

ALETHEIA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

KENOSIS

...In a world of inequality, where the powerful are free to exploit the poor, one might wonder if there is another way to live.

CARRY ME TO INNISFREE

...Merely leaving the city wasn't enough to escape it. Then, what is the proper response to the longing for a return to nature?

A HYPERDIMENSIONAL GOD

...Does considering the implications of higher dimensions affect the reasonability of a God who contradicts our assumptions and understanding of the world?

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MISSION STATEMENT:

Aletheia seeks to explore the implications of Christian thought
within the interdisciplinary space of Cal Poly.

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California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.

DEAR READERS

For most of us, university is the first time we have lived away from home. We find ourselves removed from the context of where we came from, both physically and ideologically. Suddenly, we are free to decide how late to stay out and what to eat for dinner. Apart from our parents, we may begin to develop our own religious and political views. The wonderful, overwhelming opportunity exists to re-create ourselves. Indeed, Cal Poly's "Learn By Doing" approach offers us a unique entrance into the proverbial "real world". But once the waves of midterms begin to rock our boat, we may distract ourselves with technology or indulge in unhealthy habits. Yet, when our attention can no longer be occupied, the timeless questions remain: who are we and what are we doing here? What does it mean to live a "meaningful life"?

The ancient philosopher Socrates was famous in his day for challenging listeners with questions like these, sometimes even reducing them to tears. Perhaps he is best remembered for his belief that knowledge itself is a form of recollection, where truth is embedded within each person and must be uncovered. The Ancient Greek word for "truth" is ἀλήθεια, or written in Latin characters, "aletheia". Derived from the mythological river of forgetfulness, "Lethe", and the prefix "a-" meaning "not", the word "aletheia" literally means "reversing forgetfulness to remember or realize truth". For everyone in the 5th century B.C. who followed Socrates on their Facebook and Twitter feeds, aletheia was not a relic to be hung on the wall but an ongoing quest through the mystery we call, "life".

The Poly Aletheia was founded with this quest in mind. As Christians, we have faith in a God who is the source of our imperfect intellectual inquiry and imaginative seeking. We believe that God delights in our engineering and architectural designs, wrestlings with issues of social justice, and contemplation of literature. We believe God cares for humanity. As such, we think the aletheia of Jesus Christ is a frontier worth our sincere exploration. For minister Martin Luther King Jr., pursuing this aletheia meant dedication to the fight for civil rights. For Olympic athlete and former World War II P.O.W., Louis Zamperini, it meant forgiving his torturers. For academics J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, it meant writing imaginative tales as lighthouses of beauty in a storm of materialist "progress".

The timeless questions belong to all: the religious and nonreligious. Whatever you believe, we invite you to come alongside us as we seek to understand what it means to be human through the lens of our Christian faith.

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature, on the left, reads "Lucas Dodd" in a cursive script. The second signature, on the right, reads "Lydia" in a similar cursive script.

With peace, Lucas & Lydia

THE ALETHEIA TEAM



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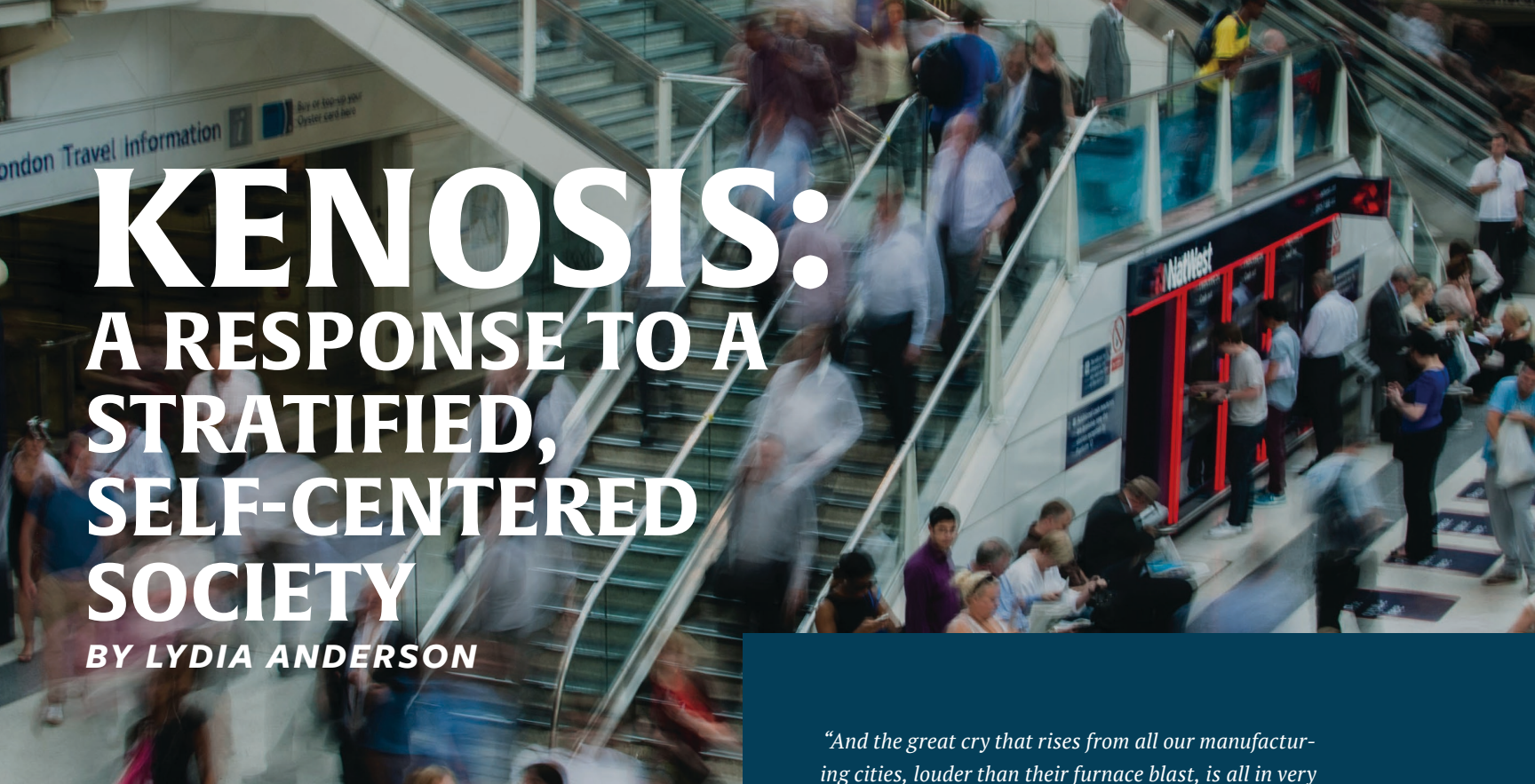
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KENOSIS: A RESPONSE TO A STRATIFIED, SELF-CENTERED SOCIETY

BY LYDIA ANDERSON

Eight rich men possess as much wealth as the poorest 3.6 billion people. It was also found that, since 2015, the wealthiest 1% have owned more than the rest of the entire globe combined.¹ These statistics reflect the current global economic trend that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer.² This wealth gap is cause for alarm, as such extreme economic stratification is fuel for abuse of the poor majority. This gap enables the mass consumption of cheap goods while concealing the high human cost of producing such goods. As a car runs on gasoline, the systemic inequalities are fuelled by squeezing the workers at the bottom. By minimizing labor wages, profits for chief executives are maximized.³ The success of such ruthlessness is disheartening. In a world of inequality, where the powerful are free to exploit the poor, one might wonder if there is another way to live.

Broadly, the industrial revolution of the late 18th century to the mid 19th century was a global turning point in the triumph of production over people. It saw a transition from family-owned artisanal making of merchandise to mass production of standardized goods in factories. This shift led thousands to sacrifice safety, sanitation, sleep, decent wages, and a meaningful work environment: lower class men, women, and children worked brutally long hours for meager wages, often in unsafe conditions doing monotonous tasks.⁴ In his work, *The Stones of Venice* (1853), art critic John Ruskin warned against the dangers of this apparent “progress:”

“And the great cry that rises from all our manufacturing cities, louder than their furnace blast, is all in very deed for this,—that we manufacture everything there except men; we blanch cotton, and strengthen steel, and refine sugar, and shape pottery; but to brighten, to strengthen, to refine, or to form a single living spirit, never enters into our estimate of advantages. And all the evil to which that cry is urging our myriads can be met only in one way... It can be met only by a right understanding, on the part of all classes, of what kinds of labour are good for men, raising them, and making them happy; by a determined sacrifice of such convenience, or beauty, or cheapness as is to be got only by the degradation of the workman; and by equally determined demand for the products and results of healthy and ennobling labour.”⁵

For Ruskin, work ought to be about more than mere money. Ruskin is correct that the human component of labor is ultimately more valuable than turning a profit. Work bent around maximum production can create a menial, even hellish work environment.

Should individuals seek to transform systems so that they center around people before profit? Unfortunately, Ruskin’s dark picture is still a relevant depiction of many modern societies, and it is a tragedy that there are millions of enslaved peoples today. Because Americans are privileged beneficiaries of the societal stratifications, we may be tempted to ignore this horror and continue to live comfortably and ignorantly. Or, we may be moved to try and change the world. We are finite beings, and the magnitude of human suffering at the hands of systemic oppression is

enormous. Trying to change the world can be like trying to put out a forest fire with a squirt gun. Sadly, some of the most dedicated, compassionate people become exhausted in their efforts to combat the oppressive systems of this world. Human empathy has limits; it is seemingly insufficient to transform global inequality.⁶ Yet, for Americans, the choice remains either to resist inequality or to ignore it.

For those who choose to honestly face the world's injustices and yet hope for justice, harmony, and the universal recognition of human dignity, first seeking an infinite source of compassion is the most logical way forward. A Christian answer is that we must allow ourselves to be transformed to be like Christ before attempting to transform the world. One way to be transformed in such a way is by experiencing and practicing kenosis. Rooted in Philippians 2:7,⁷ kenosis is a process in which Christians metaphorically emulate the death and resurrection of Christ. According to orthodox Christian tradition, Jesus Christ, being fully divine, emptied Himself in becoming a human, even to the point of submission to a humiliating death.⁸ Thus, theologically, kenosis is the act of emptying one's individual will in order to be receptive to God's will. In this way, emptiness may be transformed into fullness. Kenosis is not a doctrine to be blindly followed, rather it involves a mental reorientation that results in action.

Kenosis is the antithesis of society's attitude of self-promotion. This mindset invites us to seek the good of others, rather than cling to our own power, privilege, and status. This self-emptying may strike some as weak or apathetic, but I would argue the opposite. A kenotic attitude negates and overturns the very patterns which seek to assign human value according to riches, or intelligence, or good looks. It acknowledges a deeper Reality, one that views human beings as equals. In his letter to the Galatians, Saint Paul radically wrote: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."⁹

20th century creative writer C.S. Lewis captured a kenotic attitude in his work *The Screwtape Letters* (1942). In the book, a fictional experienced demon advises a younger demon on how best to tempt and try humans. Lewis uses this unusual context to reveal truth about human nature. For example, his literary version of hell is a bureaucracy, chosen to be a mirror for the systematic atrocities that took place during his lifetime.¹⁰ Lewis's senior demon, Screwtape, imagined that a "philosophy of hell" would rest on the axiom that one thing is not another, and therefore to be is to be in competition. Screwtape's philosophy involves putting one's self first, at the expense of all other selves: "My good is my good and your good is yours. What one gains another loses." Screwtape goes

on to observe that love is a contradiction in that, "things are to be many, yet somehow also one. The good of one self is to be the good of another." He elaborates on the mindset desired by God:

The Enemy [God] wants to bring the man to a state of mind in which he could design the best cathedral in the world, and know it to be the best, and rejoice in the fact, without being any more (or less) or otherwise glad at having done it than he would be if it had been done by another. The Enemy [God] wants him, in the end, to be so free from any bias in his own favour that he can rejoice in his own talents as frankly and gratefully as in his neighbour's talents—or in a sunrise, an elephant, or a waterfall.

According to Lewis, relinquishing individual willfulness frees us to realize the beauty by which we are surrounded. If we can release our own concern about whether we are important enough, powerful, or secure enough, we can be renewed by the bliss that already exists. From this sink of infinite love, we may be moved and empowered to transform the world.

Finally, we may consider the words of contemporary theologian Hak Joo Lee, "Society and its institutions cannot be functional without a constant infusion to even a minimal degree of kenotic spirit among their members. To build a community, we need to move beyond individualism and invite others into our hearts through self-emptying."¹¹

Footnotes:

1. "Oxfam Briefing Paper" Jan. 2017
2. Between 1988 and 2011, the income of the poorest 10% increased by \$65, while the income of the richest 1% increased by \$11,800, 182 times as much ("Oxfam Briefing Paper" Jan. 2017).
3. The International Labor Organization estimates that the forced labor of 21 million people generates \$150 billion in annual profits ("Oxfam Briefing Paper" Jan. 2017.)
4. For example, the regimented bell system, a product of a quantity motivated environment, left no room for conversation.
5. Ruskin, John. *The Stones of Venice*, 1853
6. Compassion fatigue, a form of secondary traumatic stress, arises from exposure to the suffering of others with no power to relieve it. It is suffered by many caregiving professionals, including doctors, social workers, and psychiatrists (Babbel, Susanne. "Compassion Fatigue." *Psychology Today*, 4 July 2012.)
7. "[Jesus] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness," (Philippians 2:7, NRSV.)
8. Philippians 2:6-8 (paraphrased)
9. Galatians 3:28, NRSV
10. Lewis, Clive Staples. *The Screwtape Letters*. 1942.
11. Joon Lee, Hak. "Kingdom and Kenosis: The Mind of Christ in Paul's Ethics." *Theology, News and Notes*, 2013, fullerstudio.fuller.edu/kingdom-and-kenosis-the-mind-of-christ-in-pauls-ethics/.

HOW I BELIEVE IN A GOD THAT I CANNOT UNDERSTAND

BY BRANDON BARTLETT

My faith has long been plagued by a certain intellectual pride, an inability to admit that God could be ultimately beyond my understanding. Nowhere is this more obvious than when, during my senior year of high school, I developed an argument to prove once and for all that God must be fully comprehensible to the human mind. It went something like this:

If God holds us responsible for the evil we do, we must have the ability to not do that evil. In order to not do that evil, we must know the good that we could have done instead. The good that we could have done, of course, was what God willed; therefore, we must have been able to know what God willed, for that is necessary to not do the evil. Since God does not directly tell us (either biblically or through revelation) what He wills in every decision, we must, at least, be able to infer the will of God in all decisions. To be able to know what someone wills in any decision, we would have to be able to fully understand them. Therefore the Psalmist was wrong when he wrote that God's understanding is beyond measure (Psalms 147:5), and how foolish was even God himself when he told Isaiah that, like the heavens are above the earth, so are His thoughts above our thoughts (Isaiah 55:9).

I had solved the age old problem of having one's cake and eating it too; for I could now be a part of the Christian faith while being apart from Christian faith; I could believe myself taken care of, loved, and saved by a higher power, while never actually having to believe that any power higher than myself could exist.

I had made an idol out of my intellect (something that I am prone to do), and, consequently, as soon as a storm came and I ran to my God, I found only my ignorant ideas. But eventually, after finding that I could not walk upon the water myself, I cried out "Lord, save me", and jumped towards a being I did not understand.

This did, however, leave me with a problem: if I could not rely on my intellect to tell me what was true about God, how could I discern religious truth from falsity? For instance, we are to have faith in the moral teachings of Christ, even blind faith if necessary (for they may be beyond our ability to understand). But some have taken Christ's teachings to necessitate pacifism, and others have used these same teachings to motivate war; and so which should I follow? And, more broadly, if I am merely relying on a blind faith in some book, why *this* book? And why *this* conception of God? For a blind man is easy to trick, and blind faith is easy to manipulate; that is why we are called to be as shrewd as snakes (Matthew 10:16) and be wary of false teachers (2 Peter 2:1-3).

Likewise, I could not merely assume that God would lead me to the truth in every case, for A) I have had incorrect beliefs in the past, and B) this would, in the end, just make me the final arbitrator of truth, the very situation I was attempting to avoid.

I needed something beyond reason, text, or revelation, but what could such a thing be? For while to have faith is to accept uncertainty, only so much uncertainty can be wisely accepted. I needed to find a way to have a secure faith in a God that I could not understand.

I must admit that, to this, I do not have a full answer, but I believe I can offer a partial one.

In epistemology (the philosophical study of how we know what we know), there is a school of thought called "pragmatism", in which the central belief is "what is true is simply whatever works". So, to a pragmatist, a question like "Did the Big Bang *actually* happen?" or "Do quantum particles *actually* exist?" or "Is this all just a dream?" is simply nonsensical; our science is true to the degree that it is useful, and our world is as real as it is useful to believe it is.

While I doubt that being a full pragmatist is proper, or even useful, it seems that the pragmatists bring a deep wisdom to many of the problems of skepticism. Take, for instance, the final question listed above: There seems to be no way to prove that any world

beyond the mind exists (my dearest apologies to Descartes); we could be in a dream, we could be in a simulation, we could be being manipulated by an evil demon— there is no way to know for sure. However, for the pragmatist, we do have a way to discover the truth: "Act as though the world is just a dream, and see how that works out for you". And when it does not work out well, the pragmatist would then say that we have a suitable justification for setting aside our doubts.

It seemed to me that a similar method could be applied to spirituality; that, in the face of the incomprehensible, I can but say, "Life has worked best when I believe that God is this way".

And so, likewise, while I can never prove that some guy rose from the dead and that, somehow, this resurrection offers me forgiveness of sin, I can be certain from my own experience that, when I act as though such is true, things seem to turn out better. To trust in an incomprehensible God is then to be like the blind man who trusts his seeing eye dog; for though I can never be sure the dog is leading me in the right direction, I know that, when I pretend as though she is, things work out better for me. (And, to be clear, this method can apply equally well to the faith as a whole as well as testing individual doctrines.)

And is this not at least hinted at when we were told that we could know false prophets by their fruits (Matthew 7:15-16), that falsity bring destruction (2 Peter 2:1), and that the truth will set us free (John 8:32)?

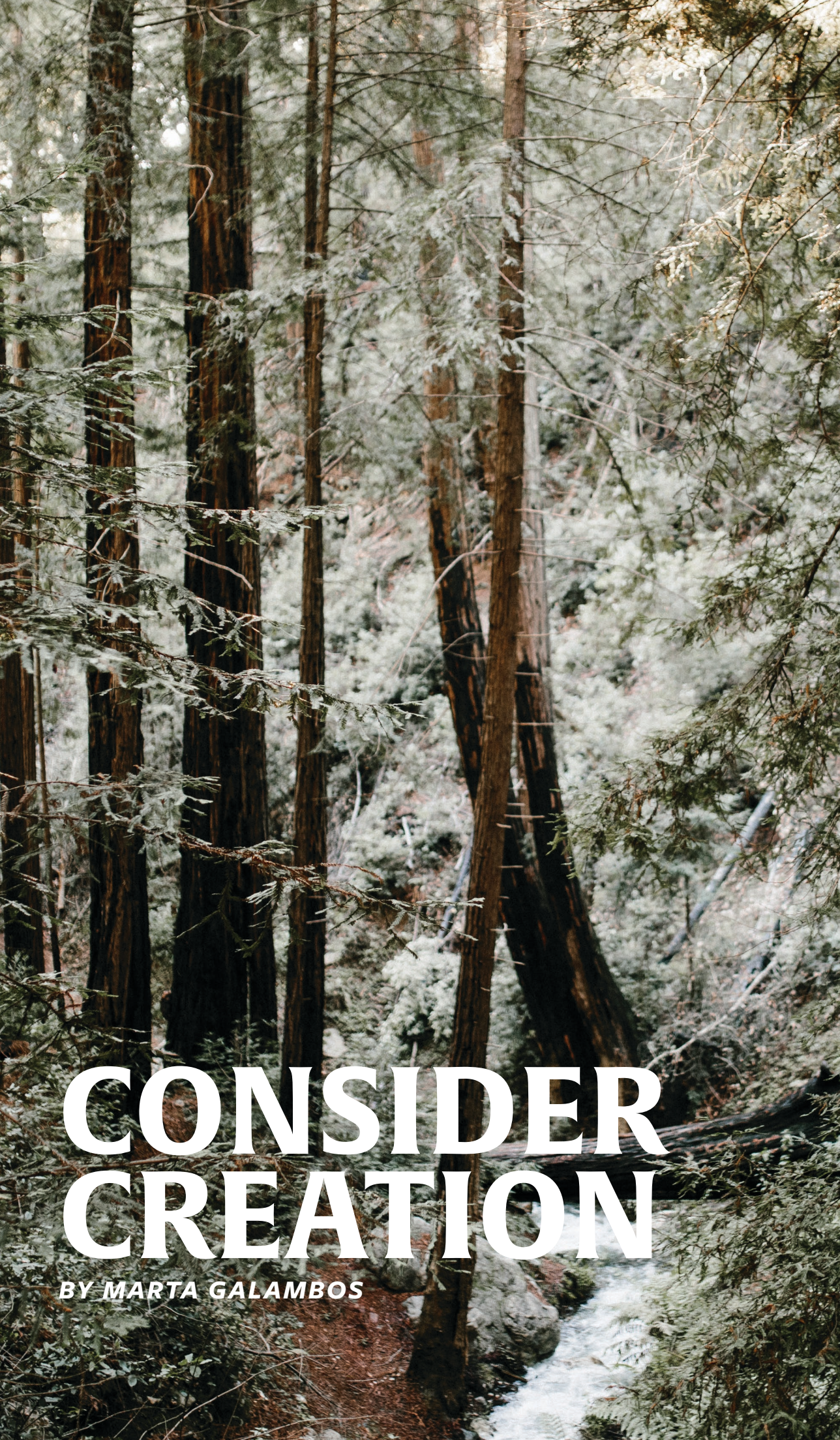
And so, while we may never be able to fully understand God, we can begin to inch ever closer to the truth by closely watching the consequences of our faulty beliefs.

Philip K. Dick once said "Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away", and I think he was right. And so, my reader, I encourage you to always keep a watchful eye on the fruits of your beliefs, and of those whom you can watch around you. Live with the strength of your convictions, but have the still greater strength to humbly discard those beliefs that have been found untrue. But, even then, we must, in the end, take a leap of faith on the beliefs that we do hold. For, as St. Paul told us, it is by our faith, and not by our sight, that we live (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Footnotes:

Esv: Study Bible : English Standard Version. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Bibles, 2007. Print. (Also applies to all following verses)

Philip K. Dick, "How to Build a Universe That Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later". 1978



CONSIDER CREATION

BY MARTA GALAMBOS



“What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.” ~Matthew 10:29-31, New Living Translation (NLT).

The topics of sustainability and environmental stewardship are appearing with increasing frequency in personal, national, and international discussions. As the intersections of government, politics, civil rights, and activism towards environmentalism grow more complex every day, I have noticed that Christians (with the exception of a few) do not appear to be leading the charge to protect the environment. Even worse, scholars, such as Lynn White Jr., claim that Christianity is “the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen” and one that permits humans to exploit nature under the guise of God’s will.¹ As such a prevalent issue, what is a Christian perspective on climate change and the value of environmental stewardship? Consider the Bible verse above: it declares that the Creator of the universe, who Christians believe God is, knows when even one bird falls. Matthew 6:26 similarly describes how God feeds and cares for the sparrows as an example of how He will likewise feed and provide for His people. However, these verses also appear to state that humans are more valuable than sparrows to the God who created us both. When situations arise where animals and plants and other forms of life are competing with humans for natural resources, do humans have license to utilize these resources freely, even to the point of abuse? What is a Christian perspective on utilizing or caring for the Earth’s natural resources and beauty? As both a Christian and a long-time lover of nature, this article will seek to present why Christians should promote environmental stewardship.

To understand Christian attitudes towards environmental stewardship, it is first necessary to understand why some, such as White Jr., view Christianity as being in conflict with environmentalism. According to a 2015 study done by the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication, American evangelical Christians are less likely to believe that climate change is happening than the total American population.² A 2016 study completed by the same organization also found that while 11% of Americans agree with the statement that “the end times are coming, therefore we don’t need to worry about global warming”, the percentage is over twice as high—26%—for self-identified Evangelicals and Born-Again Christians.³ These statistics suggest that the viewpoint, “Since this planet has an expiration date it is not worth trying to protect”, not only exists, but is also not uncommon, specifically

among evangelical Christians. If, as Christians believe, God is going to create a new heaven and a new earth anyway, then, if this is true, why should it matter what happens to this imperfect one?

However, this outlook conflicts with fundamental Christian doctrines. First of all, if we follow this line of thinking—that the world will end anyway so it does not matter what happens to it—it could be applied to our physical bodies. Christian orthodoxy states that, along with a new heaven and new earth, we will also receive new bodies, yet we do not just give up on our earthly bodies even though they are temporary. Instead, the Bible states that our bodies are His temples, and thus should be treated with respect.⁴ Why should this not apply to our physical environment as well?

Secondly, Christians are called repeatedly throughout the Bible to follow the character of Jesus, who Himself said that the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love one’s neighbors as one’s self.⁵ Katharine Hayhoe, a prominent climate scientist as well as an outspoken evangelical, does not view this idea of giving up on the earth as very Christ-like or neighborly. She cites 2nd Thessalonians as an example of why Christians should not give up on the problems of this world and leave them to non-Christian friends. She also claims that caring for the environment is a way to carry out God’s mandate to Christians to care for the poor.⁶

This perspective is shared by Pope Francis. He went so far as to label human contamination of the “earth’s waters, its land, its air, and its life” as “sins”. He also stated, “The world’s poor, though least responsible for climate change, are most vulnerable and already suffering its impact.”⁷ Studies agree that the negative effects of climate change, such as rising sea levels, drought, and extreme weather, disproportionately affect developing nations, and the disruption of food and water supplies will hit hardest those who already struggle to find adequate food and water.⁸ Pope Francis argues that climate change mitigation would benefit the world’s neediest, whom Christians are repeatedly called to serve throughout the Bible. A way to love the poor is to reduce climate change’s effects. That being said, some Christians might claim that the salvation of people’s souls matter more than the environment; however, the Bible discourages simply telling people about Jesus while failing to address their physical needs.⁹ Simply put, a way to care for people is to care for the environment in which they live and breathe and eat.

Additionally, the effects of climate change and our over-consumption of natural resources can be traced in part to human greed, and thus conflicts with fundamental Christian beliefs. Jesus warns to “[b]eware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own.”¹⁰ Out of convenience, we use a plastic fork or bag only once, and we continue to do this

because we selfishly believe “we can always get another” without regard to the environmental impacts of manufacturing and disposing of this item. Our current materialistic “throw-away” culture can be described as gluttonous, and the Bible provides the moral framework for why this is sinful.

A discussion on Christian perspectives on the environment would not be complete, however, without examining Genesis 1:28—otherwise known as the “Dominion Mandate”. In it, God commands the first humans, Adam and Eve, to “[b]e fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground”.¹¹ Does this permit the human race to consume the earth’s resources unlimitedly?

Dr. Francis Schaeffer, a Christian theologian and pastor, promotes a more careful examination of the Dominion Mandate. He states in his book, *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* (1970), that the context of Genesis 1:28 must also be considered. Schaeffer argues, “Man was given dominion over creation...But since the Fall man has exercised this dominion wrongly. He is a rebel who set himself at the center of the universe.... he exploits created things as though they were nothing in themselves”.¹² The Dominion Mandate was given before the Fall, before imperfection entered the world, when people could start acting on their own selfish impulses separated from a perfect God. Just like rulers, who sometimes act in their own interests instead of what is best for their subjects, people sometimes selfishly exercise their dominion over nature in the wrong ways.

Schaeffer goes on to say that Christians must respect their dominion because our appointment over it is a privilege from God. He states, “When we have dominion over nature, it is not ours, either. It belongs to God, and we are to exercise our dominion over these things not as though entitled to exploit them, but as things borrowed or held in trust”.¹³ A similar analogy is found in Matthew 25:15-30. Jesus tells a parable of a king who entrusts to three of his servants a certain amount of money while away on a long trip. The servants know the money is not theirs, but rather the king’s, which they are to steward in his absence. Two of the servants invest the king’s money wisely, but the third is met with the King’s wrath when he finds that the servant hid the money and did nothing with it. What would this king say to a servant who actively exploited and squandered his money instead? Christians should acknowledge that our rule over nature was not self-imposed, but rather, was divinely appointed. Stewardship for His creation is respect for the Creator.

A last question to consider—one that many may find to be barring from viewing Christianity as supporting environmental

stewardship—is whether Christianity places humans above the rest of God’s creation. A foundational tenet of Christianity is that men and women were created in God’s image.¹⁴ Schaeffer addresses this in his book, describing how “[m]an is separated, as personal, from nature because he is made in the image of God...as such he is unique in the creation, but he is united to all other creatures as being created”.¹⁵ He goes on to say that although humanity is uniquely separated from the rest of creation in that we are made in His image, we are still on the same level as the rest of creation. When Matthew 10:31 states that humans are “worth more than many sparrows”, it means that we are uniquely situated among creation in that we alone are modeled after God’s own image. However, we are simultaneously equal to the rest of creation in that we were all created. As Schaeffer states, “we can care for the animal, the tree...for we know it to be a fellow creature with ourselves, both made by the same God”.¹⁶ Matthew 10:30 describes how God knows when “a single sparrow falls”—clearly, He notices and cares



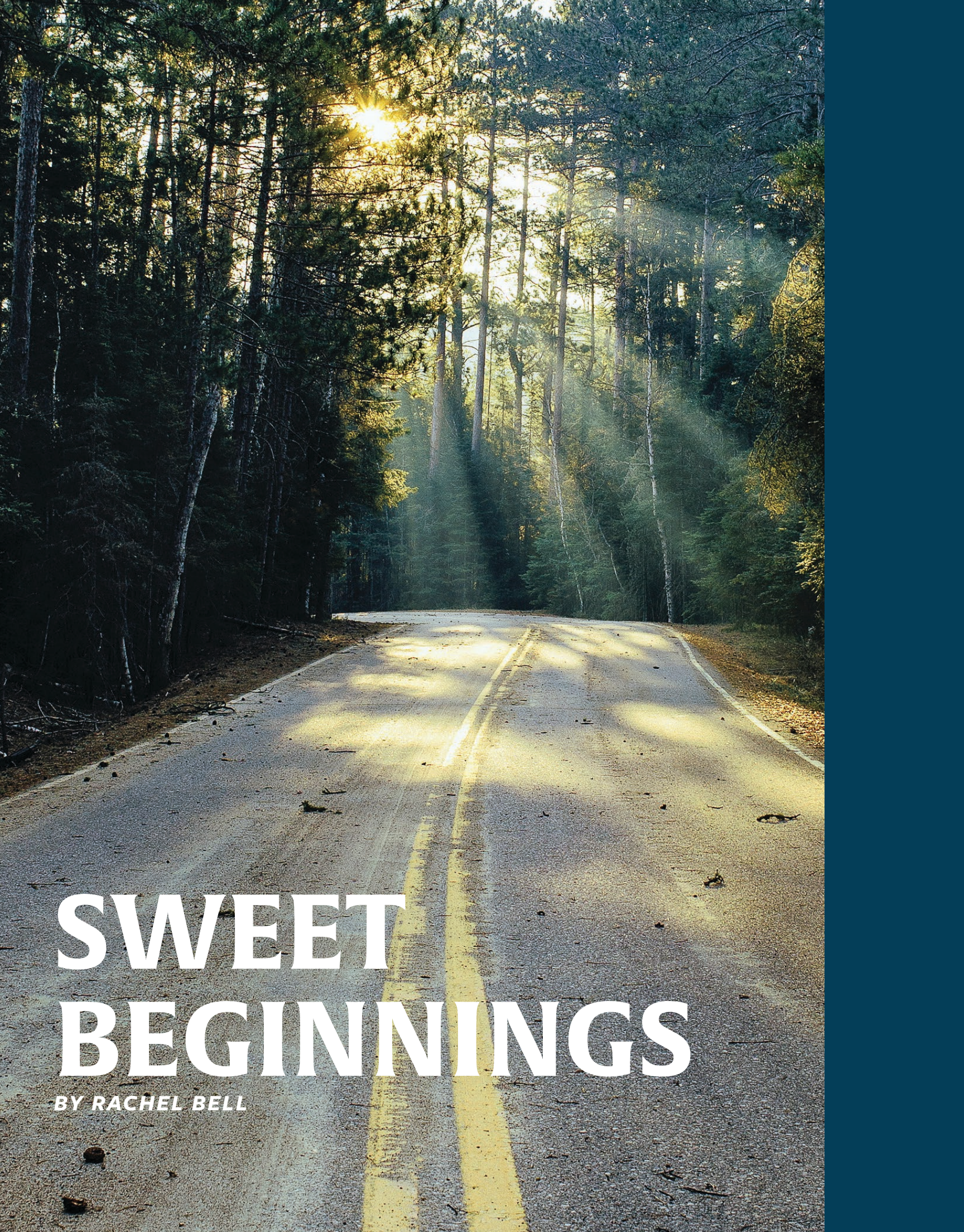
about every type of His creations, not just human beings. As those created in the image of a God who notices and cares about even a single sparrow, Christians should care about all of nature.

A Christian faith and a desire for sustainability are not contradictory or mutually exclusive; rather, Christian doctrine promotes environmental stewardship because it is based off of extreme love and reverence for the Creator Himself. Just as love for God can be expressed through simple acts of kindness towards others, so can environmental stewardship be expressed through simple, seemingly small acts. Carrying reusable bottles and bags, recycling, carpooling, and using your purchasing power to support sustainable products are all practical, little steps that add up. If God truly knows each sparrow, the least we can do is consider them too.



Footnotes:

1. White, Lynn. (1967). *The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis*. *Science*, 155(3767), 1203-1207. [dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.155.3767.1203](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.155.3767.1203).
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SWEET BEGINNINGS

BY RACHEL BELL

Anyone who has ever felt sympathy toward a story's villain might feel guilty for not hating the character with a passion, as may seem appropriate to the villain's repulsive deeds. Audiences may even become fearful if they can relate to emotions or thoughts this character has had. They ask themselves: How could I care about such an awful person? What the audience fails to recognize is that their minds are skilled at reading between the lines. This skill allows them to see the seeds of good desire that were the villain's original motive, though that may have been twisted over time. Prince Zuko from the Nickelodeon TV series *Avatar: the Last Airbender* is a prime example of a beloved anti-villain. He destroyed villages and killed people because of his do-or-die determination to catch the Avatar and restore his honor. Honor is, well, honorable to pursue. However, Zuko's longing for honor is distorted into a cruel mania and hatred toward the Avatar. But, the story didn't end here. Later in the series he displays one of the most satisfying redemption arcs in children's television. His crooked desire for honor is healed, and viewers love him for it. This article seeks to delve into the phenomena of messed-up desires by discussing several other villains and looking at insights offered by the author C.S. Lewis.

How do good desires get twisted in the first place? This change often happens when someone obsessively prioritizes one or two good things. In doing so, they abandon other much needed stabilizing factors that would otherwise keep the desire in check. The villains make initially good desires all-important, and pursue them radically, even if it means hurting other people. The desire to feel safe financially can be used as an excuse for stealing. The desire for justice can be bent until it becomes revenge. Such scenarios suggest that badness is often, if not always, messed-up goodness. This gets at the age-old question that many people have when evaluating Christianity: How can evil exist in this world if God made everything? Christianity offers the perspective that God created everything good and gave humans free will so that when they obey Him, it is out of love rather than robotic duty. The ability of human beings to choose to obey makes their obedience beautiful, valuable, and worth receiving. However, because we have free will, we can choose not to obey.

The idea of corrupted goodness is explored by J.R.R. Tolkien in *The Return of the King* (1955) when he talks about the origins of orcs, "The Shadow that bred them can only mock, it cannot make: not real new things of its own. I don't think it gave life to Orcs, it only ruined them and twisted them". Orcs used to be Elves, but were captured and corrupted by an evil being. They were not always the cockroaches of Middle Earth. By knowing what they once were, their existence becomes a tragedy. It is this origin story be-

fore the ruin of villains that readers notice and admire. Examples of perverted motives are present everywhere in literature—the most powerful and realistic works feature such a villain, instead of an evil-to-the-core-for-the-sake-of-evil villain. This is what makes these characters interesting to read about. They are not foreign ideas of a distant devil. We can see the goodness they started from and are sometimes allowed to track their transformation. If that original normal person who is just like us can change into a monster, we could too. We can then picture what extreme events might happen in our lives to tempt us to head bit by bit down that path. The endangerment of a loved one, the loss of a dream job, the desire for a partner—what would it take for us to begin that dark descent? An even more daunting question, have all of us already taken steps down that road in one way or another?

Many villains believe they are doing good. Sometimes they are scared, desperate, or hurting, and make wrong choices because they feel trapped. Consider Lord Voldemort from the *Harry Potter* series. He did many terrible things, primarily because he did not want to die—death scared him. That desire, the instinct to survive, is crucial and common to man. Through the Christian lens, it can be viewed as a talisman: something that God gave us from birth to protect us from harm. By wanting life, we naturally avoid dangerous environments that could threaten our lives. However, Voldemort pursued immortality manically, and was willing to murder to obtain it. We can pity him for the pain he suffered, as Harry Potter did during the story's climax, even while condemning his choices. These two reactions are not mutually exclusive.

Now, most people do not take their desires to the extreme of murder or some other equally horrible act. But, we still try to satisfy them in a similarly improper manner. We may become obsessed with seeking love, sex, good grades, and money as a way to fulfill our longings. It is not the Christian duty to ascetically deny every desire. Instead, Christians are to deny the negative desires and apply a brace to ones that have become crooked so that God can heal them in a way that points back to His goodness.

Christianity makes a bold claim by saying that reaching out to God to satisfy our desires is the only way they can be permanently sated. Furthermore, it states that He will not disappoint us, because He knows exactly what we need and has the power to give it. As His creations, we were made to need Him and what He offers. C.S. Lewis writes in his book *Mere Christianity* (1952):

God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the



fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there.

Lewis's main idea is that only God can satisfy these needs, and furthermore, that He wants us to seek their fulfillment. We may protest and say that we're enjoying this cheeseburger, and that our significant other makes us happy, and that we feel good about where our lives are headed. These things are by no means bad, but being satisfied solely with these things is short-sighted thinking that only serves to hurt us in the long run. On this topic, Lewis also noted in his book *The Weight of Glory* (1949) that:

Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about

with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

If someone is sick, they will want to be treated by a trained professional who knows medicine deeply. If someone is an innocent victim facing a jury, they will want a lawyer who can champion their cause with success. Christianity views God as both healer and champion of the highest order.

What many humans want most is love. Christianity teaches that God's love is unconditional, but it is not blind. He does not love every part of us, faults and all. Instead, He loves us in spite of our failures. His love is one that heals this recognized brokenness, rather than ignoring, apathetically tolerating, or embracing it. For the sake of our peace of mind, we have the tendency to want to be loved, dirt and all. We have tried so often in the past to be good,



to shrug the unwanted parts off, and ultimately failed. We try to be good and do good, but even the smallest child knows how often and how easily we make bad choices. This struggle discourages us, and we sometimes feel that it is a futile battle. Rather than live in constant guilt over our flaws, we say they don't matter or that imperfection is evidence of our humanity. We tell ourselves that we're normal and that everyone makes mistakes so that we can have peace of mind.

But by doing so, we also deny ourselves the opportunity to be truly healed and accepted as a whole person.

The sweet beginnings of villains remind us that there are always turning points, choices, and crossroads where good can become better or bitter. And for those of us encountering real-life villains, we can recognize the good seed at the root of the crooked tree and try to figure out where it went wrong—and maybe even try to help it. It may be just to chop the tree down, but it is far better to seek its healing. In the end, you will be left with healthy growth rather than ashes.

We care for villains because we see ourselves in them. Redemption arcs for villains are satisfying endings. They make us happy, because if it's possible for someone that bad to be fixed, then there's hope for us too: hope that we will not be left alone to mend ourselves, but that another Greater Author out there is weaving our story with a grand redemption arc in mind, just for us.

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CARRY ME TO INNISFREE LIKE POLLEN ON THE BREEZE

BY LIAM MADDEN



On a cool summer night, I gazed across Lake Union at the Seattle skyline. I imagined what it must have looked like before it was settled by Europeans in the mid-nineteenth century—just another beautiful swath of land, untouched by Western civilization, though humans had lived there for thousands of years. But a hundred million years earlier, it was ocean. In a vision, I watched volcanoes rise up, pouring out molten rock; I watched glaciers scour the land, chiseling valleys and basins; and I watched the great forests of Douglas firs and red cedars grow, giving shelter to animals and humans alike.² Then, in an instant, the trees were gone and in their place were skyscrapers. A shocking surprise! The skyline had a beauty to it too, but it was an almost alien beauty: strange and unfamiliar. I wondered why this place had been chosen, as if by fate, to be transformed into a metropolis, while nearby lands, such as the Glacier Peak wilderness, were still, truly, wilderness.

The city is a reality, but it is hard to not yearn for a return to nature every once in a while. One day, while the Irish poet W. B. Yeats was walking through the streets of London, he had a sudden memory of a childhood vacation spot. The memory awakened in him a yearning to live simply and at peace in nature. This experience inspired his poem, “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” in 1888. In it, he describes his desire to live in a small cabin with a garden by a lake.³ Singer-songwriter Julie Byrne echoes his sentiment in one of her songs from this year: “To me this city’s hell, but I know you call it home; I was made for the green, made to be alone.”⁴ The city is clamorous with the sound of engines and it smells of exhaust. It is anything but peaceful. Sometimes we want to find our own peace, we want to shake the world from our backs. When we do, though, the peace we find is only partial.

The Beat author, Jack Kerouac, saw first hand that our own turmoil often follows us into nature. He worked one summer as a fire lookout on Desolation Peak in northern Washington, but spent half the time lonely, wishing he was down in San Francisco with his friends. And when he finally was, he wished he was alone again. After receiving his first advance check for *On the Road*, he decided he would settle down with his mother on some little farm. But instead he ended up going on a crazy trip to Tangiers. On the boat ride over, in the middle of a real tempest, he admits, “All I had to do was stay home, give it all up, get a little home for me and Ma, meditate, live quiet, read in the sun, drink wine in the moon in old clothes, pet my kitties, sleep good dreams—now look at this petrain I got me in, Oh dammit!”⁵ When his repulsion to the noise of the city drove him away, his attraction to the excitement of the city dragged him back. He learned that merely leaving the city wasn’t enough to escape it. Then, what is the proper response to the longing for a return to nature?

The proper response is not to abscond into nature; rather, it is a kind of internal contemplation. The Christian existentialist Søren Kierkegaard writes, “This melancholy of poetical longing is grounded in a deep misunderstanding, because the lonely wanderer is everywhere surrounded in nature by that which does not understand [them], even though it always seems as if an understanding must be arrived at.”⁶ Kierkegaard argues that we should meet the stillness of nature with the earnestness of confession. In other words, we have to find peace within before we can find peace without. The Japanese philosopher Shin’ichi Hisamatsu goes even further, claiming that contemplation “can no longer be confined to quiet places like mountains and monasteries, but it must be right in the midst of constructing history and the world.”⁷ He says this in a discussion on the Vimalakirti Sutra. This sutra stresses the importance of manifesting “the nature of an ordinary person without abandoning a cultivated spiritual nature.”⁸ In other words, our longing for nature should result in us looking within, finding inspiration within our daily lives, within society.

Jack Kerouac understood the need to look within. In one of his poems he writes, “Here I go rowin / Thru Lake Innisfree / Looking for Nirvana / Inside me.”⁹ Hisamatsu explains Nirvana as the true self. He calls the true self “formless” because it is not the conscious mind, it is not consciousness at all. Seen from this perspective, Jack Kerouac was expressing his genuine search for the true self. Julie Byrne also understands the need to look within. She sings, “I’ve been sitting in the garden, I’ve been singing to the wind, I’ve been searching for an anchor, I’ve been seeking God within.” God is closer than anything, closer than even the soul. And finally, Yeats, too, understood the vastness of what is within. In 1936, after many decades of poetry, he wrote another poem, called “Lapis Lazuli.” In it, he describes a gift given to him by a friend. The poem ends with:

*Two Chinamen, behind them a third,
Are carved in Lapis Lazuli,
Over them flies a long-legged bird
A symbol of longevity;
The third, doubtless a serving-man,
Carries a musical instrument.*

*Every discoloration of the stone,
Every accidental crack or dent
Seems a water-course or an avalanche,
Or lofty slope where it still snows
Though doubtless plum or cherry-branch
Sweetens the little half-way house*

*Those Chinamen climb towards, and I
Delight to imagine them seated there;
There, on the mountain and the sky,
On all the tragic scene they stare.
One asks for mournful melodies;
Accomplished fingers begin to play.
Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,
Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay.¹⁰*

The world was on the brink of total war. Nevertheless, Yeats saw an ancient joy sitting underneath all the tragedy of history. But, how can we see this joy too? Those who have found it, teach the way to it as well. The eighth century Chinese teacher Shítóu Xīqiān made it to the “half-way house” that Yeats describes. In his poem, “The Song of the Grass Hut,” he writes, “I’ve built a grass hut where there’s nothing of value [...] though the hut is small, it includes the entire world.”¹¹ His small hut including the entire world is like Mount Rainier fitting inside a pine cone and it means that your simple life can contain all life. “The Song of the Jeweled Mirror Samadhi” is a poem attributed to Shítóu’s great grand student, the ninth century Chinese teacher Dongshan Liangjie. It says, “Practicing inwardly, functioning in secret, playing the fool, seemingly stupid, / If only you can persist in this way, you will see the host within the host.”¹² As we saw earlier, it isn’t the noise of the city that prevents us from carving out a calm home, rather it is our own inner turmoil. Therefore, Dongshan suggests that we calm the inner turmoil without changing our location or vocation within the world. And another ninth century Chinese teacher, Huángbò Xīyùn, explains how to calm the inner turmoil. He says, “Practise keeping your minds motionless at all times, whether walking, standing, sitting or lying; concentrating entirely upon the goal of no thought-creation, no duality, no reliance on others and no attachments; just allowing all things to take their course the whole day long, as though you were too ill to bother; unknown to the world; innocent of any urge to be known or unknown to others; with your minds like blocks of stone that mend no holes.”¹³ Huángbò sees that the source of inner turmoil is our own thoughts incessantly discriminating between this and that, between likes and dislikes. The solution isn’t to not think, but to let thoughts flow without becoming entangled in them as little eddies do in a river.

I believe the greatest teachings are those which lead one to put aside relying on teachings and realize things for one’s self. As Huángbò says, “no reliance on others and no attachments.” The Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart, praises detachment as the greatest of all virtues in one of his sermons: “Now you might ask,



what is detachment, since it is so noble in itself? Here you should know that true detachment is nothing other than this: the spirit stands as immovable in all the assaults of joy or sorrow, honour, disgrace or shame, as a mountain of lead stands immovable against a small wind.” He says that when you stand in complete detachment, you feel nothing physical, and yet, you may outwardly be undergoing trials. Or, you may be just going about your daily life: sleeping, eating, and working. He justifies detachment with an analogy:

If I want to write on a wax tablet, then no matter how noble the thing is that is written on the tablet, I am none the less vexed because I cannot write on it. If I really want to write I must delete everything that is written on the tablet, and the tablet is never so suitable for writing as when absolutely nothing is written on it. In the same way, when God wishes to write on my heart in the most sublime manner, everything must come out of my heart that can be called ‘this’ or ‘that’; thus it is with the detached heart.¹⁴

This is a clear parallel to Huángbò’s teaching if we can assume that a heart being sublimely written on by God is like a person swallowing the Pacific Ocean. Now, what happens if we follow these teachings?

For one, these teachings lead to a true appreciation for nature: nature seen not as an escape, but as a home we never left. We see this appreciation in Saint Francis of Assisi. In his “Canticle of the Sun,” he calls “brother” and “sister” the creatures of nature, including the sun, the moon, wind, water, fire, the earth, and even death.¹⁵ There is also a story told of him giving a sermon to a flock of birds, encouraging them to be grateful for all that they are given. This story is illustrated in the picture on the left.¹⁶ The picture below depicts an image with similar tone, one of Dongting Lake.¹⁷ The surrounding area was famous for its beauty and was home for the ninth century Chinese teacher Changsha Jingcen. One plum blossoming spring day, when Changsha came back from a walk, the gatekeeper asked him, “Where have you been strolling?” Changsha replied, “I have come from strolling about in the hills.” The gatekeeper then asked, “Where did you go?” Changsha replied, “At first I followed the scent of the herbs, then I wandered by the falling flowers.”¹⁸ He was out in nature, gratefully enjoying the beauty. And you can enjoy that beauty too. You can enjoy it by going for a solitary walk by a nearby creek—smelling the scent of sagebrush, listening to the birds singing and the water gurgling and the grass swishing with lizards and squirrels; listening to the bumblebees humming, feeling the cool breeze, feeling flies landing on your skin with persistence, and watching a bubble float down the stream and then POP.



Footnotes:

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7. Hisamatsu, Shin’ichi. “Talks on the Vimalakirti Sutra (Part One: Sitting in Complete Repose).” *The FAS Journal*. Trans. Takahashi Nobumichi. 1992. “Progress in science, technology, and social organization is rightly celebrated as a sign of human evolution and historical development. The frequent condemnation of this progress as the cause of dehumanization, accompanied by impotent calls to ‘return to nature,’ is due to a lack of true sitting. True sitting can no longer be confined to quiet places like mountains and monasteries, but it must be right in the midst of constructing history and the world.”
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10. Yeats, William Butler. “Lapis Lazuli.” 1936.
11. “The Song of the Grass Hut.” Also, see “The Song of Enlightenment” by the Chinese teacher Yongjia Xuanjue (666-773). The 22nd stanza goes: “Far away in the mountains I live in an humble hut; / High are the mountains, thick the arboreal shades, and under an old pine-tree / I sit quietly and contentedly in my monkish home; / Perfect tranquility and rustic simplicity rules here.”
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13. Blofeld, John, trans. *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po*. 1958. Page 90. Also, see “The Song of Enlightenment.” The 11th stanza goes: “The enlightened one walks always by [herself], goes about always by [herself]; / Every perfect one saunters along one and the same passage of Nirvana; / [Her] tone is classical, [her] spirit is transparent, [her] airs are naturally elevated, / [Her] features are rather gaunt, [her] bones are firm, [she] pays no attention to others.”
14. Eckhart, Johannes. “On Detachment.” *Meister Eckhart: selected treatises and sermons*. Trans. James M. Clark and John V. Skinner. 1958. Page 163 and 168.
15. St. Francis of Assisi. “Canticle of the Sun.”
16. The painting, by Giotto de Bondone, is called *St. Francis Preaching to the Birds*.
17. The painting, by Wu Zhen, is called *Hermit Fisherman on Lake Dongting*.
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PLAYING WITH INFINITY

BY KENNETH LUCAS DODD



“T-minus ten, nine, eight, seven –Main Engine Start– five, four, three, two, one, zero, and liftoff!” Within 8.5 minutes, the Space Shuttle uses 7.8 million pounds of thrust¹ to travel from a launch pad in Florida to 3200 mph at 37 miles altitude, exits the atmosphere at Mach 25, and enters Low Earth Orbit.² After the mission duration, the shuttle begins its hypersonic reentry glide, where the ceramic tiles of its heat shield must endure temperatures exceeding 2800°F. Descending through the upper atmosphere, it performs a sequence of four S-turns to burn off speed. 5000 miles from the start of reentry, the pilots land the shuttle “dead stick,” either on a runway at Cape Canaveral or on the dry lakebed of Edwards Air Force Base.³

It has been said the Space Shuttle is the pinnacle of human technology. Immense knowledge stands behind its design, representing millennia of human thought and experimentation. But why is science so special to us? Why are we such curious, inventive creatures?

Consider our study of gravity. Until Isaac Newton, gravity lacked a formal name. Astronomers like Kepler and Copernicus improved models of planetary trajectories to a point whereupon Newton’s laws of motion could accurately explain orbital mechanics in light of gravitational forces. Yet anomalies, such as the peculiar orbit of Mercury, remained a mystery. Relativistic effects, which are fundamental to modern conceptions of gravity, were not even imagined until the early 20th century with the work of Einstein. And it is quite certain that our present knowledge of gravity, while extremely accurate, is similarly incomplete. Could it be that many, if not all, of our current scientific theories fall short of some deeper knowledge? Is the complexity of the universe like that of a magnificent fractal, with reaches of infinite detail we will never fully grasp? What meaning, therefore, do our current scientific models have?

To answer this, let us consider children at play. Children, in their games, explore the world through a process of trial and error, of imagination and realization. Good parents do not scorn their children’s silliness—rather, they love it, because they know it all serves the grand purpose of developing a good, mature human being, able to explore the world further and deeper than any childish dream could ever attain. Thus, play is good.

Is this not quite like science? We hypothesize and experiment, observe and analyze. We create theories, advance them, and eventually replace them. Yet, this scientific process is good because, through it, we become better able to explore the universe.

It is apparent that whatever was responsible for the forma-

tion of the universe made us hungry for knowledge. We were made to play with the cosmos, hardwired to seek the very truths underlying our existence. However limited and flawed our present understanding may be, our scientific endeavors are justified: while they often provide only temporary beliefs, they are our vehicles for engaging with truth. Without them, we flounder; with them, we make space shuttles.

Suppose God viewed our science with the loving eyes of a parent. Among the Abrahamic monotheistic religions, Christians have a tradition of calling the Creator “Father”. The Christian God is ascribed a deep, unconditional love toward his children that “works in all things for the good,”⁴ one that “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things,”⁵ one that is undeterred by human shortfalls. Contrary to what is frequently believed, moral error is as natural to the Christian faith as failed experiments are to science. Christianity teaches that through Jesus, God is accessible to us regardless of how limited and flawed our present state may be. God’s lavish love toward sinners provides an algebra by which the discrete and frangible can connect with the Boundless and Immortal, a process whereby little creatures, as we, are allowed to cross the threshold to the “grand throne room” of Heaven. We need not scale the towers of Heaven’s castle ourselves, but can enter freely through whatever meager steps we offer. Thereby, we are invited to explore God’s mysteries “further up [and] further in” ad infinitum.⁶ And is this not quite like science? If this were true, then the welcoming nature of such a God would propel our science into the immeasurable cosmic frontiers with childlike eagerness and humility.

Toddlers manage to create all sorts of things through their toddling. As they grow, their toy block towers become pillow-forts, their pillow-forts become go-karts, and their go-karts, one day, become space shuttles. God, in his wisdom, made us to play, so let us play.

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A HYPERDIMENSIONAL GOD

BY TIM RETTBERRG

Anyone who knows me well knows that I love to watch and play soccer. When I started to consistently watch professional soccer around 7 years ago, I began to realize something relatively simple: that watching soccer, especially from the vantage point given by TV, simplifies the game and its strategy. Seeing games from this elevated perspective allows you to understand the sport in ways you never could have from on the field. For this exact reason, coaches and players in many sports use tapes, shot from a high vantage point, to analyze strategy.

In Michio Kaku's book *Hyperspace* (1994), he explains this concept in terms of warfare. In battle, gaining higher ground allowed generals to strategize with a simpler view than could ever be achieved by an individual soldier on the ground.¹ In other words, adding another dimension to a situation greatly simplifies how one can understand it.

Could that concept be true of more than just sports and warfare? Could the limited perspective of the athlete and the soldier be applied to humans' view of paradoxes, such as those in Christianity? If so, could higher dimensions be the path to resolving such paradoxes, or at least seeing them as reasonable?

Christian tenets, such as the Trinity, are commonly criticized for seemingly contradicting themselves, science, reason, or a combination of the three. Often, justifications for these paradoxes do not seem to fully resolve the issues at their core, and instead rely on faith that the answers are beyond our comprehension, though at times this may feel dismissive. If Christians claim that God is revealed through nature² and that scripture encourages seeking out the truth,³ should they be satisfied with claims that God is beyond their comprehension? I propose that we can better understand these paradoxes and human limits of understanding through exploring the implications of higher dimensions. This idea isn't new—Christians, from nineteenth century theologians⁴ to modern research scientists⁵, have considered the relation between God and higher dimensions. However, before discussing

any possible solutions, we must first understand the scientific implications of hyperdimensionality.

The anomalous nature of light waves is a helpful starting point in understanding the scientific implications of higher dimensions. All waves require a medium to travel through, except light waves. Unlike sound waves, which require air, water, or some other medium, light can travel through a vacuum. For years, this anomaly has been debated within the scientific community, gradually becoming accepted as reality despite the absence of an explanation. However, the solution may be hidden in higher dimensions.

In 1921, Theodor Kaluza published the ideas that would pave the way for String Theory. The Kaluza-Klein Theory proposed extending Einstein's theory of general relativity to more dimensions of space and time than the four (length, width, depth, time) we experience. Kaku once again explains this, saying that the Kaluza-Klein Theory described light as a vibration of the fifth dimension. Under this explanation, light does, in fact, have a medium – the fifth dimension itself. Looking at light waves through the lens of five dimensions of space and time, instead of four, allowed scientists like Kaluza to find a way through which we could more fully understand the behavior of light.

Although Kaluza's theory seemingly died as he struggled to identify the correct number of dimensions, Superstring Theory has more recently shown ten dimensions of space and time could exist and revive this explanation of light. Superstring Theory lacks experimental verification; however, Kaku points out that experiments have shown, through the observation of starlight, that the universe is, in fact, "curved in an unseen dimension". The existence of higher dimensions, no matter how many, could have enormous scientific implications, including the existence of an infinite number of multiverses. The impact of higher dimensions is evidently not limited to allowing coaches and generals to strategize better or even resolving the nature of light waves – Kaku

emphasizes that theories in three dimensions of space are simply incapable of fully explaining our universe. But are higher dimensions useful in understanding the nature of God?

For the Judeo-Christian God to exist as biblically described, He must exist beyond the universe while intervening, transcending, and maintaining sovereignty over it. He is not confined by the limits of the universe and is in control over it. If the universe exists in 10 dimensions, or any number of dimensions, then God would naturally have to operate, in some capacity, in at least 10 dimensions. Furthermore, if hyperdimensionality is an aspect of His sovereignty, then He may exist in many more than that. This is not to say that God is dimensional or physical, but that He can act within the dimensional and physical.

However, as humans, we cannot directly understand the implications of God existing in higher dimensions. Despite the increasing possibility of the existence of higher dimensions, we are incapable of visualizing them. If we are to understand, without mathematical analysis, the implications of a God who can operate hyperdimensionally, we cannot practically explore higher dimensions. Instead, we must first look in the other direction: to the implications of lower dimensions.

In *Flatland* (1884), Edwin Abbott explores the lives of fictional two-dimensional beings. The beings – called Flatlanders – perceive each other only as lines, as they don't have the luxury of a third dimension to understand their own shape. They instead discern the shape of another being by feeling their edges and inferring the angles between them.⁶ More importantly is how Flatlanders would perceive anything three-dimensional. If a sphere and a cylinder entered their two-dimensional plane perpendicularly, they would both appear as circles, only that, while moving, the sphere would shrink and grow and the cylinder would become an ellipse. If a Flatlander were told they were completely different objects, it would be confusing and contradict common sense. Without any knowledge of the third dimension, they would conclude that both are circles. In a similar way, it would also be impossible for a Flatlander to detect anything unless it physically intersected with their plane.

Furthermore, the same object could appear in multiple ways. For example, to Flatlanders, a human could be an ellipse (for an arm entering their plane), a circle (for one finger), four circles (for four fingers), or any combination of shapes. A human, to a Flatlander, is infinitely complex and full of contradictions. Without the ability to experience or visualize in three physical dimensions, Flatlanders could never fully understand anything three-dimensional, whether it's a human or a sphere.

While not directly applicable to understanding Biblical par-

adoxes, the difference between two and three dimensions can be indirectly helpful. The conflict at the core of the Trinity – that God, or anything, could be both three and one – could be resolved through the example of humans' appearance to Flatlanders. Under a hyperdimensional framework, something existing as both three and one is possible. Although the paradox of the Trinity itself may or may not be resolved by higher dimensions, to say that humans could perceive one God as three distinct persons is reasonable under a hyperdimensional framework. The difference of one dimension prevents Flatlanders from understanding that the disjointed appearance of a human was simply a limitation of their perspective. How much more might a difference of many more dimensions resolve Biblical paradoxes?

Even though hyperdimensionality cannot give definite solutions or a detailed understanding of Biblical paradoxes, it can certainly inform our view of these seemingly contradicting beliefs. These paradoxes may or may not be solved by hyperdimensionality at all, however, it's reasonable to say that they could be. Absolute explanation is never truly required for belief, especially within the sciences. Ultimately, this comes down to one question: does considering the implications of higher dimensions affect the reasonability of a God who contradicts our assumptions and understanding of the world?

Whether considering the implications of higher dimensions changes your belief or unbelief in God, they indicate an ability of Biblical paradoxes to be, at least, partially understood through reason. Higher dimensions provide a rational framework for belief in God. Being a Christian doesn't necessitate a blind belief that God is triune or omnipresent or omniscient. Neither does it necessitate abandoning reason. Instead, reason and faith work together, as Scripture encourages. Faith is less about hoping something to be true and more about believing that what you have experienced and know through reason will continue to be true.⁷ Claiming certain knowledge is beyond human understanding is not a matter of blind trust, instead, it often results from a rational framework.

Footnotes:

1. Kaku, Michio. *Hyperspace*. 1994.

2. *Psalms 19:1*

3. *Romans 12:2*

4. Arthur Willink, in *The World of the Unseen* (1893), claimed that God, Heaven, Hell and Earth were separated by dimensions.

5. *Scientists at Reasons to Believe*, a Christian think tank, have discussed the relation between higher dimensions, God and Biblical paradoxes.

6. Abbott, Edwin A. *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*. 1884.

7. C.S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity*. 1952.

FRIEND OF SINNERS

BY BRITTANY KRIPPNER

Five years ago, I walked into my first prison in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Inside was a world very different from my own, yet inhabited with people strikingly similar to myself. I expected to feel hatred, fear, and disappointment towards those who had done such wrong to others, but, instead, found that I am also one of them.

Today I walk through the wings of the San Luis Obispo Juvenile Hall and find the same fascinating contradiction. Through intense rounds of Uno, basketball tournaments, and guitar lessons with the kids at the juvenile hall, I have gained an acute curiosity about my new friends who have been publically exiled, shamed, and disgraced from society, and I understand just a little bit more why Jesus was so intentional in his interactions with social outcasts.

The life and work of Jesus Christ exhibited love, compassion, and grace to those who were rejected and shamed by society. He was known to be a friend of sinners, and his life has encouraged me to do the same in my work within the criminal justice system—to befriend them, encourage them, and find them worthy of healing, rehabilitation, and forgiveness. However, I find myself working within a much different justice system. I have witnessed firsthand a deep contradiction of justice, grace, and forgiveness through the marginalization, incapacitation, and disenfranchisement of our nation's criminals.

America boasts about being the land of the free, yet we imprison more people behind bars than any other country on Earth. Based on our current recidivism levels, which

is the likelihood of a convicted criminal to reoffend, three out of our four prisoners are reincarcerated within five years of release (DuRose et al., 2014).¹ The gospel message of Jesus Christ proclaims healing and redemption, yet our justice system fails to sufficiently invest in rehabilitative programs. It seems we have lost hope in rehabilitation, the power of grace, and the utility of forgiveness. The chains, locks, and barbed wires that decorate our correctional facilities are only a physical manifestation of mankind's captivity to sin. Our human nature desires to be released from those chains, freed from sin and suffering—yet, our correctional system says otherwise. As an officer once said to me as we walked the halls of a solitary confinement wing, “There’s just nothing more we can do for these people here.” A fixation on guilt, punishment, and isolation fails to combat the root causes of criminal behavior.

Our current justice system operates under a theory of retributive justice, and the court asks the following three questions when a crime is committed:

1. *What law is broken?*
2. *Who did it?*
3. *What do they deserve?*

Under these questions, the victim is not mentioned and their needs for healing and rehabilitation are not addressed. The state takes control over criminal proceedings and the community's capacity to resolve crime and conflict on their

own is weakened. Questions are fixated on the law, and not the person that was violated. These means of resolving crime, through incarceration and punishment, do not promote forgiveness or mediation between the parties.

By choosing routes of forgiveness and reconciliation, instead of guilt and punishment, the needs of both victims and offenders that are created by crime are addressed in a different manner. Recently, a restorative view of justice has gained increased publicity due to its effectiveness in reducing recidivism levels and promoting mediation and reconciliation between victim, offenders, and the broader community. Restorative Justice confronts crime by asking these three questions in order to achieve justice between the parties:

1. *Who has been hurt?*
2. *What does he or she need?*
3. *Whose obligation is it to meet those needs?*

Immediately, these questions demand a more holistic analysis of the crime, recognizing all parties involved, and assigning duties of mediation and reconciliation. Under a restorative mindset, justice is no longer a decision left to the government, but is an intentional action of the community to work together to restore what was broken due to a crime. Restorative justice respects its victims and makes a rehabilitative investment in offenders, recognizing their need for forgiveness, release from shame, and access to services that aid in behavioral change.

Restorative justice, instead of retributive justice, empowers all of us to participate in reconciliation with each other. Many programs such as Victim-Offender Mediation, Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP), and various in-custody vocational trainings strategically invest in restoring the lives of both victims and offenders. Prisoners are no longer viewed as social exiles, but are instead given second chances at obtaining a high school diploma, learning nonviolent communication skills, and are provided communication with their victims that promotes reconciliation and forgiveness. Many of these programs are demonstrating high levels of efficacy at reducing levels of recidivism. In one study, inmate participation in educational programs lowered their likelihood of recidivating by 43%, compared to the control group (Davis et al., 2013).² The AVP workshops that are growing in popularity across our country's correctional facilities have been found to help inmates effectively regulate emotions and conflict by promoting trust, empathy, and cooperation. A maximum security prison in Delaware found that their

AVP participants had recidivism rates 39% lower than those who did not participate in the program (Miller & Shufford, 2005).³

Finally, the emphasis on forgiveness in a restorative justice system promotes the wellbeing of both parties. Victims who have forgiven their offenders have been found to show reduced levels of depression, anxiety, and rumination (Toussaint et al., 2015; Hourigan, 2016).^{4,5} Offenders who have been forgiven have also been found to integrate better into their community upon their release, and are less likely to recidivate (Hourigan, 2016; Hayes & Daley, 2003).^{5,6}

While there is no way to replicate what is lost, killed, or destroyed by crime, forgiveness allows for a mutual agreement to be made between all stakeholders of the crime and paves the way for healing. By choosing personal forgiveness instead of mass incarceration, we demonstrate that the restoring of relationships, and not the punishment of offenders, is of greater value in the vicious cycle of crime. Through these efforts, we are able to rebuild the relationships and community that our hearts long for.

Interestingly, while restorative justice theories are relatively new to our criminal justice system, it is evident to me that the message weaved within is nothing new. When Christ died a criminal's death on the cross, it marked the end of a reliance on a punitive and retributive justice system. No longer are we reliant on methods of punishment, life sentences, and capital punishment as attempts to restore justice, but rather the extension of forgiveness through Christ's atoning work on the cross. Christ chose to use capital punishment as his means to reconcile humanity, he used the captivity and imprisonment of his apostles to further his gospel message across the nations, and even provided the foundation of true forgiveness and reconciliation for the restorative justice movements we see gaining popularity today. The life of Christ and the ways in which he interacted with the lowest of society—the woman at the well, the tax-collectors, and even those crucified beside him—provides a framework for how I, and others of the faith, are called to live today.

We gain a deep understanding of the restorative power of the gospel when we interact with those who are deemed by society as broken, unworthy, irredeemable, and unlovable. In chapter 25 of Matthew, Jesus said that the way in which we treat the least of these—the lame, the mentally ill, the incarcerated—is the way we treat him. My encouragement to readers is to consider the ways in which our



justice system views our criminals and to believe that they are worthy of rehabilitative investment. Christians believe that nobody is beyond redemption, and Romans chapter 5 proclaims that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Thus, not even our country's most despised criminals are outside the reach of Christ's grace and forgiveness. Do we really believe that?

Though media and society tells us to be afraid, angry, or vindictive to those who have committed crimes, the gospel of Christ calls us to be their friends. We no longer need to feel anger or revenge toward an offender, for we can be assured that God is an upholder of true Justice. Instead, our job is to forgive, to recognize that they are sinners just like us, and provide them the means and resources necessary to restore the brokenness and pain in their lives. The inmate longs for physical, emotional, and spiritual freedom from the chains of sin. All praise be to Christ, the true friend of sinners, who has granted that freedom to us all.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."
(2 Corinthians 5:17-21, English Standard Version)

Footnotes:

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**IN MEMORY OF KENNEDY LOVE
A FRIEND TO MANY**

1993-2017

THE NICENE CREED

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through Him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
He came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
He became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
He suffered death and was buried.
On the third day He rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and His kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son, He is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

A PRAYER FOR CAL POLY BY KENNETH LUCAS DODD

Father in Heaven,

Almighty God, we pray to you, asking for a new thing and an old thing.

San Luis Obispo is charged with newness and excitement: clubs, hands-on projects, internships, Instagram, the Rec. Center, Prefumo Canyon, M.D.O., Big Sur weekends, rolling hills, smooth waves, acai bowls, coffee shops, farmers market, bike night, U.C.S.B. games. By such, we are wonderstruck. We thank you, the Author of goodness, for these gifts of your love.

And yet, we still see brokenness all around us. Divisions are growing between rich and poor, between conservatives and liberals, East and West, old and new, and a great much is rising in the middle. Diversity blooming makes it hard to tell which way is up: so many connections, activities, and sounds surround us. Our lives at times feel like water flowing fast and thin over a flat rock; we long for the river that runs deep, low, and slow. Where is that river? Does it even exist? If it does, gentle and gracious Father, lead us by the hand to its clear mountain water, for we are thirsty.

Our hearts are restless, O God. Expectations tug on us daily. When we don't do what we should, we become afraid, ashamed, and sad: the waves crash over us. Are you angry with us? See our tears falling; hear our hearts aching. Please, forgive us for the wrong things we do. Wrap us with the blanket of your kindness, for you are good!

God, help us to see. Through everyday routines and organic moments, show us you are near. We pray for peace and healing to visit our splintered world, America, and Cal Poly. Do you cry beside our tears and laugh along our joys? Hear us, Lord, from where you are on high, and send aid. Support us in our cause, and lift us when we fall. Be with us God, for we need you to make all the bad things come undone, even through our fingertips.

Be with us, O God, through all our days.

Amen.

ALETHEIA

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