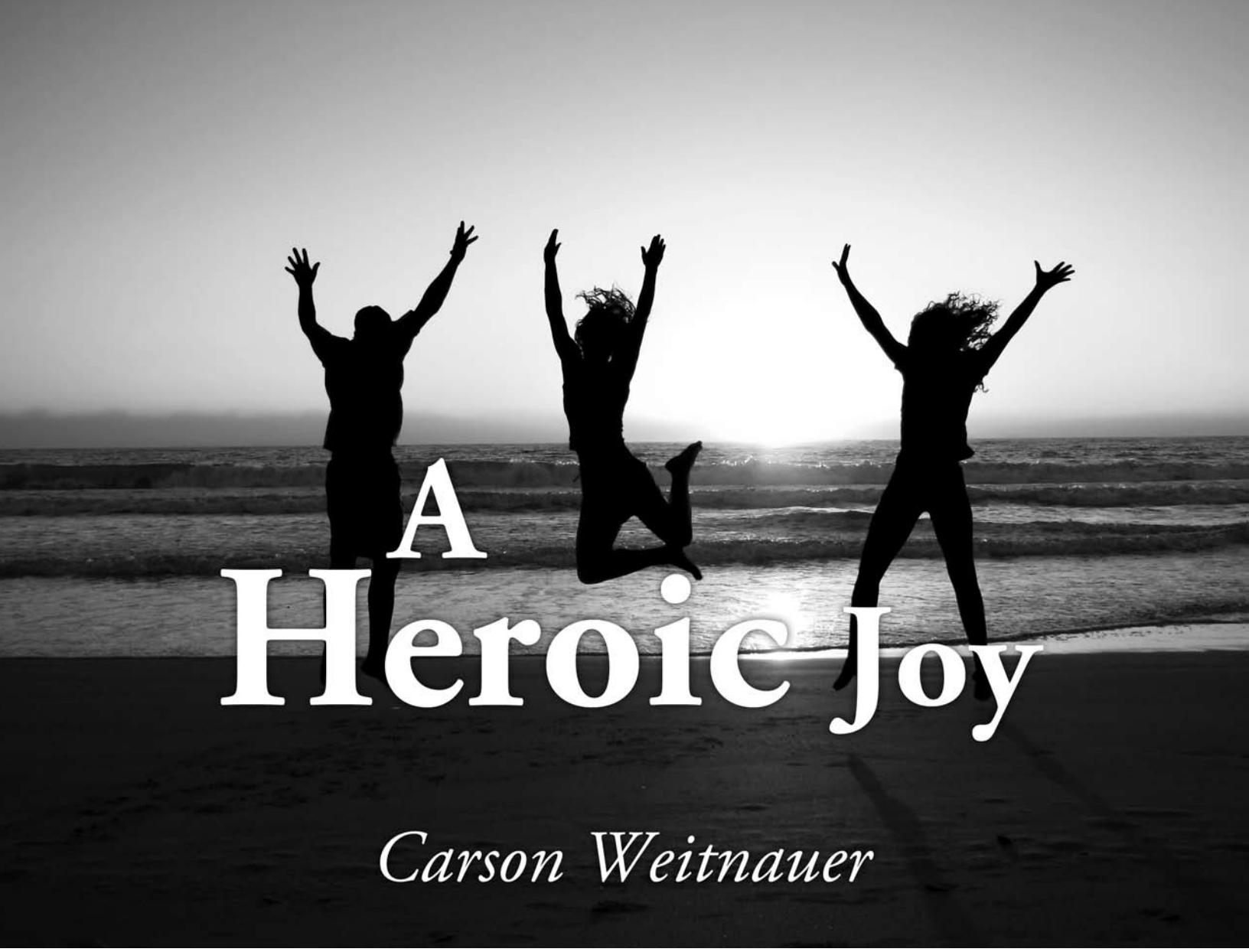
[1] Zabzebski, Linda. "Foreknowledge and Free Will." Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Mar 13, 2008 <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/free-will-foreknowledge/#2.5>.

[2] It is important to note that the lack of free will stems from *foreknowledge* and not from causal determinism. God's timeless nature implies that he should be aware of the future and what our actions will be, not that his infinite knowledge of the past enables him to predict by a causal chain what will occur. If it were the case that free will were denied because one's actions are contingent solely upon one's past experiences, then God would be entirely unnecessary to the discussion. Determinism alone would suffice. However, I am unaware of any passage in the Bible that would justify determinism, and therefore I will not discuss it here.

[3] Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*. HarperCollins Edition 2001. New York: HarperCollins, 2001. Print.

Jordan Monge '12, a Philosophy and Religious Studies concentrator living in Currier House, is the Opinions Editor of The Ichthus.



A Heroic Joy

Carson Weitnauer

Everyone wants to be happy. *How to be happy* – well, that can become a divisive topic. The happiest moments of my life have come from romantic dates with my fiancée, vacations with my family, hard-won games of ultimate Frisbee, and times of leisurely immersion in a book. Or, I think of special celebrations during the graduation weekends that concluded my high school and college days. But just try to imagine the last time you had so much fun at a church service!

Why is that? How did a religion that offers so many reasons to be happy develop communities so lacking in joy? In a spirit of good cheer, I'd like to skip over criticizing others and, instead, briefly review the reasons we have to celebrate. My conviction is that as we develop a *theology of joy*, God will transform us into a heroically joyful people.

To begin this theological project, we can start with the opening words of Scripture, which teaches that the whole universe, in all of its indescribable grandeur and awesome beauty, was created by an incredibly powerful and good God. The abundant extravagance of this creation involved making over 350,000 species of beetles alone. The apex of all God's creative work, though, was us – with spleens, brains that are 80 percent water, and twenty-some feet of intestines wrapped up inside. We are, by some terrific mystery, made in the very image of this Creator God. So before we even get out of Genesis 2, Christians have a *lot* to celebrate! After all, "and *God saw* that it was *good*" seven times.

Admittedly, evil and injustice make the third chapter of our Scriptures a sobering wake-up call. But the Bible offers us moral clarity and guidance for navigating an all-too-ambiguous and confusing world. Our answers to the burning question of our age won't have a paint-by-numbers simplicity, but let's be happy that Jesus taught us the Golden Rule! Moreover, after

battling night and day against injustice with all the goodness, love, and kindness we can muster from the strength that God provides, isn't it truly wonderful to get together with others to remember that God delivered a subversively fatal blow to evil through Christ's death and resurrection?

And this is just the beginning! The Bible gives us dozens of other reasons to be glad, from the gift of the Holy Spirit to the promise of heaven to a daily intimacy with our Father in heaven. We need to draw deeply from these sources of truth if we are to recover a thoroughgoing joy in our communities. As we recover these promises for our lives, we also need to become relentlessly *courageous* and *imaginative*.

We need to be courageous because theology is useless if it doesn't become deep-seated conviction. In the midst of adverse situations, it will take courageous, bold men and women to stand on and live out a joyful theology. Maintaining perspective is hardest when you get thrown into the mud. So without hardiness of character and close friends to encourage us, we're going to get pulled back into the same old way of life. Choosing joy, no matter what, because of who God is and what He has done, takes real nerve.

We're also going to need to imagine a different kind of joy. The syrupy-sweet, Jesus-is-a-friend-of-mine act isn't going to cut it. Standing out *like that* is just annoying. We need a resilient joy that can sustain us through suffering, loss, hardship, persecution, and sacrifice. We need an enduring joy that isn't rooted in material abundance or academic success or landing the hottest summer internship, a comforting joy that can coexist with feelings of grief, sadness, anger, and disappointment without being overwhelmed. In short, we need to recover and develop a genuinely *theological* set of reasons to be happy in Christ, the kind of ideas that can withstand any circumstances because they're rooted in the soil of Scripture.

I've outgrown some of my happiest childhood memories, precious as they are. And I've come to learn that circumstantial happiness really does come and go. But I know I'll never outgrow contemplating and celebrating the goodness of the Living God. Those are the truths that can sustain our joy in every situation. May our theology develop us into a heroically joyful people!

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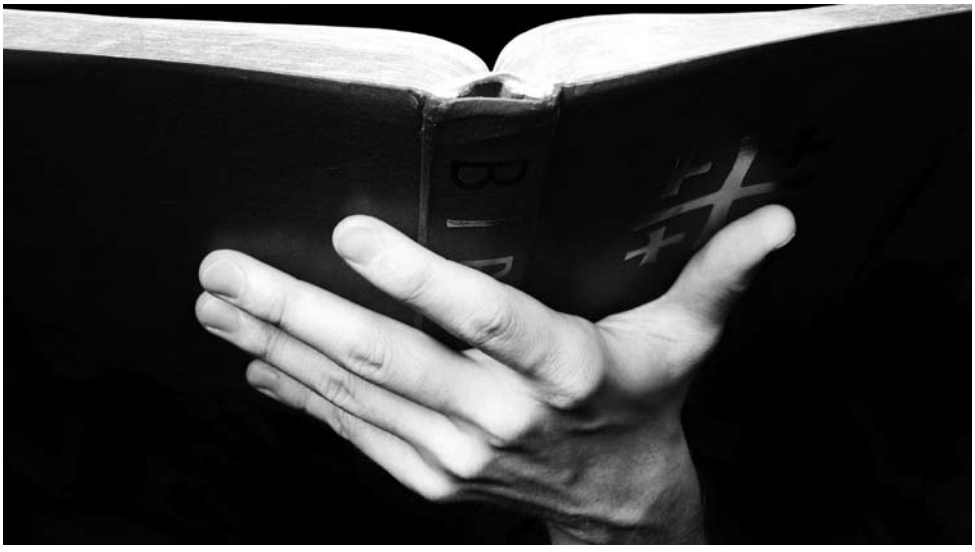
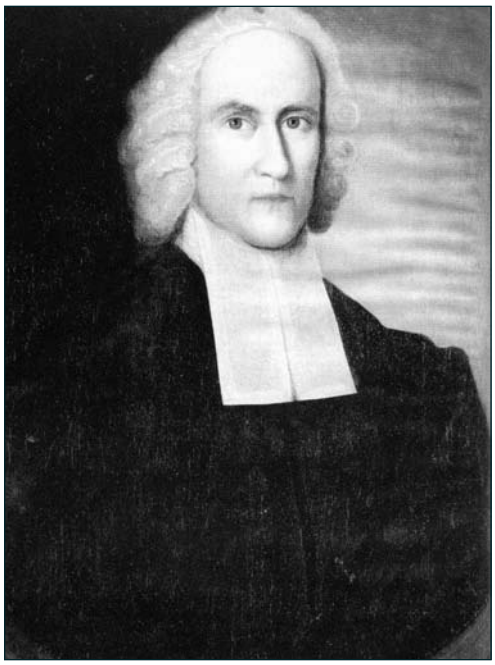


On Not Being Narrow-Minded

Nick Nowalk

"*There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on thinking and reflecting at all.*" - Michel Foucault



Few potential accusations can strike fear into the hearts of enlightened moderns as devastatingly as the charge of being "narrow-minded." Big-hearted tolerance and open-minded liberalism are very much in vogue in the public arena. These qualities are regularly equated with intellectual virtue. Christians, on the other hand, are frequently and derisively mocked as narrow – admittedly, sometimes with ample cause.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) had another interpretation, one opposed to every secular intuition and instinct. This uncompromising Puritan – who today, regrettably, is written off and remembered only for the sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"[1] – labored to demonstrate that the essence of narrow-mindedness was actually on display in the increasing tendency of Western culture to marginalize God from every area of human existence.[2] God was rarely denied outright by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, but He nevertheless was removed from the center of reality in all fields of inquiry. This cataclysmic shift was regarded by Edwards to be a profound tragedy, one that he lamented and fought against his whole life:

> 'Tis a strange disposition that men have to thrust God out of the world, or to put Him as far out of sight as they can, and to have in no respect immediately and sensibly to do with Him. Therefore so many schemes have been drawn to exclude, or extenuate, or remove at a great distance, any influence of the Divine Being.[3]

As Michael McClymond has pointed out, "[F]or adherents of the moderate Enlightenment, a little religion was a good thing. Yet Edwards abhorred moderation in religion…He was the self-appointed apostle to the spiritually indifferent."[4] Allen Guelzo has argued that Edwards was "the most consistently unsecular thinker in American history."[5] Such sentiments do not, I suspect, possess much allure for contemporary readers who are comfortable with spirituality in small doses and who tend to agree with Yeats that the best lack all conviction. By that measure, Edwards comes down to us through the ages as the devil incarnate.

So it would be easy to dismiss Edwards' challenge with a flippant, casual wave of the hand when he indicts the modern mindset as inherently narrow-minded. I plead with you to resist that urge. A respectful yet critical consideration of a perspective of pure "otherness" – even if ultimately rejected and deemed ridiculous – is a healthy experience for most of us occasionally to endure. As C. S. Lewis has so poignantly urged, it is actually we moderns (naturally prone to "chronological snobbery" as we are) who need such counter-intuitive perspectives most desperately:

> Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books

> that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books. All contemporary writers share to some extent the contemporary outlook – even those, like myself, who seem most opposed to it. Nothing strikes me more when I read the controversies of past ages than the fact that both sides were usually assuming without question a good deal which we should now absolutely deny. They thought that they were as completely opposed as two sides could be, but in fact they were all the time secretly united – united with each other and against earlier and later ages – by a great mass of common assumptions.... None of us can fully escape this blindness, but we shall certainly increase it, and weaken our guard against it, if we read only modern books.... The only palliative is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books.[6]

Just such an old book is Jonathan Edwards' *The Nature of True Virtue*. Published posthumously in 1758 along with *The End for Which God Created the World* (together called the *Two Dissertations*),[7] *True Virtue* is Edwards' most renowned philosophical work. In 18th-century debates on ethical theory, the Enlightenment's decentralization of God took the shape of distancing Christianity from moral virtue. The stunning implication was that, perhaps for the first time in human history, it became theoretically possible for people to be good without reference to God. Edwards, however, would have none of it; he insisted upon a teleological ethic grounded in God's purpose in creating the universe, rather than human happiness or social flourishing considered in isolation from that design. God's goal in creation – namely, the relational extension to human beings of His own trinitarian glory – determines from the outset the nature and scope of true virtue in human society.[8]

Edwards' decision to cast his treatment of ethics within a teleological framework was a stroke of genius, for it allowed him to include far broader considerations than most "freethinkers" of his age. If God created human beings with the primary function of knowing and loving Him, then to be "good" must be defined in light of that divine intention and never autonomously.

So it would be easy to dismiss Edwards' challenge with a flippant, casual wave of the hand when he indicts the modern mindset as inherently narrow-minded.

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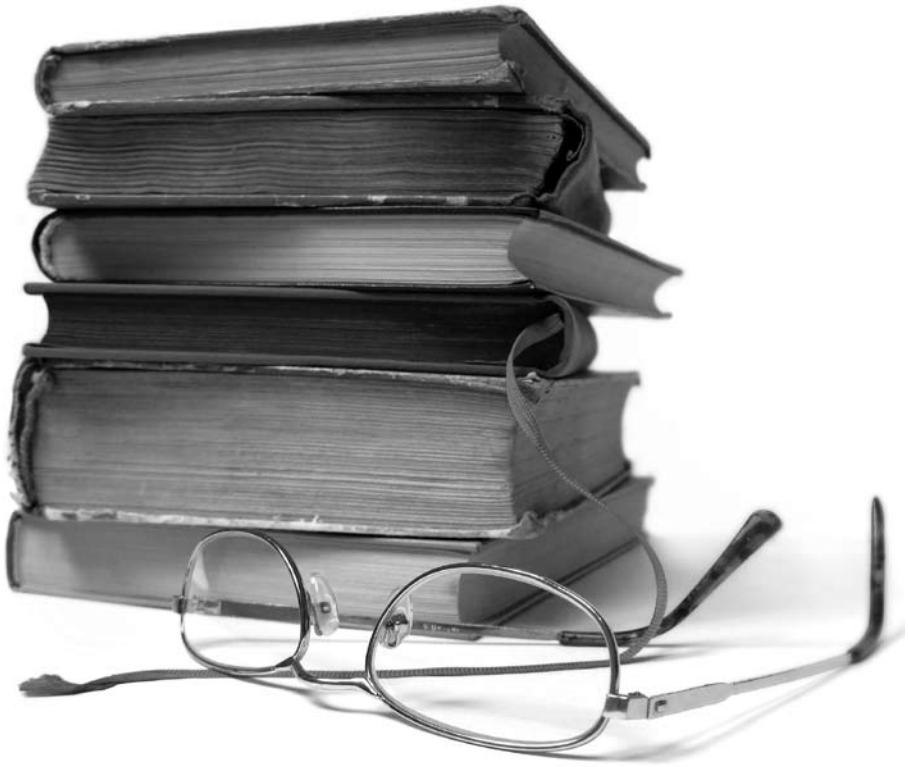
A basic example may help to flesh out the intimate connection between "purpose" (teleology) and "goodness" (virtue): a broken can opener may still prove useful as a defensive weapon against a burglar or for banging a nail into the wall. Nonetheless, if the tool is no longer able to actually *open cans*, it is not a "good" *can opener*. Think now of the creation story in Genesis 1. When God concludes His opening work by declaring all of His creation "very good", the thrust is that everything in the cosmos was once fulfilling its original function. But to fall out of line with one's design is, by definition, to cease to be "good." Therefore, before we can decide what makes a human being "good", we must first discover – in Wendell Berry's phrase – what people are for, if anything.[9] And if Edwards is on target and human beings exist to participate in the knowledge, love and delight that flow mutually between the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit, then to exclude such "religious" criteria from any ethical discussion is irreducibly *narrow-minded*:

> Hence it appears that these *schemes* of religion or moral philosophy, which, however well in some respects they may treat of benevolence to *mankind*, and other virtues depending on it, yet have not a supreme regard to God, and love to him, laid in the *foundation* and all other virtues handled in a *connection* with this, and in a *subordination* to this, are no true schemes of philosophy, but are fundamentally and essentially defective... It may be asserted in general that nothing is of the nature of true virtue, in which God is not the *first* and the *last*; or which, with regard to their exercises in general, have not their first foundation and source in apprehensions of God's supreme dignity and glory, and in answerable esteem and love of him, and have not respect to God as the supreme end.[10]

In *The Nature of True Virtue*, Edwards engages the leading philosophical trends of his day on their own ground and in vivid fashion makes a compelling case for this simple, blunt proposition: any human behavior whatsoever that ignores God's goal for humanity *cannot* be good in any ultimate sense. There are, at the last, no truly virtuous unbelievers to be found in the world. If Edwards' hunch on the centrality of God is vindicated, it can shed enormous light on the many biblical passages that make such drastic claims (consider Genesis 6:5, 8:21, Psalm 14:1-3, 53:1-3, 58:3, 143:2, Proverbs 20:9, Ecclesiastes 7:20, 9:3, Isaiah 64:6, Matthew 19:17, Romans 3:9-20, etc.).



However, Edwards is also keenly aware of this objection: the moral conduct of those who ignore or reject God's design for their existence often seems less than evil and sometimes even praiseworthy. From the standpoint of Christian theology, this is the classic problem of the "virtuous pagan." Edwards does not deny outright this common observation – in fact, he labels such secular virtue "secondary beauty" – but neither is he convinced that it contradicts his main point. How can that be? I have found three striking, complementary illustrations in his writings that have achieved coherence in the midst of

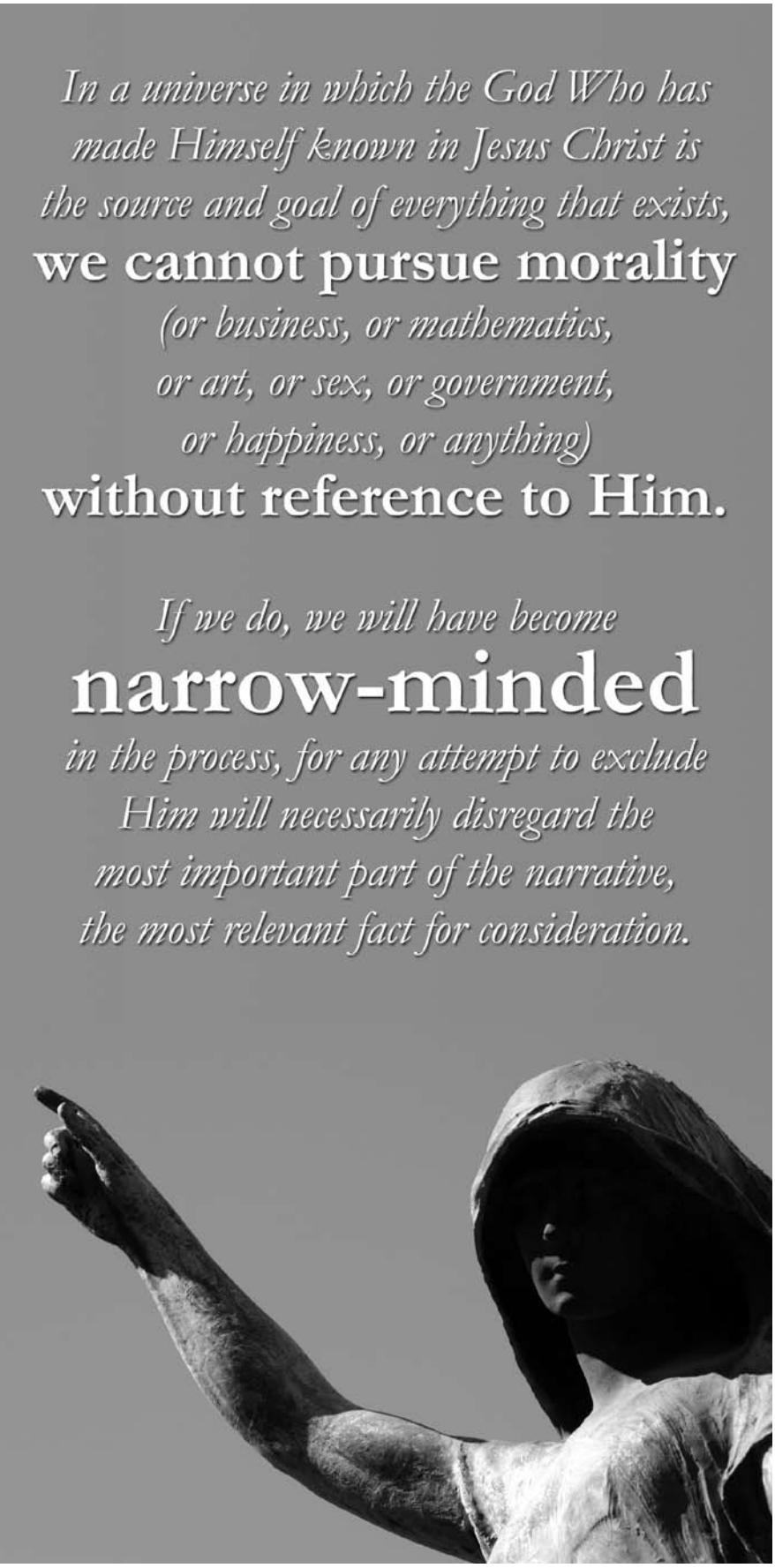
seeming contradiction.

The first illustration employs the dynamics of the marriage relationship to elucidate the matter: "Let a woman seek to give all the content to her husband that may be, not out of any love to him, but only out of love to another man, he abhors all that she doth."[11] The imagined scenario is one in which an adulterous wife acts charitably and affectionately towards her spouse in all of their intimate moments spent together in the private life of the home. Crucially, the illegitimate affair is still unknown to her husband as he contemplates her acts. From a narrow point of view, all of these "good works" (perhaps cooking a meal, complimenting her husband, buying him a gift) are praiseworthy. However, from the largest, widest perspective (that is, the *real* one), our perception changes radically: she acts benevolently towards her husband only so that he will not suspect her affair with another man. This illicit liaison is what she chiefly treasures and is unwilling to forsake. No longer viewing her individual actions with tunnel vision, we concur with Edwards: once the knowledge of the wife's overarching motive (protecting the cherished affair) is gained, the husband will despise *everything* that she does. All of her good works have become as filthy rags.

Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books. (C.S. Lewis)

A second hypothetical scene: a charismatic military leader is addressing his troops with fierce passion and tender care as they prepare for imminent warfare. With a lengthy track record of faithfulness and service to his men – often fighting on the front line himself and making every personal sacrifice conceivable – the leader authentically communicates his deep love and appreciation for his comrades. No false note is hit. He means all that he says. His men, in turn, would unhesitatingly lay down their lives for their captain; to them, he is a hero, the embodiment of courage and integrity. Once again, with this (narrow and limited) insight into the situation, our hearts are stirred and our evaluation is positive. This man is "good" in all that we have opportunity to witness. Now back up. This man is further revealed to us as a brutal, merciless rebel who has revolted against the true king of the land – a king who protects his people and acts with wisdom and justice in his reign as all prosper under him. Furthermore, his motives are malignant: he desires riches and power for himself, not for the good of others. He is spurred on by an inordinate hatred of the king, deeply jealous of the love and loyalty the people of the land have for the rightful monarch. He tortures those who oppose him and burns villages to the ground with inhabitants still trapped within the torched buildings. Again, we are compelled to reevaluate our initial perception: what initially seemed like moral goodness from a narrow perspective has turned out to be absolutely repugnant, once *all* of the relevant facts are taken into account. We were once narrow-minded, but no longer; once blind, we now see.

Finally, bring to mind your favorite childhood song. To be tangible, I'll assume you have conjured up something from U2's *The Joshua Tree*. Hearing the cherished melody stirs up nostalgic memories of years gone by. The rhythm and the lyrics combine to move your spirit in a way that only a beloved piece of music can. In this moment so narrowly conceived, *beauty* soaks into the depths of your being. Yet – back up now and take the larger picture in, one last time. This individual tune, which in isolation pulsates with energy and harmony and joy, actually turns out to have been intended by the composer to play an integral part in a larger performance of Mozart's Symphony No. 41. The song, beautiful with reference only to itself, loses its initial luster; moreover, given its interconnected location within the overall symphony for which it was designed, it actually becomes a disruptive, anarchic force of disharmony that conspires *against the whole*.[12] It doesn't fit. And thus, it has become worthless and no good. For the person whose ear is in tune with the flow of the entire performance, this individual song is painful to hear and impossible to appreciate or enjoy.



In a universe in which the God Who has made Himself known in Jesus Christ is the source and goal of everything that exists, we cannot pursue morality (or business, or mathematics, or art, or sex, or government, or happiness, or *anything*) without reference to Him. If we do, we will have become narrow-minded in the process, for any attempt to exclude Him will necessarily disregard the most important part of the narrative, the most relevant fact for consideration. The beauty and goodness which we believe mark our lives can only be evaluated as such when we take the narrow view, the contorted perspective that blocks out the most significant part of our existence. Human "virtue" apart from the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ is spiritually equivalent to the morality of the adulterous wife, the greatness of the selfish rebel leader, and the loveliness of the disharmonious song that disrupts the grand symphony. Once all of the relevant facts are taken into consideration, what once impressed us in our ethical ignorance now returns to us as broken, revolting and hideously deformed. John Piper summarizes *The Nature of True Virtue* by asserting that we are "infinitely parochial" if we embrace everything in creation but forget our Creator.[13] Jonathan Edwards' essential contention, then, is this: whatever "secondary beauty" may exist among those who have chosen to rupture the harmony of God's creation song by singing their own tune in a different key,[14] the best of this fallen human conduct apart from Christ will turn out to be, upon closer inspection, mere honor among thieves.

The Nature of True Virtue thus provides a daring philosophical explanation of Paul's claim that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). But Edwards does not abandon us to the gloom of our misery in Adam, starkly bitter and real as it is. Creation is regained through the redemption of Christ, and God's goal for His image bearers is being restored within this new humanity. C.S. Lewis was fond of referring to this phenomenon as the most important kind of evolution: the redevelopment of God's image within the community of sinners who embrace His Son.[15] What will it look like when the task is finished? I'll leave that piece of imagination to Edwards:

> By these things it appears that a truly virtuous mind, being as it were under the sovereign dominion of *love to God*, does above all things seek the *glory of God*, and makes *this* his supreme, governing, and ultimate end: consisting in the expression of God's perfections in their proper effects, and in the manifestation of God's glory to created understandings, and the

communications of the infinite fullness of God to the creature; in the creature's highest esteem of God, love to God, and joy in God, and in the proper exercises and expressions of these.... And that temper or disposition of heart, that consent, union, or propensity of mind ... which appears chiefly in such exercises, is virtue, truly so called; or in other words, true grace and real holiness. And no other disposition or affection but this is of the nature of true virtue.[16]

[1] "Identifying Jonathan Edwards with 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God' is like identifying Jesus with the woes against Chorazin and Bethsaida. This is a fraction of the whole, and it is not the main achievement." John Piper, *God's Passion For His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), p. 83.
[2] I will define "narrow-mindedness," quite simply, as any way of thinking that refuses to take into account all of the relevant facts for a given situation or theme. Accordingly, there can be varying degrees or levels of narrow-mindedness, depending on how significant the ignored data are.
[3] Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise on Grace and Other Posthumously Published Writings*, ed. Paul Helm (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1971), p. 53.
[4] *Encounters With God*: *An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 108.
[5] *Edwards on the Will: A Century of American Theological Debate* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), ix.
[6] "On the Reading of Old Books", in *God In The Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 202.
[7] "Edwards intended these dissertations to be published together. The one is the mirror image of the other; the 'end' for which God created the world must be the 'end' of a truly virtuous and holy life." Paul Ramsey, *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, *Vol. 8*: *Ethical Writings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 5.
[8] God's intra-trinitarian glory is defined by Edwards, via John 17, as the knowledge, love and joy which are shared eternally between the Father and the Son, communicated through the Spirit. In creation and redemption, God's overarching purpose is to "extend" this reality to human beings, who participate in God's own life through the Spirit as they behold God's beauty in the face of the Son.
[9] Edwards explicitly draws this link between *teleology* and *goodness*: "[T]he true goodness of a thing (as was observed before) must be its agreeableness to its *end*, or its fitness to answer the design for which it was made. Or, at least, this must be its goodness in the eyes of the workman. Therefore they are good moral agents whose temper of mind or propensity of heart is agreeable to the *end* for which God made moral agents." *The Nature of True Virtue*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 8: Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 558-59.
[10] *The Nature of True Virtue*, p. 560.
[11] Miscellany 676 in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, *Vol. 18, The 'Miscellanies' 501-832*, ed. Ava Chamberlain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 236-37.
[12] "Yet if such benevolences, however attractive in themselves, are out of tune with the great symphony of God's love that animates the universe, they are ultimately discordant, rather than truly beautiful." George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, p. 469.
[13] Piper, p. 108.
[14] For a breathtaking narrative depiction of this idea, see the creation story at the beginning of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion.*
[15] See the final chapters of *Mere Christianity*, especially "The New Men."
[16] *The Nature of True Virtue*, pp. 559-60.

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The Solar Hour

Ann Chao

Slowly his breath abated.

The world was drawn down to four corners and the stone that stretched between them. Somewhere far above, cold winds raged, and snow poured through shattered wood.

But here, there was only the soundless blink of eyelids too tired to close completely. Or perhaps the eyes had not yet grown tired of seeing, and strained against the advent of blindness. The ceiling was plain and dark. The light on the table had gone out. There was no oil to relight it, and no one would come with more. Somewhere above, a storm obscured all light from the sky and buried the air.

Thought began to fade, growing cold and dim. He might have desired to die a different way once. If not with a witness beside him, then at least with a creak on the stairs.

The world narrowed further, the four corners drawing closer and closer until they disappeared altogether and left a circle. Somewhere within, a song he had cherished whittled away the urge to remember something.

Somewhere above, the sun had frozen still and fireless against a raging sky. He found it was not too late to feel surprise. Somehow he could see the sun from where he lay. The circle was dwindling, darkening as quietly as expected in a cornerless universe.

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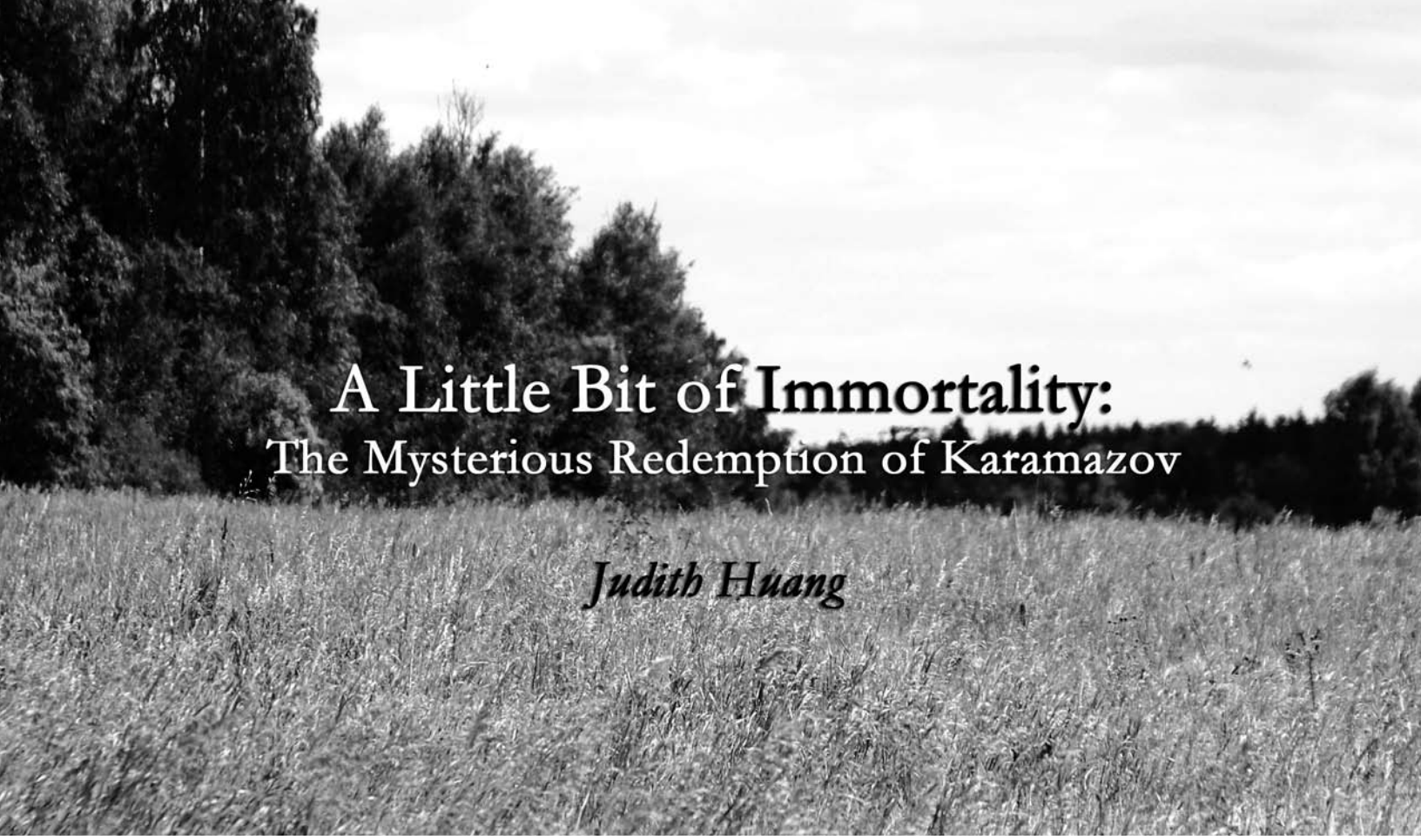
The Poet's Corner #80

Eboné Ingram

After an aimless time
searching for an ambiguous truth,
I behold the idea incarnate.
It takes the shape my mind always dreamed--
a fantasy realized and released--
one pale lily among rough reeds.
Without reaching out to its beauty, I
fall back into tangibility, leave
all untouched in silence, with
nothing to show for sight.

Eboné Ingram '12 is a Molecular and Cellular Biology concentrator living in Winthrop House.



A Little Bit of Immortality:
The Mysterious Redemption of Karamazov

Judith Huang

To angels – vision of God's throne,
To insects – sensual lust.[1]

Quoting Schiller's *Hymn to Joy* early in the novel, Dimitri presents the central figure of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's immense and intricate work *The Brothers Karamazov*, Man: that enigma poised exactly between insects and angels, between vision and lust. In the wild, inchoate, and passionate speech that follows, he goes on to frame what is ultimately at stake in this mystery novel – not righting the injustice of a single murder, but Man himself:

> It's terrible what mysteries there are! Too many riddles weigh men down on earth. We must solve them as we can, and try to keep a dry skin in the water. Beauty! I can't bear the thought that a man of lofty mind and heart begins with the ideal of the Madonna and ends with the ideal of Sodom. What's still more awful is that a man with the ideal of Sodom in his soul does not renounce the ideal of the Madonna, and his heart may be on fire with that ideal, genuinely on fire, just as in his days of youth and innocence… Did you know that secret? The awful thing is that beauty is mysterious as well as terrible. God and the devil are fighting there and the battlefield is the heart of man.[2]

The ultimate duel in this novel occurs between God and the Devil; in it, every single soul, swayed by both Madonna and Sodom, perched precariously between salvation and damnation, may be won or lost with a single tiny action.

Thus, Dostoyevsky reprises the theme of that most ancient and foundational case of the battle over a single soul, the controversial book of Job. In fact, the story of Job is central in the biography of Father Zossima, whose spirituality presides over the novel; he names hearing Job's story as the very first "seed of God's word in my heart" and pulls into focus that classic question about the morality of the contest between God and Satan: "How could God give up the most loved of his saints for the diversion of the devil ... for no other object except to boast to the devil?"[3] It is against this grand spiritual backdrop of matched forces that the individual mysteries, sufferings, lives and deaths of the Karamazovs unfold – where the stakes are not just the outcome of a worldly trial but a moral and eternal one. God won Job, who was already predisposed towards Him, in spite of tremendous suffering and Job's friends' rigorous theological rationalizations. But does God have a fighting chance in extending salvation to *every* man? Even the most devilish of men? After all, while Job is blameless and upright, Fyodor Karamazov is perhaps one of the most noisome creatures in all literature. Who wins in the case of Fyodor Karamazov? That is the mystery which

I will explore in a series of questions, investigating the nature of salvation and its accessibility in *The Brothers Karamazov* with the aim of solving the enigma.

What must one do to be saved? In this novel, Dostoyevsky seems to suggest that salvation is intricately linked to a form of grace received in childhood. Alyosha, Dostoyevsky's beloved hero, ends the novel in an intriguing and tender speech to a crowd of small boys at Ilyusha's funeral:

> You must know that there is nothing higher and stronger and more wholesome and good for life in the future than some good memory, especially a memory of childhood, of home.... If a man carries many such memories with him into life, he is safe at the end of his days. And if one has only one good memory left in one's heart, even that may sometime be the means of saving him.[4]

Implicit is the terrible assumption that children are almost always suffering – something already suggested by Ivan's horrific descriptions of child torture and abuse – but that the little thing, the one good memory, may be sufficient to "save" them. Intriguingly enough, this idea is first articulated in Grushenka's story of the "very wicked woman" who, after pulling up an onion from her garden to give to a peasant, found that that very onion was sufficient to save her if she clung to it to heaven. What is so moving is that *this* telling of the story is itself Grushenka's "onion" – "'It's only a story, but it's a nice story,' she says, 'I used to hear it when I was a child from our cook, who is still with me.'"[5] In fact, she identifies with the woman – "'I know it by heart, because I am that wicked woman myself'" – perhaps explaining how she undergoes a transformation to Dimitri's sincere lover towards the end.[6]

Redemption, then, is possible. And furthermore, its means are surprising and mysteriously tiny. But the question remains: can *anyone* be saved merely by one good deed? Can a good memory really turn a devil into a Christ? Certainly the novel provides us with clear cases of the saved: Father Zossima, whose whole childhood is crowded with "nothing but precious memories," and who watched his brother die with miraculous grace;[7] Alyosha, whose mother took him to a monastery as a child; Dimitri, the accused murderer, who was given a pound of nuts by the German doctor. But could we imagine Fyodor Karamazov saved? Could we even imagine him as a child? After all, his onion-like layers of buffoonery, irony and cleverness make him sophisticated to the point of being inscrutable, and it is difficult to imagine how he would change. Job may have faced unimaginable travails; Fyodor's redemption, however, requires an even greater, even darker grace than Job's. It would thus serve as the litmus test of the truth of Alyosha's speech. In order to determine whether or not Alyosha is right, I want to propose that Dostoyevsky *does* give us a shadow of young Fyodor in the character of Kolya – and thus, a means to postulate whether he could have been saved.

First, Kolya and Fyodor, though completely unrelated otherwise, share a certain basic personality: attention-seeking, self-aggrandizing, theatrical, cruel in their use of power, yet (on the flip side) having a certain nervous insecurity under which lies a buried child – with "the heart of the little dog Fido," as Fyodor puts it.[8] They are both preoccupied with approval and shame, both stung and seduced by the ridiculous. The first time we see Fyodor, he immediately introduces himself as a buffoon, as though eager to offer the worst in order to preempt everyone else. After letting him air absurd, perversely funny tirades for some length of time in his cell, Father Zossima puts his finger on his essential motivation: a pride, a vanity that cannot tolerate ridicule, or shame. He counsels Fyodor, "Do not be so ashamed of yourself, for that is at the root of it all."[9] Fyodor accepts this, albeit half-mockingly: "It is from shame, great elder, from shame; it's simply over-sensitiveness that makes me rowdy."[10] Then we get the tiny glimpse, just a sliver, of Fyodor as a child:

> It's been that way since I was young, when I had to tell jokes for my living in noblemen's families. I am an inveterate buffoon and have been so from my birth, your reverence. It's as though it were a craze in me. I daresay it's a devil within me. But only a little one.[11]

Even if this is an elaborate lie, we sense it must contain some facet of truth; it would not be too difficult to imagine such a small boy saying in his heart of hearts (as Kolya does), "I sometimes think all sorts of things; that everyone is laughing at me, the whole world. And then I want to overturn the whole order of things"[12] In fact, it is easy to imagine how precocious, oversensitive, Pushkin- and-Byelinsky-misquoting Kolya, faced with derisive laughter and constant dismissal from all sides, could morph into an ironic, self-preserving performer, still eager to show off his knowledge about Diderot

and Schiller but now in a preemptively offensive way.

In fact, the most important similarity between Fyodor and Kolya is their particular relationships with laughter and ridicule. As Alyosha says:

> And what does ridiculous mean? Isn't everyone constantly being or seeming ridiculous? Besides, nearly all clever people are afraid of being ridiculous, and that makes them unhappy. I am surprised that you should feel ridiculous so early, though nowadays little children have begun to suffer from it. It's almost a sort of insanity. The devil has taken the form of that vanity and entered into the whole generation. It's the devil.[13]

In speaking to Kolya here, Alyosha echoes his own father in naming "a craze in me, ... a devil within me ... but only a little one," for the cause of shame.[14] However, in a world where even a little onion makes a difference, a little devil is no small thing. Alyosha identifies the origin of the sting of ridicule as "vanity," the empty pride that was the sin of the Devil himself. Indeed, one of Fyodor's deeply disturbing declarations (his casual tone notwithstanding) resonates with Alyosha's diagnosis:

> Of a truth, I am a lie, and the father of lies. Though I believe I am not the father of lies, I am getting mixed in my texts. Say, the son of lies, and that would be enough ... though sometimes a word will do harm.[15]

This declaration, akin to Iago's chilling "I am not what I am", shows us the extent of Fyodor's corruption. Though moderated by a sudden retraction – "Say, the son of lies" – the change of "son" for "father" is a "word [that] does harm" indeed. The little devil that has achieved a toehold in Kolya has fully inhabited Fyodor.

In fact, this fear of ridicule stemming from vanity seems tied up in the very fabric of the universe as seen by Fyodor, who uncannily glimpses past the curtains of reality in an exchange with Ivan to see that very Job-like setting with which we began:

> "Good Lord! To think what faith, what force of all kinds, man has lavished for nothing, on that dream, and for how many thousand years. Who is it laughing at man? Ivan, for the last time, once for all, is there a God or not? I ask for the last time!"
> […]
> "Who is laughing at man?"
> "It must be the devil," said Ivan, smiling.
> "And the devil? Does he exist?"
> "No, there's no devil either."[16]

Secondly, the group of children led by Kolya who close the novel with their voices appear to reenact a smaller-scale variation on the central Karamazov murder case. Even the names of the other two named children seem to match those of the brothers Karamazov: "Smurov," the name of the ill-natured boy who throws a brick at Ilyusha's sparrows, could be a contraction of Smerdyakov, and Ilyusha's name (which rhymes with "Alyosha") appears to crown him the saintly sufferer for reconciliation. Kolya occupies a peculiar position among the children because of his precociousness, and actually metes out favors and punishments in a kind of tyrannical patronage system not unlike Fyodor's dominion over his sons; "I beat them, but they adore me," Kolya says matter-of-factly of the other children.[17] Regarding Ilyusha in particular, he says, "In the end he became slavishly devoted to me; he obeyed me as though I were God."[18] In this miniature family, pain and parricide are reproduced in Ilyusha's desperate penknife attack on Kolya after the larger hurt of the Captain's humiliation is exacerbated by Kolya's abandonment. Indeed, the Book of Job rears its head even in this case, and the stakes are equally high despite the youth of the actors; Ilyusha is literally punished by his capricious god, Kolya, for the sin of (unintended) cruelty

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towards Zhutchka the dog. Ilyusha even unconsciously transfers this judgment to God himself – he tells Alyosha, "It's because I killed Zhutchka, Father, that I am ill now. God is punishing me for it"[19] – and this tiny act of feeding a dog a piece of bread with a needle in it does eventually lead to his death. Also, as a precocious thirteen year old eager to break past the cusp of childhood, Kolya has a particularly precarious fate in the scheme of salvation instituted by Alyosha's speech, and thus forms a perfect test case of whether a small deed of kindness can indeed redeem him.

In such a universe – in this critical battle – do human beings matter? Can a single man, himself naked and suffering, save a brother, or even a father? Miraculously, Dostoyevsky's answer seems to be a profound yes. In a way, the salvation of his father and brothers is Alyosha's purpose as he shuttles between them before the murder, stung by premonition but unable to prevent the deed. After the murder, Alyosha finally does provide a flimsy chit of evidence in his accused brother Dimitri's favor – he hits his upper chest, perhaps the hidden fifteen hundred roubles – but this is insufficient to save Dimitri from the judiciary.

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The gesture fails in the earthly realm to be sufficient to save him; however, Dostoyevsky maintains that such tiny actions take on a different power in the eternal realm, and Alyosha, who instinctively understands these things, saves Kolya *in the stead of* Fyodor. He does this by revealing how one might, in fact, "overturn the whole order of things" – not violently, but simply through a form of acceptance, which seems an antidote to that fatal sense of the ridiculous. Fyodor prescribes this means for salvation himself, so loudly and clearly that he makes it ironic, but not any less true: "If I had only been sure that everyone would accept me as the kindest and wisest of men, oh, Lord, what a good man I would have been!"[20] And Alyosha does this for Kolya; smiling, not laughing at him, he tells him, "You really are not like everyone else; you are not ashamed to confess to something bad and ridiculous."[21] In saying it, his word takes flesh and creates a true pride in Kolya, allowing their conversation to metamorphosize into "a declaration of love." Strangely, Kolya so loves by the end of the novel that he speaks not like the devil (as Fyodor had), but like Christ: "Oh, if only I too could sacrifice myself some day for truth.... I would like to die for all humanity."[22] Though he also says to Smurov that "no one cares whether [he exists] or not" in the same scene, Alyosha has clearly planted love in him.[23]

But what words, what actions can stem the tide of laughter? What can stand up against the "spiteful jeers" of those who "laugh at men's tears and at those people who say as Kolya did just now: 'I want to suffer for all men'"?[24] After all, Fyodor's shield is laughter – the tiny child Fyodor, taught to draw laughter for favor, grows up to draw it as a buffoon, perhaps preferring that derision be directed toward his vulgarity rather toward than his finer feelings. However, a different kind of laughter teaches humility, and may gently expose and dissolve the vanity that lies behind the fear of ridicule. Without realizing it, Kolya had already discovered how to defuse the weapon of laughter, even before he meets Alyosha for the first time. When he cheekily greets a peasant along the way, the peasant replies shrewdly,

> "Good morning, if you are not laughing at me."
> "And if I am?" laughed Kolya.
> "Well, a joke's a joke. Laugh away. I don't mind. There's no harm in a joke."
> "I beg your pardon, brother, it was a joke."
> "Well, God forgive you!"
> "Do you forgive me, too?"

"I forgive you. Go along."[25]

This tiny but eloquent scene begins with one kind of laughter and ends with another. Kolya whimsically speaks to the clever peasant for his own amusement and from a position of power – laughing at him with a hint of condescension. However, the peasant, not taking his own dignity too seriously, recognizes that the joke is on him, and names the joke a joke. Somehow, this naming saps the joke of its divisive quality; when Kolya asks for forgiveness, the peasant forgives him, but only after calling upon God to do so. The simplicity of the conversation – the reciprocity of the joke once named, the simplicity of reconciliation first with God and then with fellow man – reveals the simplicity of forgiveness. And it reveals that the second kind of laughter – laughing in return, a holy, mutual laughter of forgiveness rather than the laughter of division – is one of the greatest weapons in the arsenal of good.

And yet, ultimately, it is Kolya and not Fyodor who is saved by Alyosha, though Kolya stands for Fyodor in the next generation. It is the children, not the adults, who come to reconciliation. Here, the second, more enigmatic question Zossima asks of Job arises again: "[H]ow could he love those new ones when those first children are no more, when he has lost them?"[26] How could any father, any author, any God bear the loss of his first children simply because a second set of children receives life? How could Job be satisfied – "remembering them, how could he be fully happy with those new ones, however dear the new ones might be?"[27] How can Alyosha and, above all, how can *we* be satisfied with the salvation of the children and the destruction of the father, of *his* father?

What's still more awful is that a man with the ideal of Sodom in his soul does not renounce the ideal of the Madonna, and his heart may be on fire with that ideal, genuinely on fire, just as in his days of youth and innocence.... Did you know that secret? The awful thing is that beauty is mysterious as well as terrible.[28]

The ultimate duel in this novel occurs every single soul, swayed by both Mad between salvation and damnation, may b

We do not know what little onion might lie in Fyodor's childhood, but we do know his exquisite sense of beauty, and his extreme sensitivity. Indeed, most important of all, we know of his uncanny ability to hear a terrible, cosmic laughter which he knows to be directed at man.

"Who is laughing at man?" Fyodor Karamazov asks. And though he jests, there is something searching, something

earnest about his repetition, the way he presses his questions. In naming this laughter, he somehow acknowledges the devil, for if there is no devil, there is no laughter, and there is a fine line between something and nothing in the novel. Further, he recognizes that the laughter is not with man, but *at* man – our first type of laughter, the derisive, divisive kind which places

s between God and the Devil; in it, donna and Sodom, perched precariously e won or lost with a single tiny action.

Man at odds with the Devil rather than with him. Fyodor hears laughter, that mocking kind he both courts and fears, and perhaps that laughter, small though it is, may prove to be just sufficient, may just pry open his soul to forgiving and forgiveness – for the path between one kind of laughter and another can be bridged by the littlest conversation, the smallest exchange. Could Fyodor, in mocking everything, possibly have grasped the principle of diffusing this deadly laughter? Could he have laughed *with* God *at* the Devil, that powerful but ultimately defeated force in Job? Perhaps, like Job and Alyosha, we can settle for remembering the old children while still being fully happy with the new ones.[29] But then again, *The Brothers Karamazov* ends in enormous hope; after all the destruction Fyodor Karamazov has wrecked upon his sons, the novel ends precisely in holy laughter. If we have learned anything from Alyosha, it is that someone else must intercede – someone must create that second, redeeming laughter for you. At the very least, Fyodor's name is redeemed through his son, for on the final page, the father's name rings in the voices of the children: "Hurrah for Karamazov!"[30]

[1] 120.
[2] Dostoevsky, pp. 120-121.
[3] Dostoevsky, pp. 330-331.
[4] Dostoevsky, p. 895.
[5] Dostoevsky, p. 406.
[6] Dostoevsky, p. 406.
[7] Citation needed?
[8] Dostoevsky, p. 83.
[9] Dostoevsky, p. 44.
[10] Dostoevsky, p. 45.
[11] Dostoevsky, pp. 42-43.
[12] Dostoevsky, p. 644.
[13] Dostoevsky, p. 644.
[14] Dostoevsky, p. 43.
[15] Dostoevsky, p. 46.
[16] Dostoevsky, p. 152.
[17] Dostoevsky, p. 617.
[18] Dostoevsky, p. 617.
[19] Dostoevsky, p. 620.
[20] Dostoevsky, p. 45.
[21] Dostoevsky, p. 645.
[22] Dostoevsky, p. 888
[23] Dostoevsky, p. 896.
[24] Dostoevsky, p. 895.
[25] Dostoevsky, p. 614.
[26] Dostoevsky, p. 23.
[27] Dostoevsky, p. 332.
[28] Dostoevsky, pp. 120-121.
[29] Dostoevsky, p. 332.
[30] Dostoevsky, p. 897.

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Resurrecting the Liturgical Impulse

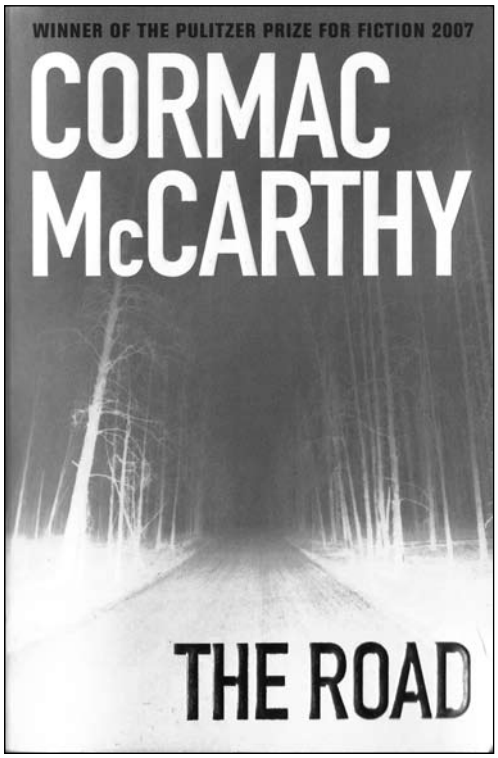
Writing a new liturgy in Cormac McCarthy's The Road

Samir Paul

He woke toward the morning with the fire down to coals and walked out to the road. Everything was alight. As if the lost sun were returning at last. The snow orange and quivering. A forest fire was making its way along the tinderbox ridges above them, flaring and shimmering against the overcast like the northern lights. Cold as it was he stood there a long time. The color of it moved something in him long forgotten. Make a list. Recite a litany. Remember.[1]

In a universe as full of pure nothing as the bleak, ashen, wasteland of *The Road*, it's tempting to think that halfway through the third day of Creation, God took a smoke break and never got back to work. There is day and night, earth and sky, land and sea — but there is not much else. Such an existence might, by itself, naturally engender a degree of pessimism or fatalism. But to have tasted, at one time, a world teeming with life and starry skies and vitamin D, and to have that snatched away — such is the stuff that obliterates all hope.

There are no plants in *The Road*. There are no animals. There's hardly anything at all, actually, except for the remains of some unexplained global cataclysm in the shadow of which the story takes place. McCarthy's terse, draining prose has us plodding along with a father and son traveling on foot to the coast as they evade cannibals, starvation, and everything else that dwells in the dark along the way.



The Road presents a Joban epic that must answer the question of *how* and *why* to hope in such a world, and it must confront the challenge to "Curse God and die."[2] The complication lies in the sheer desolation of the man's and boy's surroundings. God's answer to Job in the Whirlwind Speech[3] mobilizes, in particular, the magnificence, mystery, and terrifying beauty of all Creation to point to the ineffability of God's wisdom and splendor. Where was Job when God was knitting together the universe? Does the hawk take flight at his command, and the eagle at his wisdom? God's appearance is not an explanation of Job's experience; it is an expression of his nearness and a reminder of his inexplicable majesty. Beauty and mystery are ultimately the "answers."

But the absolute, pitiless devastation of *everything* in *The Road* leaves little beauty to point to God or to sustain the characters in the face of death's grim and steady march. So the

episode in which the man, as if in a trance, watches a forest fire from a distance is especially pivotal because it is a rare moment of wonderment in a tirelessly bleak experience. The man's response to this moment of awe points to some analogue in *The Road* of the beauty and mystery in Job. The response, the force that will sustain the pair through the destruction of everything, is a deep stirring and a call to liturgy, to creation and especially to creation of order in a world that defies all memory and categorization.

Responding to Death

There are four main actions in the passage: sight, wonderment, yearning for the past, and the urge to liturgize. First we *look* through the man's eyes and see him gaze upon beauty. In choosing "alight" rather than "ablaze" or another, harsher, word, McCarthy emphasizes the fire's bright light over its heat, so we should take the image as radiant rather than violent. This light is especially potent as it pierces the world's ashen pall and is among the novel's first mentions of a color other than black or gray. The man is witnessing a battle of sorts, and McCarthy's words are mythic: The flames are "flaring and shimmering against the overcast."[4] The fire wins. The orange is so fierce, in fact, that it tames even the snow that envelopes the land, lending it color and rendering it "quivering" in the face of an unusual, colorful vigor and vibrancy. In a monochromatic world, the bold art of an unexpected and overwhelming splash of color is a reminder that the breadth of the man's palette and his taste for beauty are dormant but not dead.

The force that will sustain the pair through the destruction of everything is a deep stirring and a call to liturgy, to creation and especially to creation of order in a world that defies all memory and categorization.

The simple act of looking (and recognizing that he *can* still look with full perspicacity) soon gives way to the second main action: *wonderment*. The man can do nothing but stand in the cold and watch the flames, peering into the beauty. The first and only analogy the man can produce is the northern lights, a visual so primal that we cannot help but think of the generations of people that have looked up in awe at the aurora borealis. The folkloric stories surrounding the lights are pregnant with the sense of mystery of those who saw them in a pre-scientific era. The flickering reflections of the Valkyries' armor; dancing foxes and dragons made of pure flame; the fighting souls of dead ancestors — the fire is so sensuous that it conjures up the spiritual. The connection between the flames and the northern lights places him squarely in a line of people who have had similar spiritual reactions to nature's rarer beauties.

This connection, fueled by the explosion of color on the dull canvas of the sky, moves "something in him long forgotten."[5] His impulses to recognize beauty (sight) and react to it spiritually (wonderment) are part of what is forgotten, but only part. One is the catalyst and the other is the sensation in response, but what must come next is connection to, and *yearning* for, the past. This longing is clear: He feels as though the orange is the "lost sun returning," perhaps a "prodigal sun" that is but a figment of light and warmth from a past life.[6]

Writing the new Liturgy

And so we arrive. The yearning yields one response: the urge to *liturgize*. Perhaps a brief definition is in order. Liturgy in the Christian tradition is, most simply, a corporate action of worship, devotion, and expression directed both vertically (as a statement to God) and horizontally (as a statement in community). Liturgy is an act of discipline, ritual, and grounding. It is uniform and unspontaneous, it is recited regularly, and it is meant to provide a sense of continuity between worshipers across generations and eras. So the words in the Book of Common Prayer, while of course polished for readability in a new day, mean mostly the same things as they did when Thomas Cranmer penned them half a millennium ago. The prayers and orders of worship used most often in Christian liturgy are meant for — along with daily services — some of the most pivotal events of the human experience, including baptism, Eucharist, marriage, and funeral. They speak to the most important moments in our lives, and even their language ("Speak now or forever hold your peace…") has seeped into our own.

The problem is that the old liturgies don't quite speak in the same way to the humanity of *The Road*. The quaint rituals and consecrated hosts and sanctified water of Church,

the glimmering mosaics and spires and flowing robes — all is rendered null and void in the wasted world of the novel. "'Til death do us part" isn't a statement of marital commitment; it is a confirmation that tomorrow, the man might cough out his left lung and die. When the old rituals and habits and ways of being break, the temptation is to yield to a bleak nihilism, perhaps the only escape from overwhelming grief or self-swallowing rage at the universe. But there is another way: developing for a new era a new liturgy that can ground a new life. We see this impulse to liturgize expressed in the three key steps of the man's final realization in this passage: creating new forms of liturgy, living in the liturgy, and using the new liturgy as an agent of memory.

When the old rituals and habits and ways of being break, the temptation is to yield to a bleak nihilism, perhaps the only escape from overwhelming grief or self-swallowing rage at the universe. But there is another way: developing for a new era a new liturgy that can ground a new life.

First, he thinks, "make a list."[7] He responds here to the chaos of a world in which the old liturgy is bankrupt. The constancy of liturgical action, its ritual and tradition, is a key element of how we make sense of and ground a changing world in some grander, more cosmic sense of continuity. But the societal and communal underpinnings of the old liturgy — and more broadly, of the old habits and disciplines and lifestyle — are gone. McCarthy makes this point a number of times. "No lists of things to be done. The day providential to itself. The hour. There is no later. This is later," the man thinks.[8] Here we consider the disintegration of human purpose and of time itself, a particularly significant loss as the man does not even keep a calendar anymore.[9] The liturgical calendar is a way of keeping time collectively, of preserving some notion of time's cycle. But with no calendar and no such preservation, the seasons' and days' meanings blur into nothing.

To further underscore the irrelevance of the old ways, McCarthy constantly deploys analogies that are bankrupt even to us: the two wear masks and goggles on the side of the road "like ruined aviators" bereft of their biplanes; they look like "street addicts" in a world that lacks *urban* decay but is full of *everything-else* decay; and in their thick winter coats, they are cowled and shivering like "mendicant friars."[10] Reading these analogies feels like reading Song of Solomon or some other biblical text full of obscure, culturally outdated references; most women today would not be aroused by comparisons between their breasts and two gazelles feeding among the lilies.[11] The analogies convey the feeling of an outmoded liturgy that bears updating.

The new culture that has eclipsed the old liturgy is one of utter chaos and emptiness, and thus in "making a list," the man is speaking order into "blackness without depth or dimension."[12] McCarthy expresses this through a preoccupation with creating "forms" in a now-formless world. "All of this like some ancient anointing," the man reflects as they dry off before the fire. "So be it. Evoke the forms. Where you've nothing else construct ceremonies out of the air and breathe upon them."[13] These ceremonies form the patterns of a new existence in a cold world: "Glassing the plain" with his

telescope; living among the ashes, grayness, and snow. The man and boy even develop certain verbal liturgical gestures, most notably "carrying the fire", storytelling, and assuring one another that they are "the good guys."[14] These are the actions that they turn into habits — the recitation of the "litany," the second phase of the liturgical impulse.[15] It ritualizes a difficult life, one that is rooted in the basic human task of survival and provides some constancy even as everything else around them is dead or deadly.

Most significantly, the codification of the liturgical impulse culminates in the man thinking, "Remember."[16] Liturgy is a vehicle for collective memory; when it must change (as it must now), it does. Sometimes, as Ernst Kasemann tells us, "continuity with the past is preserved by shattering the received terminology, the received imagery, the received theology — in short, by shattering the tradition...The truth is that it is this variation which makes continuity possible at all."[17] But until then liturgy remains a repository of the wisdom and tradition of the past that grounds a community. While the centerpiece of McCarthy's and the man's thinking on liturgy is the development of new ritual, some things remain the same and are held constant even in the new world. For instance, the novel preserves the ultimate significance of names. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, to utter someone's name is to have a kind of power over them. In the novel, this is attested to by Ely, an old man the father and son meet on the road who is reluctant to tell them his real name.[18] Furthermore, names have power in and of themselves. The name of God, for one, is spoken only once a year by the high priest, in the liturgy of Hebrew national atonement. Followers of Christ are forgiven for His name's sake.[19] In *The Road*, names are spoken aloud only at moments of extreme importance: When reflecting upon his wife's suicide, the man says her name; and when the man dies, the boy says his name "over and over again."[20] Otherwise, names are conspicuously absent, perhaps out of a vestigial reverence that McCarthy preserves to remind us that when nature and society and all else but us are obliterated, our tags still hold some mystical key to our us-ness. The sparse use of names suggests that these tags must be respected and guarded fiercely. The veneration of names is just one such holdover from the past that is preserved as McCarthy's man and boy participate in the discipline and memory of new liturgy.

These three phases of the liturgical impulse — creating new forms of liturgy, living in the liturgy, and using the new liturgy as an agent of memory — allow the man and boy to make at least some sense and habit of their harsh existence. The spiritual experience of the forest fire stirs the man to a new awareness of the thing in him "long forgotten." Like the Whirlwind speech, it places the pair in the Joban tradition of emerging without easy, pat answers to "why" but with a fuller, clearer, more nuanced answer to "how."

"Liturgy is like a strong tree whose beauty is derived from the continuous renewal of its leaves, but whose strength comes from the old trunk, with solid roots in the ground."
- Pope Paul VI

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[1] McCarthy 31
[2] Ibid. 114
[3] Job 38-41
[4] Ibid. 31
[5] Ibid. 31
[6] Ibid. 31
[7] Ibid. 31
[8] Ibid. 54
[9] Ibid. 4
[10] Ibid. 28, 177, 126
[11] Song of Solomon 4:5
[12] Ibid. 67
[13] Ibid. 74
[14] Ibid. 83, 266, 77
[15] Ibid. 31
[16] Ibid. 31
[17] "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, pp. 20-21
[18] Ibid. 171
[19] 1 John 2:12
[20] Ibid. 54, 281

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A Review and Contemplation of

The Portal of Beauty: Towards a Theology of Aesthetics

Bruno Forte, 2008

Cecelia Raker

But it is true, they fear
it more than death, beauty is feared
more than death, more than they fear death.
- William Carlos Williams

Theology seeks the particulars of how God works in the world and who He is, how the Infinite interacts with we the limited. Aesthetics pursues a strikingly similar aim: how the Whole, the All, the Eternal manifests itself in the fragment to create beauty. In the fusion of these two similar and yet disparate disciplines can be found incredible and important insights. Yet both theology and aesthetics are huge, diverse fields of thought, with canons too massive for mere piqued interest. For a simple start, *The Portal of Beauty* introduces a few key thinkers who tie together the two fields. Bruno Forte, in his concise, dense, and gorgeous work on the theology of aesthetics, draws us to a deeper understanding of the Holy One, through an exploration of the many links between studying beauty and theology. These links are reminders of vital, inescapable truths — truths we would do well to apply in our own relationships, lives, and art.

Forte's knowledgeable, well-read guidance at times forsakes clarity in favor of poetic and eloquent mental acrobatics. All in all, though, his work is an enlivening beginning to an area that merits much further examination. He often stops at summarizing thinkers' viewpoints, not carrying forward their ideas into practical applications relevant to daily life. And yet his work provides the first stepping stones in a path that we must take. Indeed, through his window into aesthetics shines impassioning clarity about the importance of beauty to the world, and specifically to the lives and missions of believers in Messiah.

Beauty, as Forte defines it, is "an event; beauty happens when the Whole offers itself in the fragment, and when this self-giving transcends infinite distance."[1] The Infinite Whole gives of itself in tiny fragments of its fullness through *form* and *splendor*. Beauty as *form* suggests that a fragment becomes a proportional analogy of the harmony of the Whole, a dwelling-place for the Eternal. Beauty as *splendor* describes the Infinite breaking forth, shining out of the intimate fragment and giving itself into the finite.

Seen in such light, what event is more beautiful than that of the Holy One offering to manifest Himself as Jesus, a frail, human fragment to His unfathomable entirety? Jesus embodies the exact perfection and nature of God — He is the image and *form* of the Infinite. At the same time, the power and radiantly loving heart of the Father shines forth from Jesus' deeds and personality, a *splendor* unmatched by any other human being in history. Indeed, the incarnation of Jesus is perhaps the most complete and obvious example we have of an event of beauty. Thus suddenly the entire, vast body of understanding of beauty through the ages — aesthetics — unexpectedly reveals the personality and love of God.

In examining beauty, one shortly comes to wonder at that strange melancholy that seems to haunt the truly beautiful, the twinge of death that entwines with joy to pierce the heart in aesthetic arrest. Forte puts his finger on the importance of that strange sadness, our need for despair in tandem and contrast with beauty.

> "A Christianity deprived of beauty would risk being nothing other than a faith that has never known the darkness of despair, and so being an empty, tranquilizing 'established Christianity'...True sacrifice requires love, and we only truly love a beauty that has

> stolen us from ourselves. And so there is a special strength and dignity in despair, attained only by those who have fallen in love with beauty, and absent from a this-worldly Christianity which has compromised with the calculations and comforts of this present age."[2]

Forte turns to Soren Kierkegaard to elucidate the interplay between beauty and misery. Kierkegaard intimately investigates various models of how one might stray into pursuing penultimate beauty, all of which lead to abject despair in the dissatisfaction with the merely reflective beauty of this world while the heart continues to long for the true Beauty of the coming Kingdom. Beauty draws us to need desperately, and at some point of the dark night of despair our desperation drives us out of our prejudices, lusts, mediocrity and false comfort into a relationship with the One who is equally desperate to hold us in His arms and fill us with His Comfort. A faith without such passion at its heart is dry, shallow, and cannot but be co-opted by the forces against the Kingdom—quotidian apathy, satisfaction with mediocrity, fleeting pleasures to dull the pain of existing instead of living. Without beauty and therefore despair, we subscribe to a comfortable, controlled religion that places the Infinite One in a box built of our own fears, urges, and mundane routines and will not allow Him to fully reign over our lives.

And yet beauty in the world has a way of entrancing its pursuers, never quite fulfilling their inherent longing for the Infinite at its heart. We stop at aesthetically pleasing moments and begin to pursue the pleasure they lend us, rather than the Truth that shines through such beauty and indeed is at its very core. There is a harsh tension between the acknowledgement of the Infinite revealed by real beauty and the desperate yearning for something *more* that beauty seems to highlight within us.

Forte, in his exploration of and departure from the base of Augustine's aesthetic theology, elucidates the nature of this tension. "God is…Beauty, original and final; so it is that this-worldly beauty, echoing its divine origin and pointing towards its fulfillment in the homeland, is the way that leads to him if, following this way, we do not halt at what is penultimate, but let ourselves be attracted towards supreme delight."[3]. In Augustine's treatment of beauty, we are granted permission to perpetually wish for another moment of beauty, so long as we remain conscious that in our pursuit of that *more*, what calls to our hearts is not the pleasure of experiencing beauty, but rather the Infinite within the beautiful fragment.

The choice to run after the penultimate beauty rather than the Source of all Beauty is a snare, a doorway into the abject pain of grasping at what cannot ever fulfill — skeptics have been entirely correct in fearing beauty's fickle allure. But because of this snare, it seems that for far too long much of the worldwide Body of believers in Messiah has shied away from pursuing beauty, branding it 'worldly' and 'vain.' We worry, because the corruption of something so profound as Beauty can so pull the heart from its quest for intimacy with its Creator. And yet in such fear, the Body risks practicing exactly what Forte (and indeed Jesus) warns against — a passionless, dry, "established" religion. Just as beauty corrupted is a fearful thing, so Beauty redeemed strikes terror in the hearts of the adversaries of the Kingdom.

"Beauty happens when the Whole offers itself in the fragment, and when this self-giving transcends infinite distance."

Further drawing us to the urgency of our need for beauty, Hans Urs von Balthasar suggests that "…in a world that no longer has enough confidence in itself to affirm the beautiful, the proofs of the truth have lost their cogency."[4] So much of our knowledge of the

Holy One is through His creation; what proofs exist of His truth are in His beauty. Augustine speaks to this in a parable, questioning creation. "I looked at the creatures, and asked [about my God]; their beauty was their answer."[5] Should we choose to ignore the vital importance of beauty in drawing the human heart toward God, we risk not only missing vital truths about His nature, but misusing our own creative natures. We as the living Body of Jesus have a mandate to live in His image: an image that yearns for the beautiful, that embodies the beautiful, that creates, mimicking the actions of the Creator.

We have been granted "…salvation *of* history, and not salvation *from* history…The more man is man, the more he is an image, an icon of God."[6] This idea is from the Russian Orthodox thinker Evdokimov, a philosopher wrestling with the concept of the icon. In salvation does not come removal from our true selves, but rather growth toward who and what we were made to be. In exploring what it is to truly walk *in His image,* as we were designed to live, it is impossible to escape the mandate to create. Indeed, the first thing God asks of the human race in the Bible is that we "be fruitful and multiply."[7] We were made to create: our choice is not whether or not we will be creators, but whether or not our creations will be vessels through which the Infinite is invited to offer itself to the world in beauty. Creation in this sense is vast — the politician, the housewife, the accountant in her work is just as creative as the painter in his.

Clearly the world is not always the most gorgeous place. We are ravished by war, by apathy, by despair, by poverty of the body and mind and spirit. Thus we find ourselves in desperate need of beauty in every aspect of society — beauty that draws us to first know God, that helps us understand the Infinite from our finite perspective through its form and splendor, that comforts us and agitates us and yet always pulls us deeper into the mystery of Reality. And we find ourselves with a commission to act in His image, creating and interacting with beauty in this world as a tool for drawing every person we meet into the coming Kingdom alongside us.

Forte's book, densely packed with many more nuanced revelations and philosophies, still manages to leave the reader at a simple, convicting place. It is an invitation to begin a life of Beauty, not a set of spoon-fed conclusions applicable immediately to life. But the invitation is one that returns to the very core of our beliefs. The Eternal, Infinite One manifested Himself in fragmented humanity, took on death, and conquered despair — this core truth is the heart of all Beauty. All beauty in the world is in some way an echo of the Truth in the realization of the Eternal within the finite. And as beauty creates desperate hunger for Beauty, so by daily creating in the image of our Beautiful Creator, we advance His Kingdom and draw closer to Him.

[1] Bruno Forte, *The Portal of Beauty,* p. vii.
[2] Bruno Forte, *The Portal of Beauty,* p. 29.
[3] Bruno Forte, *The Portal of Beauty,* p. 12.

Beauty draws us to need desperately, and at some point of the dark night of despair our desperation drives us out of our prejudices, lusts, mediocrity and false comfort into a relationship with the One who is equally desperate to hold us in His arms and fill us with His Comfort.

[4] Bruno Forte, *The Portal of Beauty,* p. 55.
[5] Bruno Forte, *The Portal of Beauty,* p. 7 ; quoted in St. Augustine's *Confessions* X, 6-8.
[6] Bruno Forte, *The Portal of Beauty,* p. 71; quoted in Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon,* p. 105
[7] Genesis 1:28

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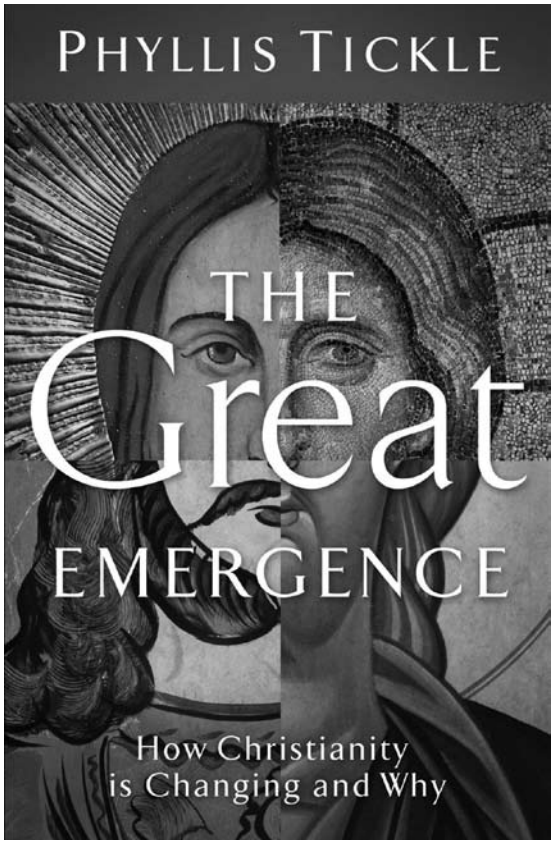
A Review of *The Great Emergence*

Phyllis Tickle, Baker Books, 2008

Jennifer Delurey

"When an overly institutionalized form of Christianity is, or ever has been, battered into pieces and opened to the air of the world around it, that faith-form has both itself spread and also enabled the spread of the young upstart that afflicted it"[1] claims Phyllis Tickle in *The Great Emergence.* Believing that we are right in the middle of this process, Tickle explains a paradigm of change in the Church. As all of North American society shifts, Christianity is changing as much as it has since the Reformation. In *The Great Emergence,* Tickle skillfully weaves together the many changes in the world, technological, cultural, and intellectual, to explain and predict trends in Christendom. However, the book is weakened throughout because it fails to draw strength from the significance of the gospel and to acknowledge areas of stability in the Church.

According to Tickle, fundamental changes to the world and religion follow a five-hundred-year pattern: the Reformation occurred approximately five hundred years ago; back another cycle is the Great Schism which separated Greek Orthodoxy from Roman Catholicism; and another five hundred years brings the fall of Rome and the rise of monasticism, five hundred years after the life of Christ. Furthermore, each cycle has a general structure. First there is a hundred-year period of adjustment to the changes. Next there are two hundred and fifty years of relative peace and stability in this new worldview and form of religion. Finally, there is another hundred and fifty years in which this construct falls apart again before the next revolution occurs. She believes that we are nearing the end of this part of the cycle and beginning something new.



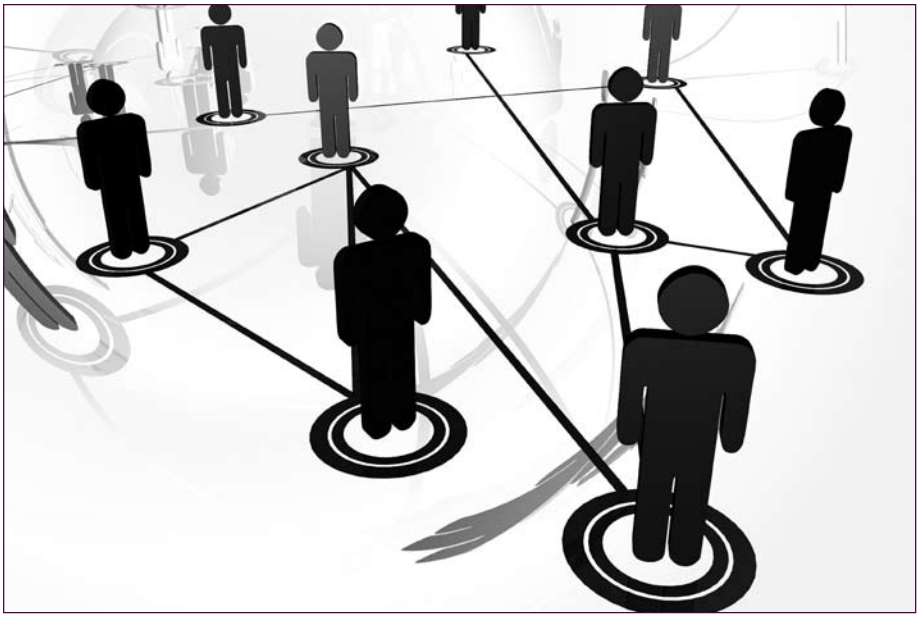
Tickle's descriptive interpretation of the past hundred-fifty years is both scholarly and readable, touching on many major changes without becoming bogged down in details. Examining the past century and a half, she formulates four pressing questions which she claims are driving the Great Emergence and need to be addressed by Christianity:

- Where is the authority?[2]
- What is human consciousness?
- What is the relationship of all religions to one another?[3]
- What now is society's basic or fundamental unit?[4]

While she succeeds in establishing the importance of these questions in North American society and the need for any religion to deal with them, she focuses on the intellectual issues and outward problems and patterns of the Church, rather than on inner life. Although important, these are not the main business of Christians or the Church, which is to become more like Christ and to spread the gospel. Tickle has an unfortunate tendency to portray the Church as a passive reactor to changes happening in the world of society, economics, and culture. Moreover, she writes as if these reactions are progress — and therefore automatically good, often implying that new, non-traditional answers will become standard for these questions. For example, as she discusses her fourth question in terms of family structure, she inserts this comment about the introduction of the pill and its effect on gender roles: "There is, again, nothing inherently right or wrong in these changes. There is only change itself."[5] Throughout, she ignores the objections of various groups

of Christians, neither refuting them nor justifying the goodness of the changes, but presenting the most non-traditional form of Christianity as the form that is going to prevail doctrinally in the Great Emergence.

So far, Tickle only notes an emerging response to her first essential question: authority lies in "Scripture and the community."[6] Theological discussion outside of traditional religion and exchange of ideas replace the more traditional hierarchical forms of authority. Tickle predicts that mysticism, emphasizing experience and paradox, will become much more prominent, as well as interest in pre-Constantine Christianity. Codified doctrine, which assumed a much greater role in Christianity after Constantine and was closely associated with temporal authority, will decline in its importance in unifying communities. What is emerging through these changes is not Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox, but rather something new that comes out of conversation and the mixing of all forms of Christianity. Appropriately, then, Tickle calls the new form of Christianity "emergent Christianity." The Church is a network rather than a building, a fixed set of beliefs, or a tradition inherited from the family. Tickle's clearest description of the nature of this new form of Christianity is that "'emergent' Christianity is fundamentally a body of people, a conversation, if you will."[7]



The Church is a network rather than a building, a fixed set of beliefs, or a tradition inherited from the family.

While emergent Christianity puts more emphasis on community and less on doctrine and theory, this change is not reflected in *The Great Emergence*. The influences on history mentioned in the book are almost exclusively intellectual and theoretical social issues. As Tickle discusses the origins of the Great Emergence, she focuses on intellectuals, such as Einstein and Freud, and social trends, such as the automobile and the rise of women in the workplace, in order to explain the increased importance of community. Even worse, there is no hint of an active God in any of these changes. Her perspective and presentation of the matter tries to absolve the Christian of any blame in the state of affairs, taking away any responsibility for action on the part of the Church. The system of cycles slips into a kind of history where there is no actual progress or regress, only change. Ideas are portrayed as becoming outdated, with little explanation of why they are outdated or why the changes are good. With this perspective, guilt is "neither appropriate, justified, nor productive,"[8] and history takes care of itself. Both those who choose to remain in traditional settings and those who embrace change are given similar gentle approval, which dilutes any enthusiasm for the work of God, personal action, or leadership.

Through all of this, Tickle does not define Christianity, either what essentials should remain through all the changes, or what does in fact remain the same. While she claims to include every form of Christianity, her lack of opinion, judgment, or any central doctrine leaves many Christians out of the conversation that is her "Great Emergence." Arguing that Christianity is reacting to societal changes, Tickle misses out on the grandeur of saying that God is doing a new thing.

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[1] The Great Emergence, p. 28
[2] 45
[3] 73
[4] 112
[5] 114
[6] 151
[8] 104
[10] 42

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Last Things: Façades

J. Joseph Porter

We are all — *every last one of us* — obsessed with giving good impressions. We like to be thought of as smart, attractive, funny, virtuous, and strong; we want everyone to believe that we have it "all together." The staff of *The Ichthus* is certainly no exception. It is our secret hope that you will be enamored with our thoughts, our ideas, our layout, with the firstfruits of our labor — in short, that you will be enamored with us. If this is not our desire (and how could it not be?), it is at least our temptation.

I know, at any rate, that it is *my* desire. Were I left to my own devices, I surely would never rise above this pathetic ostentation and vainglory, the idolatry of self that is the sin of modern man. I wish I could tell you that I am a good and kind-hearted person. But the truth is that I am a sinful wretch: proud, conceited, and judgmental, prone to anger and to deceit. I am a slave to the flesh, a poor wayfaring stranger.

The bad news is that, if anything even remotely resembling Christianity is true, *you are, too* — you and everyone, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Even our righteous acts are as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). And it is obvious that we know this; the gulf between our public and private personae give us away. And so we are comedians playing to an audience too afraid to laugh — adulterous brides who have spurned our grooms and reveled in our infidelity. We are a contradiction, a fusion of the divine and the demonic, at constant war with ourselves. We are a race of Fyodor Karamazovs, blithering clowns hiding behind masks because we are terrified, absolutely *terrified* that someone might see the truth beneath the disguise.

The good news is that God's grace is *for* adulteresses and clowns — in short, for the world. God has forgiven us and intertwined His Spirit with the Sodom in our hearts. We are sinners in the hands of an angry God — and we can be redeemed. Try as we may, we can never vanquish Beauty, only wound it; despite all our transgressions, we still can sing, write, dance, and laugh.

The Ichthus, then, like any publication, is a journal devoted to the victories — the stories, essays, and ideas — of its staff. But it also is a journal devoted to the *weaknesses* of its staff, a journal created in recognition of the fact that we Christians are nothing without Christ. We acknowledge that we need to be saved — and we acknowledge that we *have* been saved.

We need no façade. Rather, we boast in our weaknesses: God's power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). We rejoice in our mortality: Death has been swallowed up in victory (1 Corinthians 15:54). And we remember that our triumphs come not from our brilliance or wisdom, but from the goodness, grace, and majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ.

J. Joseph Porter '12, a Philosophy concentrator living in Quincy House, is the Features Editor of The Ichthus.

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