

Spring 2013 Volume II Issue II

CORNERSTONE

A Christian Journal of Literary Arts at Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design



Stressless

On Mystical Obedience

Fiction and Its Consequences

Why Would Anyone Want to be Christian?

Symbols of God

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Taylin Im

Recruiting & Marketing Director

Monica Perez

Copy Editor

Madeline Price

Submissions & Inquiries

thebrowncornerstone@gmail.com

Online

browncornerstone.wordpress.com

facebook.com/CornerstoneMagazine

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Mission Statement

Cornerstone Magazine seeks first and foremost to celebrate the Christian Gospel by presenting its richness and beauty to Brown and RISD students and faculty. Open to those of all denominational persuasions, we provide a literary and artistic outlet for followers of Christ. We publish works of art, prose and poetry that exhibit intelligent and creative approaches to current events, history and Christianity in general.

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Letter from the Editor

The Didion Conundrum

When I first arrived at Brown, an encyclopedia's worth of advice was dumped into my lap and, being an immortal, unbreakable teenager, I ignored every single warning. I was cautioned that if I chose to eat a Spicy With at Jo's every single night, I would likely gain the Freshman 15 within a month. I was warned about the existence of the SciLi challenge. (Whether such a warning carried with it an encouragement or a discouragement, I could never really tell.) Only in passing, however, did anyone really hint at the Sophomore Slump. To be sure, it came up occasionally, but only tangentially and superficially. Maybe because no one can really touch on the nature of the phenomenon, because only in experiencing this pampered nothingness can you really understand the depths of slumping. Or because once you have been to the bottom and climbed back out, you can never discuss where you have been. To look back would be to risk turning into a pillar of salt.

Freshman year is awash in the newness of college. Everything is pretty and green, even when the winter chill has forced you into hibernation and limited your wardrobe to inherently unattractive, chunky sweaters. Everyone is interesting and squeaky clean. Your friends' quirks are still funny. The rundown classrooms and unpalatable food still seem adorably "Brown." Yet, when sophomore year hits, it becomes just a little bit harder to accept these eccentricities. They begin to grind on you, aggravating the anxiety, which already eats at your consciousness. Many of us begin to question our choices, our concentrations, our purposes.

For me, it began the summer after freshman year. I was living in New York City working for a local newspaper when the loneliness nearly ate me alive. In his novel, "Sport of the Gods", Paul Dunbar perfectly captures the empty rush of the city, writing, "The lights in the busy streets will bewilder and entice him. He will feel shy and helpless amid the hurrying crowds. A new emotion will take his heart as the people hasten by him — a feeling of loneliness, almost of grief, that with all these souls about him he knows not one and not one of them cares for him." I knew people — fellow interns, editors, my roommate — but within the maze of the city — befriending someone, understanding someone, is an uncommon luxury. So I spent the summer watching, huddling alone in magnificent parks and historic museums, and trying to feel something. I felt as if I was wasting it all — wasting New York, where so much culture has lived and died, wasting youth when I had few responsibilities or burdens. At the end

of the day, it seemed to me that there was little purpose to working tirelessly to write a story, to seeing the most famous works of art, to looking at the house of a once-famous writer. I became obsessed with experiencing life and incapable of doing so at the same time.

When I came back to Brown in the fall, I thought I was free. I was home. I thought these annoying, tireless questions would no longer creep into my brain when I was bored, would no longer haunt my every action. But it seemed to me that, in the shadow of having to declare a concentration, having to choose a future, everyone reeked of the same questions. Everywhere I turned, I could see the same fear in my friends' eyes. I could smell the anxiety seeping from their bodies like sweat. The studying, the applying, all seemed useless and wasteful — because we are nineteen and young and free. But then the partying and hook-ups grew annoying too. We were going through the same motions without the feeling. Dancing without a rhythm, and singing off-key. For a few minutes, we could escape our own brains by immersing ourselves in work. Sophomore year, you become involved with everything so that when you finally lay in bed at night, you cannot think. You attempt to run away from your conscious and from your being.

But you can't really leave it all behind. The questions lurk, waiting for you to have an empty moment, and when you do, they fill it all with their desolation. College means nothing. Studying means nothing. Friendship means nothing. Life means nothing. It's clawing and creeping and unavoidable, and you become so exhausted and feel so generic in your depression that no one speaks of it. No one speaks of the slump. It may manifest itself in conversations about uncertain personal or academic decisions, but these discussions never really touch the bare truth; each is left to grapple with the confusion on his or her own. Further, as we are so blessed to be at Brown, we feel guilty for our own feelings of lostness. You have come this far. So how, in your right mind, can you cry yourself to sleep at night? It's an endless loop that always, always comes back to self-loathing.

In this pit, I lost myself for a while. I saw a lot of other people lose themselves too. And it's easy to abort your own personality with a shot glass and a bong. It's so very easy to leave the essential you in the middle of a sticky, sweaty room attached to a nameless, faceless stranger. And then just keep going, metamorphasizing until you create a human that is so different from



where you began that you no longer have to question it all. If you are not yourself, you don't have to figure out your purpose. In Joan Didion's "Play It As It Lays", she writes, "I know what 'nothing' means, and keep on playing." And many of us play it as it lays. We let meaninglessness be the rule of the game.

But at some point I couldn't do that anymore. Maybe it was over winter break when my mom looked at me and asked me why I had so much rage, why I looked at her like she was a stranger. Maybe it was when I stopped being able to go to sleep on a Friday night without drinking a handle of rum. I need, and firmly believe that everyone needs, a purpose, a promise of something more.

It seems ludicrous, even childish, to discuss such a generic concept — the meaning of life. I could watch a Disney movie if I wanted a concise summary of what I needed to be happy. But watching these movies, reading these books, tells me that being good and productive and sociable will be enough, will give my life a theme. Yet, at the end of the day, if there is no retribution for the evil, no promise of comfort after all this toil, no greater being who loves me beyond any human capacity, life feels hollow.

When I failed to find purpose in my friends, in my studies or even in my family, I released my inhibitions and my preconceptions. I'm a writer for heaven's sake. I live to break normalcy. So I had a little faith and let life be more than a series of rote actions. And when I unclenched my fist just a little, God took my hand. He told me, when being a straight-A student, when getting the most prestigious internships, when having an attractive boyfriend is no longer enough, let me be your purpose. When you fail a midterm, and don't get an internship and your boyfriend cheats on you, let me hold your pain for you. He told me, when you slump and can't lift your head up because everything feels so heavy, let me be your back brace.

Let me carry you. He told me, when everyone turns away and fails you and when you turn away and fail everyone, I will love you. I will always love you.

I will be the first to admit that my faith is infantile. It is not supported by airtight arguments and solid facts. It is only affirmed by the peace I can sometimes feel, the gentle calm and contentment that seems so much more attainable. I am no closer to understanding my path, but knowing that someone is guiding me is enough. Christianity is not always a language of words. Sometimes, it is a language of knowing and feeling and being. "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans," (Romans 8:26). Sometimes wordless groans are the only things that make sense, the only sounds that can comfort an aching soul.

I still cry and fall and question, but the concrete doesn't feel so hard anymore. There is a bit of cushion, an extra hand to help me feel a bit steadier. I am writing about my experience now because I know a lot of you are feeling this pain, this slump. I know a lot of you feel an endless anxiety about your future. And I want to tell you that you can free yourself from the torment. You will still have to experience the grind and the grime, but in God's arms, you can escape and feel whole. You can look over the peaks of the mountain and see beauty, not clouds. You don't have to play it as it lays. You can change the rules. We are Brown students for heaven's sake. We can be more.

Don't settle for life when you can have eternity.
Find your Cornerstone, and breathe.

Love always,

Margaret Nickens

Crossing to Jericho

So Joshua led us out into the stream.
The mighty wash of Jordan's great expanse
Came lapping at our sword-tips. We were men
Who walked as in a dream, knee-deep now, trembling
With dread of the familiar circumstance.
(For did we hear Old Egypt's chariot wheels
Come rumbling up from half-drowned memory?
And did the stink of quail and manna-meals
Rise in our mouths, unbidden, like a corpse?)
But still we followed. I saw the priest's son
White-faced and knuckled, clutching at the ark,
Steadfastly shouldering beneath wet robes.
The weight, the weight of all his priestly garb:
I knew it dragged at him unbearably.
The fabric billowed madly in the tow,
Drawn by deep waters running down from Adam,
The town upstream. But such amazing things
Were promised us that day! So we obeyed
When Joshua said, "Come consecrate yourselves.
Tomorrow your Lord does great things among you."
I followed for the sake of those last words —
"Among you." Was such witness possible?
I wondered to the last, as I advanced
Upon the roaring stream.

Sudden—a touch
Like thunder thrilling in a silent sky:
I watched in terror as a mighty shape
Began to mount the distant, dim horizon.
Immense and dark and frothing like a beast
New-caged and wrathful in its impotence,
It was the Jordan piling in a heap,
Heavy and trembling, held by some strange hand
At bay, and raging in captivity.
Dumbstruck, I watched the waters buck and rear,
As round our legs the eddy drained away;
And looking to the Sea of Arabah
We saw the flood was utterly cut off.
The river — oh, I saw the river run
To nothing. In its place, a desert road,
Hard-packed and dry, unraveled at our feet.

What could we do but follow? There we crossed,
Shame-faced and fearful, shadowing the ark.
The day passed swift as swiftly we traversed
A bone-dry bed where river ran before.
What stumbling steps I took! unused to paths
Made easy by my adamant God.

Night fell. We found our feet on Canaan-shore.
With weary steps like ours, the gathering dark
Alighted on our camp; but we stood still
And gazed out at the plains of Jericho
In silence. In that thin and lonely dusk
The bravest of us would have blushed to speak.

Then Joshua's voice rang out upon the air:
"O men of Israel, take up your stones!
For we have come through fire, and cloud, and flood.
I will not suffer Israel to forget
That she has witnessed God-with-us today.
Take up twelve stones, to mark the memory
Of dry paths made, and lost, and made again."

Some small thing stirred within me. So I rose
And did as bright-faced, clarion Joshua
Commanded, choosing for my tribe a rock
From river-tumbled bed. Thus, twelve in all,
Our burdens built a great memorial there.
Behind us, the ark-bearers staggered up
From their long vigil as the media
Twixt Israel and the promised land of old;
And with a sigh the floodwaters resumed.

Is this the way that you, my God, appear:
A living breath on Israel's dry bones?
In us, as at the crossing, do you choose
To make your glory in a ruin of stones?

I Know Your Step is Coming

I know your step is coming (light and wise,
unwinding like a crown untwisted quite
Of thorns, torn. And I'm glad — so very glad —
My life can figure in a little part

Of yours.) Why gentle, why dread, dear my Heart?
In giantness, you, magnanime, can make
my days to overflow with kindnesses.
So speak me soft — woo me — will all my words
Would turn to you — turn, taste, try deep delights.
My fingers, as they type, bend to a mind
That's full of all the graces you possess.
And now, graceless, expect me filled, formed, found

Out by all everythings you hold in hand
and heart. In part, dear one, you are that tune
Recalls me to my truer form and time.
In whole, you have the lingering sweetness, His,
Likenesses, limbs formed in the love of One
Who knows, consoles, holds, has to have his own.



Berit Goetz: Senior Farewell

At the end of the movie “Schindler’s List”, Oskar Schindler, a wealthy German businessman who bribed Nazi officials to keep over a thousand Jews out of Auschwitz, meets face to face with a large crowd of the people he rescued. They are the flesh-and-blood proof that he has done something good — a tangible sign that he has made a difference. Surely if anyone was ever justified in rejoicing, it is Mr. Schindler at this moment.

But he weeps.

He weeps because he could have done more, given more deeply of his resources, and didn’t. “This car ... why did I keep the car? Ten people right there ... This pin. Two people. It’s gold. I could have got one more person. And I didn’t. I didn’t.”

If I had no hope in Christ’s incomprehensible grace, coming to the end of four years at Brown would be a lot like looking at this crowd. These are people whose lives I had the opportunity to touch with Christ’s love. People I invited to explore with me the deeper story of human reality — regardless of whether they followed Jesus or not. I’d have to wonder: who is missing? Which of my friends never heard about Jesus, or never saw him reflected in my actions, because of my cowardice or hypocrisy? I could have drunk less that night. Why

did I drink so much? I could have been kinder to my roommate. She saw me at my worst for four years. How did she reconcile that with my claim to Christ-like-ness? I could have been better. I could have done more.

But as my time at Brown comes to a close, I joyfully thank God that the reality of Christ’s resurrection delivers me, and all Christians everywhere, from the pernicious lie that our friends’ salvation lies with us. And because of that reality I can pray that we would never reach the end of any chapter in our lives and think, with Schindler, “I didn’t do enough.” Let there be no mistake — we have so much to give: our time, conversation, compassion, testimony and willingness to listen. This is our privilege, our joy, our imperative.

One of Schindler’s rescuees gives him a pin engraved with a line from the Talmud: “Whoever saves one life saves the world entire.” But I have felt so keenly that this is not enough. Our best is not good enough. So instead, in these final weeks at Brown, and as long as we have breath, let us proclaim something new:

By the giving of one life, the entire world has been saved.

And that *is* enough.

Stressless

ELIZABETH JEAN-MARIE

Stress, according to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, is "a state resulting from a constraining force or influence of bodily tension resulting from factors that tend to alter an existent equilibrium." This definition takes the physiological approach to define stress; if you lift a heavy weight, you will put stress on your body and the energy you exert will no longer be at equilibrium. But as far as explaining the way we experience stress mentally, this definition really doesn't do it justice. Stress is such an abstract concept; is it an emotion, a feeling, an unavoidable fate? As I tried to find a way to define stress, all I could conclude was that it is merely a representation of reality. The reality that you may have just failed your orgo midterm; the reality that you have less than 24 hours to write your 20-page final paper; the reality that you have no idea

what you're going to do once you graduate from Brown. However we experience it, being a college student lends itself to the experience of constant stress. This week, as all of my schoolwork started to pile up, I found myself at a breaking point. All I could think was, how am I going to get through all of this?

But now that that moment has passed and I've managed to get through all the work that I have to do for the week, I'm laughing. I'm cracking up because I honestly cannot believe that I allowed myself to be so doubtful, when I serve the God who created the universe. The first verse of the Bible states, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." I mean, who am I to doubt Him? And it's not just a matter of this one time circumstance; I stress out everyday. My usual route back to sanity is found in Matthew 6:34, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." It's a great verse — it's even on a poster in the Rock^[1]. But if I really took the meaning of this verse to heart, I know I would never stress out again. As I pondered on this, all I could feel was a wave of disappointment. I allowed myself to slip away from complete trust in God. The only logical solution to my dilemma was to delve into the Word.

"ALL I COULD THINK WAS, HOW AM I GOING TO GET THROUGH ALL OF THIS?"

I turned to Psalm 23, a psalm of David I memorized in childhood, and for the first time verse four really hit me. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." David's not walking through some "dark" valley, he's walking through the valley of *the shadow of death*. I'm pretty sure it doesn't get any scarier than that. And yet, he has no fear; he faces Goliath with courage and bravery and defeats him. David seemed to be in tune with a concept I have yet to fully embrace. His trust in God was so strong and full that he was **fearless**. In modern times, I guess that translates to stressless. I also looked up the word "stressless" in the dictionary and, yes, it is a real word. Not only is it a real word, but it is also a real concept — something that can only be experienced if you fully trust in God.

I flipped over to the New Testament to the Pauline letter, Philippians. Paul wrote this letter from a prison cell, and even in the midst of torture and starvation, Paul still had some encouraging words:



4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!
5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. **6** Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. **7** And the peace of

“THE ONLY LOGICAL SOLUTION TO MY DILEMMA WAS TO DELVE INTO THE WORD.”

God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”^[2]

Those verses speak for themselves; I could end the article right here. But there’s more. In Jesus’s sermon on the mount he tells the crowds “Do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’” **32** For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **33** But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all

these things will be given to you as well.”^[3]

It’s really easy for me to read the living Word of God and just have a rush of emotions. I feel joyful and euphoric; for a moment, I forget everything I have ever worried about, and I’m laughing again. But the sad truth is that it doesn’t take long for those emotions to subside as I come back to the reality of stress. So as I read these texts, I stopped myself from getting too emotionally overwhelmed about what I was reading, and I thought about what I needed to do to stop this cycle of short lived euphoria followed by complete lack of faith. For now, I will focus on living out my life the way that Jesus instructed, by seeking his righteousness first. I know that sometimes I will fall, but as long as I land on my knees, I know I’ll be okay.

¹ Brown University’s Rockefeller Library

² Philippians 4:4-7

³ Matthew 6:31-33

Conversation Corner

If asked when you’re 75 years old, what do you want to tell others about your college life now?

CIA MATHEW

When I’m 75 years old with crow’s feet wrinkles around my eyes and arthritis in my knees, I want to tell my grandchildren that I was rebellious and counter-cultural. That I believed in the impossible, and that I talked about a scandalous grace. That I welcomed death. That I embraced radical abandonment of my post-grad plans in a Type A-praising school. And that I practiced the most unusual sexual behavior — chastity and abstinence. Being a 21st-century, American, Christ-follower in your 20’s is not the norm. I stick out. When most of my peers are passing joints and making jokes about Moses, I’m at worship nights and leading Bible study. When I’m 75, I want to tell people that my choice to pursue Christ made me different. And I want that difference to be something that turns heads and makes my friends question me — because with that I can point them

towards a God that can satisfy them more than any substances, romances and successes of this world.

When I’m 75 years old, I want to be positive that God used me. I want to have been used for his Kingdom, and I don’t want to regret missed opportunities. My young 20’s is an age where I have few commitments (no family, no pets), I have a three-month summer vacation, and I can still ask my parents for money. It’s the perfect age for traveling and exploration, and the options to serve God are endless. I want to be 75 and know that I didn’t set boundaries for how God could have used me. Instead, I allowed Him to take total control of my life, and I took the backseat with assurance I was in unfaltering hands.

Fiction and Its Consequences

Fiction in our Time: A Short Writing on Its Implications and Consequences

GABRIEL BROTZMAN

When the novel as it is known today was beginning to be formed in England at the beginning of the 17th century, its pioneers found that it allowed them a curious creative power. The creation of a piece of fiction — the life and times of an imaginary man or woman — was limited only by the expansive creativity of its author. Writers composed imaginary correspondences, interviews and worlds, all formed by the author's moral landscape; they summoned people, creatures and characters for the sole purpose of demonstrating views on anything from how a virtuous man or woman should conduct him or herself in society to what the author considered beautiful. The creation of the novel was an explosion of self-exploration and self-expression, the likes of which had never before been seen in the world; authors found liberation in their creations, their expressions, in a way that mere theoretical discourse did not, and perhaps could not, allow. When an author places his or her theoretical, ethical, or philosophical beliefs into a "realistic" realm, it can still produce an awe-inspiring effect. It is for this reason that readers have enthusiastically fawned over Fyodor Dostoevsky, V.S. Naipaul, Samuel Richardson, C.S. Lewis and countless others across time. And there is no doubt that we learn through reading, even in reading about the imaginations or beliefs of others. I say "even in reading" them because we must remember a key characteristic of the novel is its fictionality, the product of one person's imagination. And yet it is this principle of fiction that is so often overlooked.

For any novel or work of fiction to be effective, there must be a something real with which we can relate; if a novel had no semblance of reality we would have no interest and no connection to the work. Imagination builds itself upon what is real, what is known and what is experienced and then proceeds to mix and match characteristics, personalities, perspectives and principles. Novelists employ imagination but towards an objective, aligning the components of reality in slightly different ways (or perhaps not so slightly) so that his or her views are manifested in the colors and trappings of reality. But then are these views *true*? Without dissolving into a discussion on the nature of truth, I will simply say I believe, in the most basic sense, these authors would say no — these novels are fictional and therefore not "true." This is not a hard point at which to arrive. Novels are, by definition, fictional works; fiction is, by definition, an invention or fabrication as opposed to fact.

Here I want to interject a very simplistic definition of "reality" in order to continue the discussion: let us say that "reality" is that which has happened, or is happening, or will happen, and nothing else.^[1] According to this definition, novels are not true, that is they were only imagined to have happened. Frances Burney's *Evelina* never actually lived; Dostoevsky's Father Zossima never really walked on the Earth; the talking lion Aslan never literally breathed life into a stony fawn (neither do fawns actually exist). But, again, I don't think I'm asserting something people don't already understand. We accept that when an author writes a work labeled as fiction, he or she implies that the work should be received with less weight than, say, a court document or an eyewitness account.

I remember sitting in one of my classes this semester as we discussed Matthew Lewis' novel, "The Monk". The novel follows a series of events in which the protagonist, a seemingly devout, middle-aged monk,

"NOVELISTS EMPLOY IMAGINATION BUT TOWARDS AN OBJECTIVE, ALIGNING THE COMPONENTS OF REALITY IN SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT WAYS (OR PERHAPS NOT SO SLIGHTLY) SO THAT HIS OR HER VIEWS ARE MANIFESTED IN THE COLORS AND TRAPPINGS OF REALITY."

is led astray by a temptress and proceeds to commit a chain of heinous crimes which ultimately lead to his undoing and painful death. From the beginning, this "devout" monk, Ambrosio, is simultaneously the outward representation of goodness and chastity and the inward representation of pride, arrogance and selfishness. The novel is littered with "religious" characters like the Prioress, the head of the convent who seeks brutal, violent retribution for those who stray an inch outside the law. Needless to say, by the end there is not much good to be said of any religious character or the church establishment, and, in fact, the only truly "good" character in the novel has nothing to do with either the church or any religiosity. As we discussed the text in class, a student raised her hand and commented that the novel reaffirmed the rigidity and immorality of religion, citing the numerous examples of religious hypocrisy and brutality within the novel. I found this comment to be quite odd since, as we have discussed, the novel does not (or at least

should not) affirm itself as a factual account of what has happened. If we suppose this girl understands that there never really was a person named Ambrosio who lived as a monk as depicted in this novel, then she must be saying that although the circumstances never in fact occurred, the implications of that imaginary circumstance are real or true. In other words, even though there is no prideful, arrogant, hypocritical monk named Ambrosio, the feelings created in her by imagining that fictional character are still true.

But what could an imagined reality possibly tell us about our extant reality? While it is theoretically possible that something or someone fictional could have existed, it is also *impossible* in the sense that it did not actually happen. There are infinitely many scenarios that one could play out by simply taking reality and reordering it. One such scenario very well could be that of Ambrosio and his hypocrisy. But in the end, there is only one line of reality that has happened, that is happening and that will happen.

In the world as we know it, there is only room for either “A” or “not A” in linear time. There is only one history of the world; multiple possible histories cannot logically exist. Likewise, in this moment, there are a few things that I could possibly be doing to fill the passing seconds but only one thing will inevitably fill it. I could continue typing or I could stop typing, but I cannot do both. And finally, as long as time continues, it will be filled with one progression of events. It would seem that there are many possible directions in which the future could be taken — and, since we do not know its characteristics, it is still “changeable” — but we must understand that time will trace only one of these conceivable paths.

So I say again, what can fiction add to our lives? How should we take an imagined story and apply it to our lives? I have already discussed how fiction creates the representation of an alternate reality or a parallel universe in which different people existed and acted on the earth. Yet, because of the nature of fiction — its manifest presence in realm of reality — we can lose that understanding more easily than you might think. Take for instance the movie “The Grey” with Liam Neeson: towards the end of the film Neeson is lying bruised, beaten and half-drowned on the side of a river; he is being pursued by a pack of savage wolves that have just killed all his companions and will soon surround him as well. As he sits on the rocks feeling that death is creeping ever closer, Neeson looks to heaven and yells to God to prove Himself by saving him. Anyone watching the scene would say that Neeson does a very convincing job displaying this desperation, yet as the camera pans upwards to the sky there is nothing to see, nothing to hear. God has abandoned Neeson’s character, reinforcing the overarching theme of the film, as put by Neeson’s character earlier in the film:

“I don’t believe in that stuff [heaven/God]. I wish I could, but its all fantasy. This is real,” gesturing to the forest, “Those things out there are real.” Neeson was so compelling that I found myself angry with God as well. When Neeson’s character pulls himself up by his bootstraps and snidely remarks toward heaven, “F*%& it, I’ll do it m’self,” I found myself thinking, “Yeah, you go, Liam. Thanks a lot, God.” Because these things were said by an actual person, because I had just seen these men torn apart by wolves and I knew that Liam was next, because I could feel the anticipation that now God **MUST** act, because it all seemed so real, for a second I accepted that it was. Yet could someone ever present this clip of this movie as evidence that God does not exist? Absolutely not.

Think for a second about the countless fictional books, movies and even songs that wash over a person in the course of a lifetime. People will generally not allow their beliefs to change based on an individual stimulus. The first few times you may come away thinking, “That is an interesting point, but it is only an opinion.” The next time you encounter the same idea but in another

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work: “This is the same idea I’ve seen before,” you might say, “I wonder why it is a common element. It does feel right ...” And by the hundredth time you see it you may think, “Ok, there must be truth in this idea. Why else would it keep popping up everywhere?” We see throughout history that the prevalence of an idea, a thought or an opinion can make it “fact,” yet when it is pushed, no real foundation of truth can be found.^[3] Eventually, things become so muddled between reality and fiction that we lose sight of where these ideas even came from, who started them, why they were allowed

“WE SEE THROUGHOUT HISTORY THAT THE PREVALENCE OF AN IDEA, A THOUGHT OR AN OPINION CAN MAKE IT “FACT,” YET WHEN IT IS PUSHED, NO REAL FOUNDATION OF TRUTH CAN BE FOUND.”

to penetrate so deeply into our culture. But even more frighteningly, it can muddy the waters regarding the singularity and finality of time. Because we are imperfect beings and are not gifted with perfect discernment, we are easily distracted by the things that are altogether fictional. We can quickly forget that there is only one line of history that matters, that time marches on, and we must pay close attention to the things that really have happened, are happening, and (possibly) will happen.

In all of this, I wouldn’t say then that all fiction is utterly wrong or immoral. Even Plato argued in his “Republic” that myths were an effective teaching tool if they embodied some great natural or philosophical truth: myths are fantastical, but they are not inherently irrational and they are not targeted at the irrational parts of the soul.^[4] But Plato also foresaw the danger in using myths as a means of persuasion. Everything must be questioned in regards to substance or we risk accepting a dream over our waking moments. And one might ask, “Would that be so bad?” If the dream is built upon something better, something greater, would we not wish to live in that dream, never returning to this painful existence?

I think most people who hold the assumption that reality and meaning are blurry concepts would point to the existence of pain. At face value, we see pain and assume it to be a horrifying, useless feeling reserved for only the most unreasonable and evil of universes. That is one popular theory. However, there is another possible interpretation of the existence of pain as evidence that existence is ordered and meaningful. If we are to arrive at a conclusion, we are forced to look deeper into the meaning in our own lives and our specific circumstances. This would only make sense for me to propose by reflecting upon my own life. After all, *only I* and God can look back on my own

life and intimately understand the deep, personal, painful experiences — some of my own making, some which were inflicted by others — were the fullest blessings I have ever received. Additionally, I can *only* look at my own life. I do not have the privilege of overlapping completely with another perspective and

“BECAUSE WE ARE IMPERFECT BEINGS AND ARE NOT GIFTED WITH PERFECT DISCERNMENT, WE ARE EASILY DISTRACTED BY THE THINGS THAT ARE ALTOGETHER FICTIONAL.”

I cannot, therefore, see the deeper meaning behind another’s pain or struggles. I have no authority to say someone found meaning in the midst of tragedy. But, I can still believe that it’s there, and I do.

So when I am presented with an account of a human life — whether in a book or a movie, perhaps expressly fictional, perhaps not — in which the problem of pain or suffering is presented, my gut response should be preceded by a discernment which separates reality from belief. When I am confronted with the example of Ambrosio the monk, other than for some highly theoretical discussion which has little realistic consequence, I find his experiences and actions about as true as Matthew Lewis’ personal opinions (who, I might add, was only 21 when he wrote the book). Is this to say then that this exact series of events, characters, actions, motives and outcomes could never occur in the future and, thus, be of consequence? Theoretically, no. But at this point it can only be called fiction, and we should respond to it as such.

When we see the intricacies of human experience, the millions of interactions among people and the effect those interactions have upon even a single human life, it is easier to assume that complexity is the result of an arbitrary universe spiraling out of control. Indeed, the immeasurable task of mapping out the entire “human experience” would cause anyone to abandon any conceptions of order. But when we consider the smallest segment, the “self,” there is much more order, less confusion and more reason. It is here, in a moment of deepest honesty, we must begin to consider what is *actually* true, what has *actually* happened and what’s *actually* going on.

1 “Nothing else” would include things that were imagined to have happened or things that were supposed to have happened.

2 Of course there are multiple things occurring at any given second. However, these are not contradictory things like “blinking” and also “not blinking” to which I am referring.

3 Unfortunately, this is a phenomenon most people would say describes religion.

4 <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-myths/>

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A Poem on God & Suffering

CIA MATHEW

A forty-two year old father is on trial for sexually assaulting and raping his three daughters. The assaults began when they were four.

The concentration camp outside of Munich, Germany gassed Jews to death, and skinned their dead flesh to make lampshades for their top-ranking officers.

In two hours, Rwandan soldiers slaughtered 5,000 citizens with machetes and rifles. They left them half alive so they could feel the flames scorching open their flesh.

Does God not hear their skin singeing?

The embers rising from their burning bodies, God there is a bonfire of your children's bones in this land.

And I don't see water anywhere.

God where is your hand touching on the red light districts of Bombay, where your daughters use hangers to abort babies from pimps.

And pimps use fists to love babes with broken hearts.

God where is your hand touching to stop a child from dying every four seconds.

You didn't create prepubescent girls to lie naked in porn shows and have dark skinned boys drink from separate fountains.

God show me your hand touching this broken creation.

God we're sorry for breaking your creation.

We created poverty because we can't feed the hungry brother next to us when we eat our three-course lasagna dinner on a Tuesday night.

We started a 9.5 billion dollar sex trafficking industry because

we make sexual pleasure an idol, consensual or not.

We tell my nine-year-old sister she'll get suspended for fighting and show her Americans dropping bombs over Baghdad on TV when she eats her morning cereal.

We took your perfect Eden, and made dystopia out of your utopia.

We love ourselves more than anyone else,
And greed after flashy ambitions.

We hoard goodness and take pleasure in denying you.

We pursue self-righteousness, instead of your holiness.

But God, you give us the freedom to reject you, because then only do we have the freedom to receive you.

God, you made us a humanity that can create "evil" because then only can we create a "good" that is worth having.

You do not puppet this world like pieces of a board game,

But you are a God that looks at his creation and weeps over the way we've played.

God I feel your tears raining down as reconciliation stems from the mass graves of Rwanda, and as American peace teams dine with bomb-blasted Iraqi families.

I see your future glory lacing through the ghettos of Philly as Christians open safe houses of radical hospitality for addicts and prostitutes,
And as orphanages outside Bombay promise red light children they are not an accident.

God, I can't blame you for the groaning cracks of destruction that are tearing open our planet.

But I can praise you for the hope that is crawling out these cracks
Weaving a web of beauty on our blood stained grounds
A contagious healing that is suffocating injustice and restoring God's humanity.

Michelangelo painted, I see your hand desperately reaching out, crying to a world that needs a reestablishment of your Kingdom.

Lord, thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven.

God I'm reaching for your hand,

To hold onto the cross that has promised these blood-stained grounds will become streets of gold.

A cross that birthed a savior that pours justice into the cracks on our planet, and empties a love that fills over every break and tear, proving that God loves despite us rejecting Him.

God gave us the cross not to turn it upside down into a sword, but to beautifully infect this world with His love.

The blood shed on the cross is raining down streams of love to take out these fires, these embers of burnt bodies are colliding with drops of faith.

God, break me for what is broken,
So I can join our Suffering
Servant in restoring our world.

So my hands and feet can bring down your Kingdom of future glory,

hope is brimming
love is conquering
beauty is here
peace is promised
the cross is healing
God is redeeming
my Savior is restoring
thy Kingdom is coming
thy Kingdom is coming.

Why Would Anyone Want To Be Christian?

An exploration of self-identity and what it means to be yourself

TAYLIN IM

At Brown, I have felt an increasing pressure to know who I am. Identity is huge, and yet, only we know our own identities. How can anyone else know you better than you? We constantly categorize people in our heads: science, humanities, political, religious, artistic, musical, athletic, academic, creative, liberal, conservative. The lists go on, and again and again I am guilty of labeling, to a degree, only to get to know people and take back first impressions and inconclusive judgments. Maybe there is more to knowing yourself than your own individual thoughts and behaviors. I believe that our identity is inclusive of our surroundings and the people we know, even as far as to say that how people perceive us is also a part of how we identify ourselves. However, I know that regardless of these external influences that help shape who we are as people, there is something that is inherently personal and unique to each one of us. Things that come naturally, that feel “right” to us, that work. For me. This is a little different than holding up pleather jeggings and saying, “This is so not me,” preferring Sprite to Coke or enjoying romantic comedies to horror films. This is the difference between who you are when you are alone in your room and who you are when you are interviewing for college; who you are late at night, right before you fall asleep, and who you are when you are in the car with all your friends blasting Taylor Swift out the open windows.

So what is identity anyway? What makes you, you? Or is identity no more than some sort of social construct with a subjective component that we can simply mold to fit what or who we want to be? We hear and see so often that “nobody can do you better than you” or that the best thing to do is to “just be yourself.” But I ask you, what does it mean to *be you*? Maybe you know this and refer back to the list of adjectives you thought up back when colleges asked you to describe yourself. Maybe you define yourself more loosely, or have no definition at all because why would you reduce yourself to a mere description? Who we are is more than what we like or dislike. Who we are is an accumulation of our beliefs, our actions, our words, our friends and family, our accomplishments and our mistakes. Given that we are constantly changing, the notion of “identity” implies that *something*, however, is indeed constant about us.

So what is this *something*? Maybe you identify through religion. This is not true for everyone, but if

you believe your identity is somewhat determined by your actions and behavior and if your beliefs affect how you view and respond to the world, then maybe there is a hint of consistency and validity in this making up an important part of your identity. Are you proud of what you believe, or do you prefer to hide it unless it is brought up? If you were to tell people what you believed, would you be able stand up and defend your identity to others, or are you doubting or embarrassed? And so we run into this problem — this inability to defend our identity — often with Christianity. Many of us are aware of the connotations or ideas of what it means to be a Christian, especially on a campus that is so diverse and involved in world issues. In people’s minds, Christians might be kind and charitable, judgmental and intrusive, or anywhere in between.

“THERE IS SOMETHING THAT IS INHERENTLY PERSONAL AND UNIQUE TO EACH ONE OF US.”

Most have encountered Christianity either personally or indirectly, and it is only natural to take into account these experiences when characterizing our idea of Christianity and then applying it towards people who claim it as part of their identity. So again, after all the pain and damage Christians have done to their name, why would anybody want to *identify* as a Christian?

Admittedly, I have had my own share of angst and “rebellion” against religion as an institution. Christianity, identity, favorite food; what isn’t a spectrum nowadays? I believe that our identities are multidimensional, but which dimensions do we take into account when questioning one’s identity? Personally, I don’t have all the answers to my own identity figured out, but I do know the most important part of my identity: I choose to identify with Christ. This is not because of the name or because the people around me believe in God, but rather because of what I believe, which is in a God that loves us unconditionally. That God is bigger than anything we can ever imagine is enough for me to recognize that my own knowledge is insufficient and limited, and that with our capacity to love, differentiate good from evil, and continuously discover what we didn’t know yesterday today, we are living proof of God’s power and love. Of course, the theological debate of whether God exists or not



go on and on, but in my relatively short life, I have seen that both sides are capable of supporting their beliefs enough to satiate the biases, and so I believe that “evidence” can only go so far with how little we really do know. Rather, for me, what it comes down to is not realizing how many “hard facts” each side can produce, but the hope and reality that if what the Bible says is true, we have a God who is love, big enough to cover our sins with the sacrifice made on the cross. And who am I to deny an eternity with my Creator?

I have to admit, however, that although I can logically “reason” myself through why I should want to identify with Christ, that is not ultimately the case for why I choose to follow Him. Perhaps my upbringing has a lot to contribute as I was raised in a Christian family, and as I’ve learned about God throughout my life, I have had the opportunity to discover new facets of who He is. Though I know that living a life like Christ is the hardest path in this world, I know that as I understand more of what Jesus did for us and His true character, I cannot deny His identity and His sovereignty simply because I don’t like or agree with how many Christians today portray God. God is not the people of this world, no matter how often we link the religion with the church or the faith with its people. I know we all fall short of the glory of God, and to expect people to be my example of God’s nature is partially blindsided and misled. We are all imperfect, and because of that, we must rely on God’s sacrifice and mercy to overcome our faults. This is not to say that we cannot go to other people for support or guidance, but simply that they are not God, and so to reject God because of others’ actions or interpretations is not as wholesome as we often may believe. Even in my own walk, I have

stumbled and fought against what I was brought up to believe, but to fight against Jesus, I know, is selfish and only results in more pain and regret than I could have imagined. Thus, this may not be a faith of comfort or safety in the typical sense, but one that recognizes God because of who He is rather than because of what He can and has done for me.

Sure, we all have a list of qualities or beliefs that “identify” us, but maybe in contemplating my own

“THIS MAY NOT BE A FAITH OF COMFORT OR SAFETY IN THE TYPICAL SENSE, BUT ONE THAT RECOGNIZES GOD BECAUSE OF WHO HE IS RATHER THAN BECAUSE OF WHAT HE CAN AND HAS DONE FOR ME.”

identity, I realized the importance of importance. Priorities underlie all of who we are, and maybe those priorities are what differentiates us from each other. For many Brown students, I think I can safely say that our education is important to us. Maybe our relationships come before school, or vice versa. Our futures, our goals and our dreams define us if they are high in our priorities. Why we are doing the things we do or why we think the things we think comes from an inherent prioritization. Maybe you care what people think about you, and maybe you disregard social norms altogether. All these things make up parts of who you are. But while there is arguably an “inherited” quality to our own identities, we do have a say in who we become and in the way we prioritize our lives. And whether God is the most important in your life, non-existent in your mind or somewhere in between, does make a universal difference in who you are.

5 Healthy Verbs to Practice Daily

TAYLIN IM

Do - a verb
without a care
but so much purpose.
For me, I can't just
Do.

Think - a command
before you Do
or even breathe.
For me, too much
except when I'm with you.
Pray - a gift

like words, but unlike
our words, they're lifted
beyond flawed syllables.
For me, disjointed thoughts,
but comfort, because
Someone is always listening.

Love - all of the above
let it flow through every
pore in your body,
every ounce of your soul.
For me, there is no greater
reason for living than to
Love.

Join - the four,
pray, as you think
let it be entwined with
every thought
And then do, love,
not through me
or you, but by Him who gave
For me.

On Mystical Obedience

ANDREW KIM

Today, I want to restore the reputation of obedience.

I think we've been conditioned by the imperfection and exploitation of obedience by man to view this term in a negative light. The use of authority as a manipulative tool brings many to think of obedience as voluntary slavery, as the cause of much trauma, violence and imperfection in the world, and for good reason. I'm sure a lot of you — at least the psychologists in the room — have heard of the Stanley Milgram experiment on obedience. Basically, there was an experimenter, a teacher (who was the subject) and a fake learner. The subject could not see the "learner," which was actually just a tape recorder. But the subject didn't know that; he/she thought it was a real person. The experimenter would command the subject to give increasing voltages of electric shocks to the alleged learner each time the learner got a question wrong. Each time the subject administered a shock a tape recorder would play from the other room with a man's voice expressing pain from the shocks. Eventually, with the larger shocks, the recording played noises of banging on the door, complaining of heart problems and eventually the recording stopped responding. Still, 65% of the subjects administered the highest level of shock of 450 Volts. The typical lethal level of shock is 100-250 volts. These are normal people giving lethal electric shocks just because an experimenter commands it.

I don't think I have to go into the more extreme examples such as the Jonestown massacre or the Nazi party to make the case that obedience has, for good reason, a negative association for many people.

So now that I've sufficiently bashed obedience, I want to emphasize that obedience is at the crux of Christian faith. 1 John 5:3 says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." Christians are called to love God; after all, that is the greatest commandment. But what exactly is love? It's such an

"FOR THIS IS THE LOVE OF GOD, THAT WE KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS."

abstract concept. It's not just as Hobbes (the tiger, not the philosopher) describes it: that feeling "when your heart falls into your stomach and splashes your innards and short circuits your brain and makes you woozy." Love is deeper than an emotion. And for us, it's far too abstract to have a truthful gauge of our love for God and others, apart from the physical, emotional and mental manifestations of this so-called love. And as John describes, if we love God, our obedience to God will follow. Or in other words, we know that we love God when we obey Him, or rather desire to

obey Him. This act is like an indicator of our love.

But this begs the question, *why does God command what He commands? And why must we obey Him?*

Let me read you Clive Staple Lewis' answer to this:

God's will is determined by His wisdom, which always perceives, and His goodness, which always embraces the intrinsically good. But when we have said that God commands things only because they are good, we must add that one of the things intrinsically good is that rational creatures should freely surrender themselves to their Creator in obedience. The content of our obedience — the thing we are commanded to do — will always be something intrinsically good ... But in addition to the content, the mere obeying is also intrinsically good, for in obeying, a rational creature consciously enacts its creaturely role, reverses the act by which we fell, treads Adam's dance backwards and returns.

In this quote I see Lewis split the answer to why God commands what he does into two reasons. First, He commands what he does because they are good things to do. It is good to love your neighbor and your enemy, it is good to forgive trespasses and visit orphans and widows, it is good not to murder. But second, Lewis points out that God commands these things for the sake of commanding, that we may have a chance to obey for the sake of obeying. In the very act of obeying, we will not only be doing good things because God commands good things, but we will be performing an intrinsically good act. Why is the mere act of obedience a good act? Well, first, it's because as Christians, we believe that God created us, and we rejected our Creator, and yet He came down and died for us so that our sins may be forgiven. Obedience to this graceful, merciful Creator and Savior is our way of not just playing the role we should play as His creation, but also our way of loving Him. Second, Lewis also mentions that this will "tread Adam's dance backwards." What does that even mean?

Let me answer that with a verse from John. Let's read John 8:31-36. So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are the offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

Jesus answers what Lewis means by treading Adam's dance backwards. Adam's sin and the fall

**“AND YOU WILL KNOW THE TRUTH,
AND THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE.”**

of man have made us all slaves to sin. I, for one, am enslaved by certain sins more than others. Lust, pride and judgment – I am a slave to them all. These three vices control my actions daily, and though I may think I am free to choose whatever I do, I feel I am controlled by my desires.

Jesus proposes an alternative to this. He says that if we abide in His word, if we act according to His word, we will know truth and become free. Now that seems counterintuitive considering our initial examples about obedience and how that stifles our freedom. But Jesus states that by obeying His commandments, we are set free. What does it mean to be free in this context? It means we are free from the control that sin has over our lives. It means I'm free from doing things that are so toxic to others, so harmful to others or myself. It means that we are free to live as God intended man to be.

Lewis says this: “When humans should have become as perfect in voluntary obedience as the inanimate creation is in its lifeless obedience, then they will put on its glory, or rather that greater glory of which Nature is only the first sketch.” Think about that – a world where it would be as natural for humans to obey God as for the earth to rotate round the sun, or for this pen to fall to the floor when I drop it. We will put on the glory that God has in store for us; the glory so beautiful that we cannot even fathom.

I mean, that sounds awesome, right? So why don't we just get set free? Why don't we just achieve that glory? All we have to do is ... oh wait ... become perfect in voluntary obedience and abide in his word. Let's go back to that first verse we read, 1 John 5:3. John writes, “And His commands are not burdensome.” What the heck John? You're telling me that God's commands are not burdensome while I'm struggling to go even half of a day without breaking one? How can you say that his commands are not burdensome when our desires and our wills conflict with his commands?

This can range from straightforward to downright confusing.

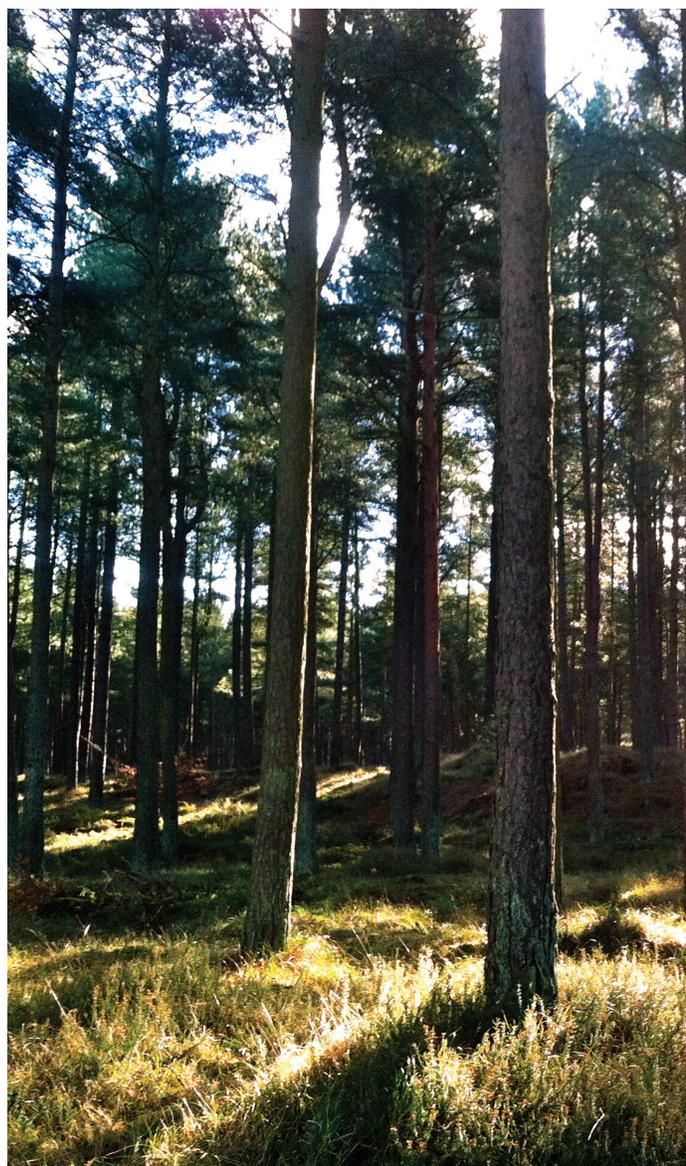
Let me give you a more ambiguous example. In “The Magician's Nephew”, which is one of the Narnia books by C.S. Lewis, the main character Digory is a little boy whose mother is dying. Aslan the lion (who is a figurative Jesus) commands Digory to go fetch one apple from a magic tree. When Digory gets there,

he sees a witch who tells him that the apples from that tree have the power to heal anyone and give eternal life, which is true. The witch eats the apple and lives forever. So here, Digory is faced with a desire to save his dying mother's life by taking an extra apple. Yet Aslan's command is to take only one. In the end, Aslan ends up healing the boy's mother by giving him another apple, but that's just a miserable conflict in desires for a little boy to choose between. How can John say that this is not burdensome?

**“JESUS ANSWERED THEM, “TRULY,
TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, EVERYONE WHO
COMMITS SIN IS A SLAVE TO SIN.”**

How, when our desires conflict with the desire to obey God, can God expect us to obey him?

I believe that the problem arises from our misperception that our salvation has two parts to it. We think that there's God's part: He dies on the cross and forgives our sins for us, and our part: we love him and we obey him. In fact, there is only one part – God's part. He not only forgives my sins, but when I believe in him and



ask him, he also puts into me the miraculous desire to obey His will. We cannot love God apart from God. We cannot obey God apart from God. To try to obey Him on our own with brute-force discipline would be futile. I know this because if any of you know me pretty well, you probably know that brute-force discipline is something I'm quite good at. It's a perk of being raised in a Korean family. And yet I cannot obey Him through my will only. I have to ask Him to remove my will and supplant it with His will, the will to obey Him.

Let me show you this with an analogy. Here I have a cup; let's say this is my heart. Here I have water; let's say this is the good will that I have; the will to obey. After all, humans aren't completely depraved. We empathize, we love and we are sometimes altruistic even without God. Now let's say that these rocks are some of my sinful desires. I put them into my heart and now my desires are corrupt. They conflict with wanting to obey God's will. But I can easily stick my finger in there or get a strainer and pick those out. But here is some salt. Now if I pour these desires in there, they will dissolve in the water, and I can't manually separate them. This is the state I'm in every day,

and that I'm pretty sure most of us are in every day. So how do we get our heart's desires pure again?

Actually the correct answer is to vacuum filtrate the solution to remove the rocks and debris and then subsequently perform a simple distillation to separate the salt and water. But for the metaphor's sake, let's say we can't do that. What we really need to do is to dump the whole thing out and ask to have it filled with water again. To love God, we must obey Him. And we cannot do this by our own meager efforts. We need a heart of obedience. We must empty all of our desires, even our good ones, so that our cup is empty to become filled again with the new desire, the desire to obey Him.

Why does this seem so difficult? It means the rejecting of our own desires, admitting that they are flawed and wrong, and asking Him to make us new, to give us His perfect desires. It's painful because it means admitting that our dark desires are the reason for so much of the pain, evil and suffering in the world. It means confessing this in the most self-effacing and vulnerable manner about our personal desires, not just attributing evil to some vague concept of "mankind."

By continual prayer for less of our desires and more of His in our hearts, we can truly get closer to that elusive but beautiful goal of perfect voluntary obedience to Christ. The obedience that not only sets us free from being slaves to sin, but also brings us to share His eternal glory. Let me close with a short quote from our friend CS Lewis, or as his friends called him, Jack. One of the characters in Jack's novel, "That Hideous Strength", has mice that he has trained so that after a meal when he rings a bell, the mice come out and eat the crumbs on the floor to clean up after him. He says this:

"Humans want crumbs removed; mice are anxious to remove them. It ought never to have been a cause of war. But you see that obedience and rule are more like a dance than a drill."

I desire nothing less than this for us – that we overcome our negative views of obedience imparted on us by our imperfect earthly experience, that we instead ask God to put into us the delight to do His will, and that we ask this continuously, every day, every hour, every time we are tempted to break his commands (a simple prayer: "God let me desire to do your will"). So often in fact, it would be as hard for us to disobey Him in that ideal future as it is hard for us to obey him now. God, imagine a world like that. It would be heavenly.



The Creamer Medieval Gallery

RACHEL HIMES

Art museums, from the most modern of New York City galleries to the most ancient collection of historic treasures, seem to be universal in atmosphere — one hears the whisper of hushed voices and muted footfalls, one feels a quiet appreciation for human achievement. A good word for this atmosphere might be reverence, a term which may certainly be applied to many places around the world where art is displayed, but is particularly relevant to the Creamer Medieval Gallery of the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design. While all the art gathered in the RISD Museum is, in a sense, sacred, the galleries which display religious art have, through careful arrangement of art objects and architectural choices, introduced a ritualistic aspect to the experience of viewing the art. In her book *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, Carol Duncan equates ritual — here defined as sets of practices which induce a transcendent experience — with the experience of viewing art in a museum. The selection of artwork and the placement of art pieces within the Creamer Medieval Gallery, as well as the architecture itself and the overall ambiance of the room creates an experience for viewers which is in fact a religious ceremony, providing museum-goers with the chance to experience religious art in the same context as its historical practitioners. The sacred space created in this gallery is not only appropriate to the art it contains, but lends itself to an apprehension or appreciation of the concept of the divine, facilitating a museum experience which leaves the visitor not merely a detached viewer, but an involved devotee.

The Creamer Medieval Gallery is first visible upon entering the European Paintings Collection. At the end of the long royal blue salon, its walls covered floor to ceiling in paintings, you see it — a massive crucifix, framed by an arched stone doorway, its somber grey a striking contrast to the rich blue of the previous gallery. Encompassed by the 12th century French Romanesque portal, viewers see the artwork “Crucified Christ” much as it would have first been seen in 11th century France, immediately visible above the altar, centered at the front of the church. In this context, the placement of the crucifix creates an imagined altar and chancel in the gallery space. The European Paintings Collection becomes an area in which you prepare yourself to enter a sacred place — the narthex of the ‘church,’ a transitory space between the secular and the sacred. The historicity of this setting gives museum-goers the sense that this is a place removed from the modern world. We are transported to the Middle Ages, where we enter a gothic church with the hesitant sense of an imminent encounter with the divine.

The impression of sacred space becomes stronger within the Creamer gallery. Viewers must crane their necks to look up at the “Crucified Christ”, much as the people who saw it in a church or cathedral in the Middle Ages would have done. This placement of this artwork is a glance heavenwards, despite the enclosed space of the room. The entire piece is raised on a dais and separated from the rest of the gallery by a molded iron grille. This deliberate placement, in conjunction with the architecture of the room, implies an altar screen and the raised step platform of the altar, upon which practitioners would kneel. In this way, viewers see these pieces of art in the same context as they were originally intended to be viewed, and understand the same sense of the sacred they were intended by their creators to convey. Thus, a greater understanding of their purpose is gained.

The main medieval gallery is flanked by two smaller rooms. Found on either side of the ‘altar’ created by the tableau of the “Crucified Christ”, they can be interpreted as dual transepts, features of the European medieval church. These transepts create the same cruciform shape typical of period churches, adding another historic layer to the sacred space this gallery implies.

One of the doorways to these smaller, transept-like rooms features a 12th century Gothic tracery arch, an architectural element common to medieval churches. The symmetry of the room, the central aisle, the pediments and pilasters — all are features of liturgical architecture. The very architecture of the room leads to a ritual experience because of its visual likeness to a place where rituals are truly enacted. The atmosphere of this room in the museum requires the same devotion from museum-goers as a holy building would from church-goers.

The idea of ritual experience is of course enhanced by the actual artwork displayed in the collection. Precious objects of devotion — illuminated manuscripts, leaves from holy missals, stained glass, painted altarpieces — all reside in glass cases or rest upon pedestals. It is impossible to forget that the very objects laid before you were created to inspire religious devotion. An especially lovely 13th century French pyx resides in a glass case in front of the central crucifix. If the tableau of the crucifix is understood to be the ‘altar’, the placement of this pyx, a receptacle designed to hold communion wafers is especially relevant, implying as it does the rite of holy Eucharist, the most important ritual of the Christian church.

All about the room, statues and icons of saints — Peter,

Anthony, George, James and nameless apostles — gaze down upon museum-goers from their pediments and pedestals, their height implying a palpable sense of their holiness and power. In addition to the central tableau of the altar and crucifix, there is to the right side of the gallery another deliberately placed scene of religious significance. A carved wood Italian statue of the Angel of the Annunciation is placed directly across from a Virgin Annunciate, their proximity creating a tableau of the exact moment at which the Virgin Mary was told of the coming of Christ by the Angel Gabriel. The viewer is forced to walk between these two pieces of artwork to enter the adjoining room, effectively becoming a participant of the scene. Museum-goers are completely immersed in this religious ritual. This is important, because the original intent of the creators of these pieces was to endow practitioners with a sense of the very real presence of the sacred in churches, to enhance devotion and religious experience, an experience now communicated to modern viewers in a secular setting. While Duncan argues that art museums generate exclusively secular experiences, and, are indeed “temples of the secular”, the Creamer Medieval Galleries proves otherwise. Despite their enclosure in the secular environment of a modern museum, the artworks of this gallery seem to emanate a palpable sense of religiosity and the divine.

Upon entering the smaller medieval gallery which adjoins the Creamer Gallery, viewers are immediately struck by the centrality of another crucified Christ, this time in the form of a 13th century Spanish painting. This centrality of Christ is an important part of the layout of the room. Christ becomes the focus of the exhibit, just as He would be the focus in a church.

Interestingly, this adjoining gallery also subtly implies the Stations of the Cross, a devotional practice which uses icons representing different scenes from the Passion of the Christ. Beginning with a beautiful carved linden wood Pieta from Germany, in which the dead Christ is cradled in a grieving Virgin's arms, visitors circumambulate the room and eventually arrive at a 14th century Italian painting of the Risen Christ, freed from the bonds of death. The timeline of the life of Christ is implied, as viewers pass representations of the crucifixion, encounter Mary Magdalene and experience other scenes. Whether intentional or not, this interesting configuration is heavy with ritualistic implication for the

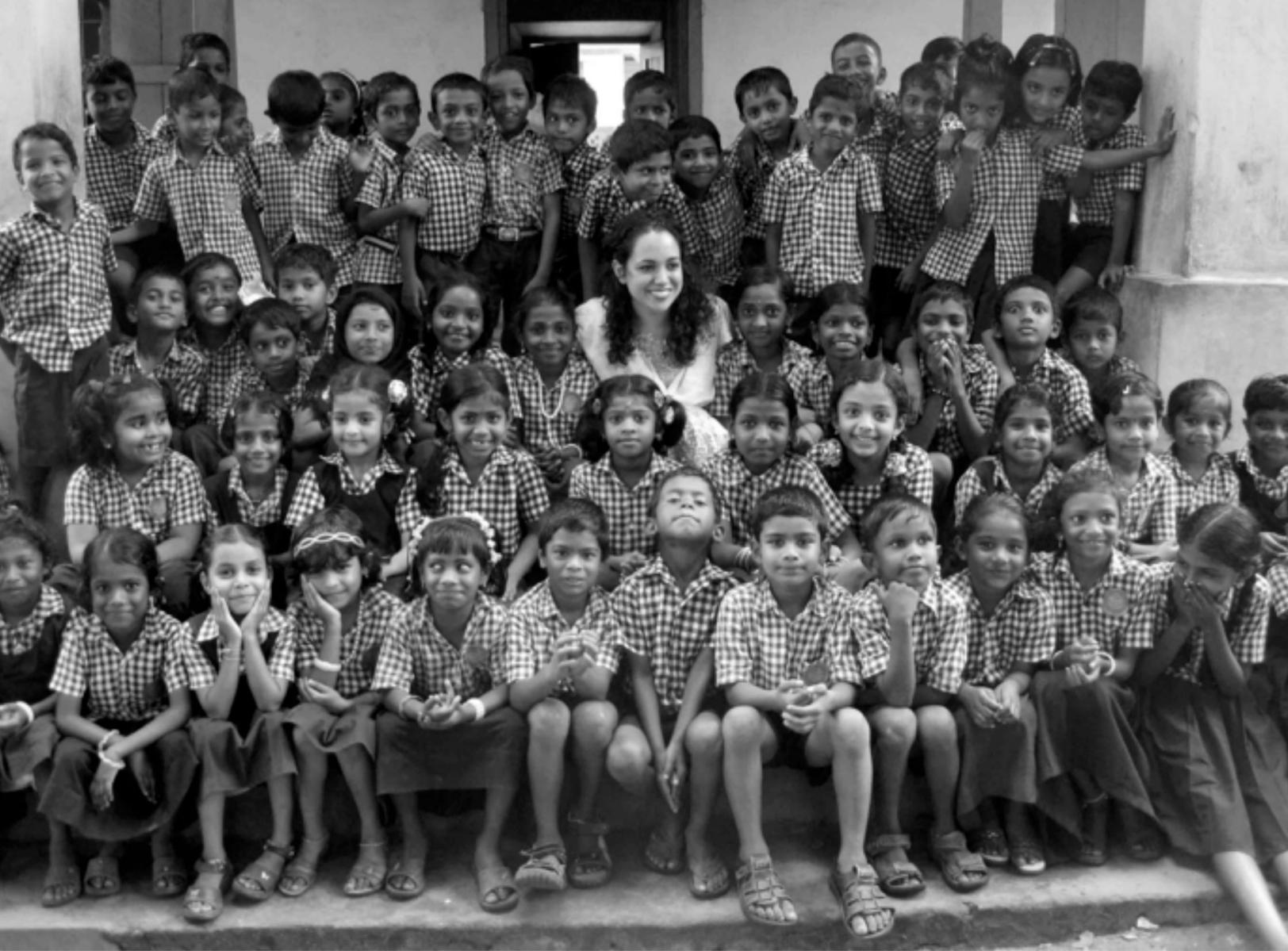
observant visitor. While in a non-religious exhibit, this sort of circumambulation would be a secular ritual, here it becomes a religious procession, fraught with Christian connotations.

Even the most subtle details of this gallery give the impression of ritual. Scarcely noticeable at first, strains of song can be heard in the Creamer Gallery; period music is being played. Recordings of early medieval plainsong, composed specifically for the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages, as well as madrigals, enhance the experience of the gallery. The soaring choral arrangements which fill the room give a definite sense of not only time, but place, reminding viewers of the intent of the gallery. A 'Domine Deus' or 'Christus' is occasionally discernable — strongly evoking the memory of the religious audience for which such compositions were intended, as well as the purpose for such music: to glorify and praise God. Even the dim lighting in the Creamer Gallery seems like that of a medieval church, lit only by candles and sunlight.

In this day and age, where it seems that we are slowly losing all opportunity of experiencing the transcendent — as nature is slowly destroyed and modernity and technology encroaches upon holy and historical places — it is wonderful to be given a chance to step outside of today and visit a place where such things as bulldozers and bluetooth were unheard of. The Creamer Mediaeval Gallery, and countless other museum spaces, provide us with just such an opportunity, and it is up to us to take advantage of them.

Shepard Batik
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Symbols of God

RACHEL HIMES

Since the first century, Christianity has been characterized by the paradox resultant of the need to express and convey knowledge of an unknowable God — the necessity of representing the unrepresentable. This theme has led to, at one extreme, periods of destructive iconoclasm, but also to an extensive and rich use of symbolism in rituals, texts and objects, for Christian symbolism is not limited to the visual, but is present in all dimensions of the faith. Indeed, for Christians, particularly those of the period spanning from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages, there was nothing — not the Divine Liturgy, not the Sacraments, not icons, texts or even architecture — that was not at some level, or entirely, symbolic. The heavy weight of symbolism meant that layers of meaning were embedded in every image and action, necessarily so, for “we see through a glass darkly ... and know only in part,” (1 Cor 13:12). Because by this world our eyes are veiled, symbols are necessary to gain knowledge, albeit partial and inadequate knowledge, of God.

But how are symbols to be used when the divine — whether as God the Father, the divine aspect of Christ, or the Holy Spirit — is as St. John of Damascus puts it: “uncircumscribed and unable to be represented?”^[1] For theologians such as John of Damascus and Patriarch Timothy I, both of whom authored apologia for Christian symbolism, the divine can and must be represented in understandable ways in order to bridge the gap between the human intellect and the incomprehensibility of God. Symbols, despite being partial and incomplete representations, are crucial to Christian religiosity and devotional practice, because they lend themselves to some understanding of what God is. At their most elevated, symbols are the doorway into the Christian faith, the path through which one may approach God, become one with Him, and thus be saved.

Because humans can only comprehend things of this world and cannot comprehend God, God must be described through symbols originating with this world, so that humans may understand. Our “inability... to direct our thoughts to the contemplation of higher things makes it necessary that familiar everyday media be utilized to...construct understandable analogies.^[2]” Timothy I writes, we “cannot know and hear about Him as He is, but simply in the way that fits with [our] own nature, a way [we] are able to understand.^[3]” The emphasis is on the possibility of understanding God via terms couched in the world that He has made. Indeed, this argument could be furthered by saying that God made the world with the intention that the creations of the world might be aids through which humans could comprehend Him. The intellectual consideration of earthly concepts such

as ‘fire’, ‘wind’, and ‘king’, from Timothy I’s apology, and “sun, light...burning rays...running fountain... overflowing river^[4]” is the means by which we may contemplate God. The multiplicity and diverse nature of such symbols serves to illustrate the manifold dimensions and all-encompassing nature of God.

There is direct precedent for using the symbols of this world to explain divinity; it is the method God uses to describe Himself and His kingdom in the New Testament, through the parables and wisdom sayings of Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of Heaven is couched in earthly — even homely — terms. It is like the mustard seed, it is like the leaven, it is like the found sheep and the fine pearl. Literary metaphors such as these are simultaneously accessible and mysterious, readily apparent and requiring much contemplation. The point of such symbols is, however, not to make the nature of God easily comprehensible, but to engage the intellect and facilitate earnest contemplation of their meaning. Jesus spoke to the disciples and the people in parables, and often explained parables with yet more parables, layers of meaning indicating the futility of explaining God via symbol, yet also illustrating that symbols are the only means we have. The use of parables is not limited to the New Testament. Timothy I uses a parable about an apple to explain to Caliph Mahdi how God can be at once both Word and Spirit, using “bodily comparisons and similes” to convey the reality of God.^[5] Julian of Norwich and St. Symeon use parables in their writings, as do countless other theologians.

The language which both Timothy I and John of Damascus use to explain the function of symbols is also similar in that it is prospective, expectant of some greater future knowledge at a time when God will be fully revealed and our knowledge of Him will be complete. As John of Damascus puts it, “image shadows something that is yet to happen, something hidden in riddle and shadows.^[6]” For Timothy I, symbols are here to tide us over until “the darkness of mortality passes, and the fog of ignorance dissolves.^[7]” For “now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face,” (1 Cor 13:12). It will become possible to know the Lord fully, and symbols will no longer be necessary, when, as Jesus said, “the time comes when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father,” (John 16:25). At that time the intellectual efforts of the human mind to contemplate the divine via symbols will be transcended by the knowledge of God.

1 John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, ch. 15, p. 22

2 *Ibid.* ch. 11, p. 20

3 Timothy I, *Apology before the Caliph Mahdi*, p. 239

4 *On the Divine Images*, ch. 11, p. 20

5 *Apology before the Caliph Mahdi*, p. 238

6 *On the Divine Images*, ch. 12, p. 21

7 *Apology before the Caliph Mahdi*, p. 241

The Difficulty in Communicating with a Heavenly God

GABRIEL BROTZMAN

Have you ever wondered why people pray to God? I mean, we understand why people pray — to communicate our thoughts, concerns, hopes and fears to God so that he will overcome, fulfill and heal according to his will. I think most people can understand the impulse to ask God for those things, the desire to communicate with God. But why do we talk to him? Why is it so important to speak to God with sounds from our mouths? Why must we even communicate via the physical? In fact, the Bible^[1] says that God knows the thoughts of man before they are spoken,^[2] certainly implying that we don't speak to relay unknown information. And even if we did have something to offer God — perhaps some secret he didn't know — we are utterly inadequate communicators who, many times, can't even properly explain our own thoughts. Yet Scripture is littered with evidence that our voices — our interaction with God through language — have divine importance and implication.

C.S. Lewis, as both author and Christ follower, wrestled with this quandary in his thoughts and writings. In his novel *Perelandra*, Lewis (who establishes himself outright as the writer, narrator and, therefore, a character within the story) relays the strange yet fascinating expedition of Dr. Elwin Ransom who has just returned from a journey to Venus, and previously to Mars. As Ransom begins to explain his journey, Lewis assures him, "Of course I realize [the journey is] all rather too vague for you to put into words..." when suddenly Ransom interjects, "On the contrary, it is words that are too vague. The reason why the thing can't be expressed is that it's too definite for language."^[3] There is so much about human language that draws us close to heavenly powers and yet simultaneously keeps us distanced from those powers, much of the time resulting in a mixed feeling of awe and frustration. Yet with intentional design (a view Lewis would profess) comes intention in the components of the design, leaving us to conclude that there must be some greater reason for language.

1. Speaking of God...

To begin: "Does God the Father talk to God the Son?"^[4] "Talking" here would first imply that the Father and the Son each have the instruments (a mouth, ears, a voice box, lungs, etc.) to

accommodate speech, sight, and hearing, as well as the physical components (space, oxygen, light, etc.) and a shared language. And if God is omnipotent, from where does he speak? Is his mouth everywhere? Are his ears everywhere? Does the Father speak in a direction when he speaks to the Son? Many of these specific questions could be circumvented by the principle that God is outside

"SCRIPTURE IS LITTERED WITH EVIDENCE THAT OUR VOICES — OUR INTERACTION WITH GOD THROUGH LANGUAGE — HAVE DIVINE IMPORTANCE AND IMPLICATION."

of space and time and therefore does not have to exist in physical space as we do. It's very possible that God doesn't need a mouth to "speak" or ears to "hear." I guess we could understand that. But does the Father use language when he speaks to the Son? Or in other words, does God need a language? If he does, it would seem we have found something greater than God; God is bound by language. Even if God was able to convey something with perfect precision and speed, he would still be unable to communicate but through language.

So there are two possible conclusions to be drawn from this fact: either God establishes/creates language specifically for us, to use with us and through us, or language is a reflection of God's own dependence on a force greater than himself. However, we can only conceive of God using language when it directly involves humanity, his creation. We read in Genesis 1 that before the forms of the earth and the universe existed, God was there; before there was anything — man, birds, trees, shapes, air, gravity, space, time — there was God. How, for instance, could language have existed before time (in the broadest sense)? Does language not function as a progression of sounds, thoughts, expressions, or movements over a period of time (even if that amount of time is indescribably small)? Yet before time existed, God was. Therefore, God also precedes language and places it in submission to his will. God must have some greater, fuller way of communicating with the Son and the Spirit (who both existed with him before the creation of the world) that does not answer to time, does not depend on form or space, and yet could touch a human being.

2. Liars and Stutterers

So if God created language for humanity, how do they function in relation to each other? For example, why can we believe one thing and say another? Or, to put it more bluntly, why can we lie?

The Biblical answer would be “Because sin entered the world through Adam and Eve,” which is true. We lie because we feel shame, we want to protect ourselves, we want to hide our actions, and we foolishly do all of this before a God that sees all things and knows all things. So what if you lie unintentionally?

This is important for one key reason: we understand that language is an independent function, a vehicle, which is used for explanation, not creation or destruction in the physical realm; our bodies, souls and minds are not directly determined by language (the vehicle). If a person asks me for directions to the library? I give the directions, and we go about our business. However, because my mind was on other things or because I accidentally mixed up my right and left, I ended up giving him/her the wrong directions — so I lied, technically speaking. This of course does not mean that I really did not know the directions to the library or that I had malicious intentions. It reveals the simple fact that we are able to say things we don’t “mean” — things that contradict our true thoughts and knowledge and even contradict our reality. Now we do say things like “His speech really moved me” or “Her words hurt me,” but no one believes it was the wind that came out of the person’s mouth or the vibrations of his/her voice box that had the effect. Language itself is only the vessel in which our meaning is transported. The weight of language lies elsewhere.

But this is also not to say that language is inconsequential. The Book of Romans says, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”^[5]; and in Jeremiah: “Because you have spoken this word, behold, I am making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall consume them”^[6]; and in Joel: “And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”^[7] Throughout the Bible there is evidence that a great importance rests in speech and in the act of speaking. But how could anything in the physical realm have anything to do with the heavenly/spiritual? How much eternal implication do our words really have? In the Book of Matthew, Jesus says, “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person.”^[8] The critical element is what Scripture many times refers to as “the heart.” It is the center of the physical life as well as the center of all things mental and spiritual.^[9] But more often than not it concerns the thoughts of man. As we read further in the passage from Romans: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your

heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. *For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*” So it is the heart that believes and roots the body and it is the mouth that reflects the heart and spirit.

“HOW DOES A “PIXELATED” SYSTEM OF LANGUAGE ACCURATELY REPRESENT A HIGH-DEFINITION HEART WITH ANY LEVEL OF TRUTH?”

But therein lies a paradox: how does a “pixelated” system of language accurately represent a high-definition heart with any level of truth? It makes sense to first ask why a physical realm exists at all; why earth exists, why we exist in bodies in time in space. Of course no one knows the answer to that question with any amount of certainty, but we can wager that our physical world has divine implications (the converse would be that nothing on earth has implications in which case the issue is irrelevant). So also then must the components that make up that world be of divine importance. If we define “divine” as something beyond humanity, beyond what we understand, and even beyond our use, and if God established language to physically reflect the hearts of man to God, then language should be seen as a divine establishment. So could it be that when language seems to fail we actually perceive our own limited ability to wield a divine tool? Perhaps this is why “the Spirit helps us in our weakness...For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”^[10] Perhaps it is the formation of sounds or words that is divine and the words themselves are unimportant; perhaps although words and sounds change across cultures and countries, the inward reflections remain the same?

3. The Consequence of Time

There are few thoughts more sobering than human mortality. Our lives on earth begin and then they end, the day and time are unknown to us. But that amount of time, however long or short, is finite and final. There are no do-overs and no retries after death. Although we can recollect past events and even plan into the future, the fact is that we only exist presently. And to further complicate matters, we will perpetually have more things to say than time to say them.

During this past election season, perhaps you were able to watch the two candidates duke it out during one of the debates, or maybe you watched one of the thousands of campaign advertisements. If you are like me, you might have wondered why one of the candidates doesn’t spend a whole speech devoted to correcting all the half-truths uttered by his opponent? Granted, the candidates spend energy and time addressing factual mistakes in the interest of damage control, yet the best defensive measure is action in the present. Each candidate knows

that if he addressed every instance in which his opponent “massaged the facts,” told half the truth, used a quotation out of context, or flat out lied, then he would lose. In most cases, to focus on the past is to disregard the present.

If you consider that time progresses linearly (the past no

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longer exists) and that we only exist finitely, then we are left with precious little time to speak. But here is where we are deceived. One of the greatest deceptions is that time is at the disposal of the subject, that time is not of the essence, that decisions can be put off for tomorrow which could have been made today. And this does not just occur over the course of a day, a week or even a year. By remembering past events and planning into the future we assume that our time is greater than it is, but, in reality,

“ONE OF THE GREATEST DECEPTIONS IS THAT TIME IS AT THE DISPOSAL OF THE SUBJECT, THAT TIME IS NOT OF THE ESSENCE, THAT DECISIONS CAN BE PUT OFF FOR TOMORROW WHICH COULD HAVE BEEN MADE TODAY.”

time marches onward unapologetically and our allotted time to impress our words upon this physical earth lessens every second. Lewis writes in “The Screwtape Letters” from the perspective of the demon Screwtape:

Our job is to get [people] away from the eternal, and from the Present. With this in view, we sometimes tempt a human (say a widow or scholar) to live in the Past ... It is far better to make them live in the Future. Biological necessity make all their passions point in that direction already, so that thought about the Future inflames hope and fear. Also it is unknown to them, so that in making them think about it we make them think of unrealities. In a word, the Future is, of all things, the thing least like eternity. It is the most temporal part of time — for the Past is frozen and no longer flows, and the Present is all lit up with eternal rays.^[11]

What if a person was deceived into allowing an entire lifetime pass by without speaking out or making a meaningful spiritual decision? If a choice can be put off until death, then a choice has been made — inaction is itself an action.

In C.S. Lewis’ novel “Perelandra” (the second book of

the Space Trilogy) the protagonist Dr. Ransom witnesses these implications of human mortality firsthand in his travel to Venus, or Perelandra. Upon arriving, Ransom discovers an evil presence, the “unman”, has set out to corrupt and destroy the planet, not by force, but through manipulation and deception. Ransom finds himself interceding on behalf of the planet’s only inhabitant — a pre-fallen woman called “the Green Woman” — providing rebuttals and arguments in order that she might not submit and be destroyed. Frustratingly, everything the unman says is subtly misleading, only partially true, and sometimes purely inaccurate. As the days pass the situation seems increasingly futile; once Ransom has corrected one errant statement, the unman has already spewed forth twenty more. Ransom begins to grow weary so also does he begin to realize that he has reduced himself to participating in a struggle in which there is no possible victory. The Green Woman could never withstand the unman and his evil plots for an eternity — time is eroding everything but the unman. So what is Ransom’s response? Action. He rises up in all of his corporeal glory, all of his physical essence, and strikes down the destructive machine in the unman. Ransom understands that the only reason his enemy was not destroyed was that he, Ransom, had not chosen (or chosen not) to take up the power he had been given and to act upon it.

The words we speak, the silence we break, these are divine actions, and, as I discussed above, this is because words reflect the “deep waters” of man’s heart. So if time was of no consequence to us there would be

“IF A CHOICE CAN BE PUT OFF UNTIL DEATH, THEN A CHOICE HAS BEEN MADE — INACTION IS ITSELF AN ACTION.”

no need for action and no need for choice. But time advances mercilessly and in it, we are pushed ever closer to an end of life and the beginning of eternity. The greatest emphasis must therefore be placed upon the present decision, the present physical act.

Conclusion

If there is anything that language has taught us about ourselves, it is that humanity alone is insufficient. In the gaps of understanding, in the attempts of discovery and explanation of the human psyche, there is space for completion and a need for conclusion. Yet the promise of both those things will not be found in the world. Bodies wither and fade and voices will one day cease. But there is a promise of completion which lies in the hands of the one that created the divine connection between us and Him. I think Lewis describes this idea best in his final chapter of “The Chronicles of Narnia: The Last Battle”: “I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now ... Come further up, come further in!”

1 All Biblical citations from ESV unless otherwise indicated.
 2 Psalm 94: 11; Isaiah 66:18; Matthew 9:4; 1 Corinthians 2:11, 3:20; Hebrews 4:12
 3 *Perelandra* 30
 4 I say “talking” to denote communicating with sounds, words, noises, images, or gestures as we know them.
 5 Romans 10:9
 6 Jeremiah 5:14
 7 Joel 2:32
 8 Matthew 15:18
 9 Matthew 13:15; Proverbs 23:7; 1 Samuel 9:20; Isaiah 46:8; Luke 2:19
 10 Romans 8:26
 11 The Screwtape Letters 76



Closing Remarks

Andrew Kim

As someone who grew up Buddhist and converted to Christianity only a couple of years previous to coming to the US, I came into college with a slight expectation that I'd hold off on my faith until after Brown. But God had other plans for me. I write this today, struck by the fact that my faith grew, not withered, at Brown. And so much of it is because of an important lesson I learned — to learn to be vulnerable and depend on others.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!"

When I took several wrong turns my first year at Brown, it was through two wonderful religious life affiliates at Brown — John Michaelson and Adam Koelsch — that I was able to stand up again and be restored. Likewise, in bringing Cornerstone from an idea to fruition, I know it could not have happened without each of the first staff team members and co-founders.

Now, I strive each day to "lean not on [my] own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5), and I'm grateful to all those at Brown who have taught me to do so.

Blessings,
Andrew

Gabriel Brotzman

My hope in helping to start this magazine was that Brown students could begin to better explore the one thing you won't learn in a Brown classroom — the reality of a fellow Brunonian's testimony. We exist as your peers to engage with this campus in a caring and loving way, to remind those around us that we too seek to know how we should best spend this life. But don't be surprised when we come to you with more than just a life philosophy or a list of things not to do. Don't be surprised when we say that our goals aren't just extracurricular or complementary to the greater goal of fitting in. We want you to see with our lives, our energy, our artistry, and our thoughts, just how important this Jesus is to us. And I hope in some way these pages allow you to meditate with greater comfort on the apostle Paul's words, the great mystery: "Behold! We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet."



Ministry Profile

Brown Christian Fellowship

Brown Christian Fellowship is a group of students with a vision to see our campus know and experience God. We desire to be a demonstration to our peers and our city of the love of Jesus Christ and the power of God's word in Scripture. We're a student movement of about fifty students, including seekers, followers, and doubters of Jesus, and we strive to collectively grow in our faith.

Brown Christian Fellowship, also known as BCF, is a local chapter of the national campus ministry, InterVarsity. We're a multi-ethnic and para-church organization with students from various cultures and traditions. We embrace our different cultural and denominational identities, and aim to learn and understand from each other.

Our ministry has several community groups, which are groups of 10-12 students that gather weekly to study Scripture over food and friendships. We have two freshman groups focused on the Keeney and Pembroke quads. We also have a Latino and upperclassman Bible study. We believe that God's word is powerful and practical to us as 21st century adults in academia, and our community groups are meant to unlock the lessons God wants to share with us today through Scripture. We also have large group gatherings on Thursday nights where the members of the community groups and others involved with the fellowship come together to listen to speakers, worship and have further discussions on Christian living. Our large group meetings are meant to create an intentional space to explore Christian topics ranging from human suffering to the authenticity of the New Testament. It's also a space that creates laughter, dancing, roommates and friendships that go beyond our scheduled meetings.

As a junior serving on the BCF leadership for the past two years, I can say that BCF has been the most formative niche of my undergrad. Through it, I have found my deepest friendships, have had the heartiest laughs and have made some of my favorite memories. We're a group of students that do life and experience Christ together, and I'm honored to be able to call BCF my family.

BCF is a group of students that believe in a greater purpose, another way to live. We believe that there is a God who radically loves his humanity and desires for individuals to connect with Him. We are not a perfect group of smiling Christians, and we recognize the pain and brokenness present in ourselves and in our world. However, we trust that God is working for the good of His children and that the cross is the ultimate symbol of hope. Ultimately, Brown Christian Fellowship is a student movement with a mission to advance God's Kingdom and to bring reality to the Lord's Prayer. "Let thy Kingdom come."

Cia Mathew



A Prayer for Brown

*from Reverend Janet M. Cooper Nelson
Chaplain of the University*

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Philippians 4:4

Brilliance illumining all thought and learning
At the conclusion of this year's study
With much to complete, and trembling thanksgiving for all there is to study,
We seek from You clarity of mind, energy and purpose.

Wisdom defining the limits of learning, the depths of compassion —
We offer our strivings in library and laboratory.
Engage our knowledge in loving service:
By the power of the Holy Spirit, strengthen our deepest intention.

Tenderness cradling any heart that must bear fear, grief or uncertainty
Grant us loving vision.
May we see anew ourselves, our neighbors and Your world,
With the acuity of Grace.

Keeper of Life's Chronicle,
We name our teachers and deans, our families, our communities of faith and learning,
all who enrich and strengthen students with heartfelt thanksgiving
For the privilege of our education may we reply in gratitude,
Finding life's vocation in the holy work to bless, to
strengthen, to heal Your beloved world,

This day, this season, and always,

Amen.

“Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind.”

MATTHEW 13:47

