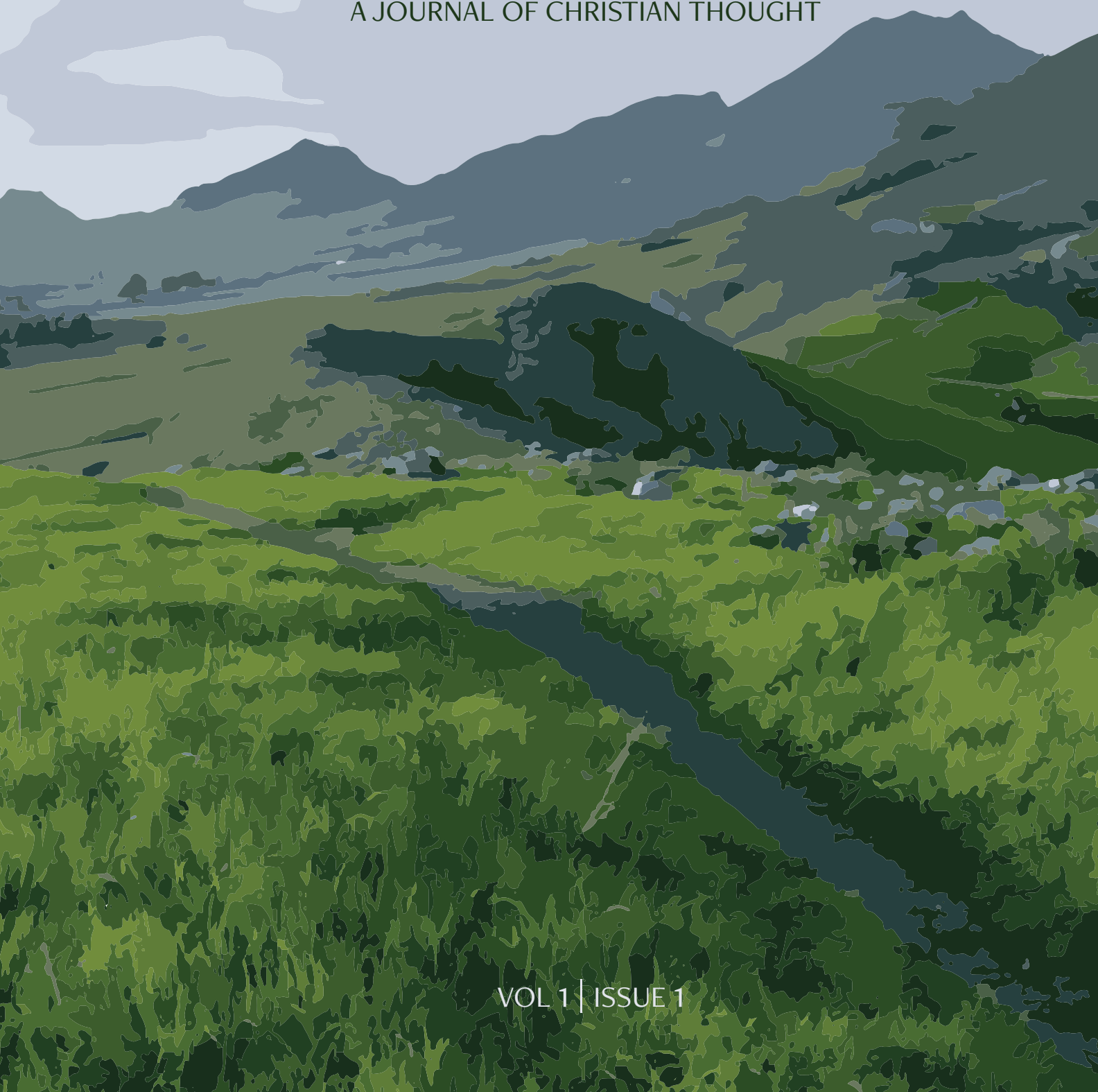


# ALETHEIA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT



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1

## THE HEART OF MAN IS NOT COMPOUND OF LIES

Lydia Anderson

5

## AMONG THE RUINS: FINDING YOUR PHILOSOPHY IN LIFE'S DARKEST MOMENTS

Caleb Gotthardt

9

## CALL HOME

Liam Madden

11

## GO NOT TO LETHE

Liam Madden

13

## SCIENTISM: AN INTERVIEW WITH MIT PROFESSOR DR. IAN HUTCHINSON

Anelise Powers

17

## SHEDDING LIGHT ON THE CHARACTER OF GOD

Lucas Dodd

21

## GRAFFITI

Rachel Bell

23

## KINTSUKUROI: THE STRENGTH THAT GRACE PROVIDES

Shannon Feil



## MISSION STATEMENT

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

### Dear Readers,

For some, Christianity may represent an ideological cop-out from the harsh realities of the world or an outdated ignorance towards scientific and moral progress. For others, Christianity signifies an identity, a framework for understanding and living within the world. At Aletheia, we are seeking explore that framework within the context of our studies and interactions at Cal Poly. However, whatever your perception of Christianity, we think this journal is for you.

In the past, Christian faith has had a tremendous influence on academia. Authors such as famous friends J.R.R Tolkien and C.S. Lewis drew inspiration from their religious beliefs to shape themes and principles in their stories. Salvador Dali's conversion to Christianity resulted in unique and controversial surrealist paintings. It led philosopher and theologian Augustine of Hippo to suggest in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* that creation may have been more than seven days, hundreds of years before Darwin would write on *The Origin of Species*.

We believe that practicing Christianity and thinking well is just as possible today as it was for Tolkien, Dali, and Augustine. We have gathered with students at Cal Poly and at Harvard, Yale, Cornell, Dartmouth, UC Berkeley, Claremont McKenna, and Brown who believe that the questions of God and the implications of Jesus' death and resurrection affect the very structure of how we see the world. We believe – in accordance with the rich academic tradition of Christian thought, in Augustine, Aquinas, and Paul, that – Christianity engages every aspect of humanity, including the intellect.

We are not here to argue or to debate, but to converse. We believe this conversation, for Christians, Atheists, Muslims, Buddhists, and everyone in between, is vital to the intellectual health of the university.

We humbly ask you to join us as we search, with open minds and hearts, for truth. We may not arrive at the same conclusions, but at the Cal Poly Aletheia, we believe that in the search we find ourselves, we find each other, and we find God.

-Caleb and Anelise



# The Heart of Man is Not Compound of Lies\*

## Redemptive sacrifice found in fictional literature

Lydia Anderson



**Readers are warned that major spoilers for *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Harry Potter* exist in this essay.**

Fantasy<sup>1</sup> is often regarded as either escapist or romantic; a means to ignore or deny the harsh realities of human life. Cynics see it as pure entertainment, with little or

no true value apart from distraction. However, the importance of fantastic tales should not be so easily dismissed. Fantasy has been created by human beings for thousands of years in various forms, from classical Homeric epic poetry, to Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, to modern American television shows. Joseph Campbell, a 20th-century scholar of mythology and religion, wrote that myths indicate the universal search for meaning, as well as reflect the journey of each individual. He wrote: "What human beings have in common is revealed in myths. Myths are stories of our search through the ages for truth, meaning, for significance. We all need to tell our story and to understand our story."<sup>2</sup> In fantasy, we can question existence and purpose in an imagined space, confront the realities of suffering and death, and experience a touch of joy.

This "imagined space" of fantasy is removed from everyday life. That is, we encounter charac-

ters we have never met and travel to places we have never been. Further, the very rules which govern our world are often rewritten. In a fictional universe, one may encounter anything from talking beasts to people with superhuman abilities to fire-breathing dragons. In his essay "On Fairy Stories," JRR Tolkien describes "faerie" as a wide, deep, and high realm that ordinary humans may enter, assuming they can accept the Secondary World imagined by the author: "And while he [the reader] is there [in faerie] it is dangerous for him to ask too many questions, lest the gates should be shut and the keys be lost."<sup>3</sup> To enter faerie, or the imagined space created by a story, and thus become able to experience the unfolding plot, the reader must trust the creator of the imagined world, relinquishing doubt and pride. In this humble surrender, there is temporary rest from the stress and care of life.

But in faerie there is more than simple respite: in the temporary absence of the thoughts, feelings, and distractions that so often clutter our minds, there is the opportunity for insight and self-understanding. In the detachment of a strange imagined world, we may encounter ideas, people we know, or even ourselves. The wonder of fiction is that it can take a concept like love, strip it of its everyday appearance, and re-present it in a disguised yet powerful form. In this way, an abstract concept like love can become real to us.

\*Tolkien, J.R.R. *Mythopoeia*. 1931

<sup>1</sup>I will be using a loose definition of "fantasy." By fantasy or fiction, I mean any oral, visual, or written story invented by humans. This includes everything from historical fiction to cartoons to oral storytelling.

<sup>2</sup>Campbell, Joseph, and Bill D. Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday, 1988, 6.

<sup>3</sup>Tolkien, J. R. R., and Peter S. Beagle. *The Tolkien Reader*, 68-69.



# Myths indicate the universal search for meaning, as well as reflect the journey of each individual

In fiction, it becomes more than an idea: it is tangible, practical, accessible. At last it is something we can engage with, touch for ourselves.

Fiction is detached from reality in that it often exists in an alternate or parallel universe. But we don't invent and enjoy fiction in order to and convince ourselves of the literal existence of that world or its fantastic elements. For example, it would be foolish to read The Lord of the Rings<sup>4</sup> and conclude that the one ring, elves, wizards, and hobbits actually exist in our physical world. Middle Earth is detached from our world in this way. But thematically, The Lord of the Rings is about questions that concern humans deeply: the struggle of good and evil, friendship, and courage in the face of certain defeat. The setting of Middle Earth allows for these themes to appear strongly. This disguise, or veil, is what makes these themes able to appear with such potency.

This costume enables asking questions and revealing truth. To further this point, I consider a court jester of the European Middle Ages as an analogy to fiction. This court jester was the only person allowed to “mock and revile even the most prominent without penalty.”<sup>5</sup> The jester, dressed in a silly outfit, skipping around, juggling balls and doing tricks, is ridiculous, even contemptible. Because he was laughable, his words were not taken seriously, and therefore he had the unique ability to point out uncomfortable

(though perhaps obvious) truths about the king, without punishment. Any other person, great or small, who called the king a fool directly would surely have had their head chopped off.

Fictional tales, full of fantastic beasts and laughably absurd enchantments, hold the same power as the court jester. Their strangeness is exactly the thing that gives them a unique power to strike a chord within us. As Clyde S. Kilby observed about the power of fantasy, “No amount of shouting at us that this is all wrong changes the fact for very long. Detachment and the upside down view are a constant necessity to circumvent the rats, the tags, the clichés everywhere awaiting us.”<sup>6</sup> Fiction, like the court jester, can deliver truth through the “upside down view.”

The notion that the projection of oneself into an imagined space allows for greater self-understanding and the revealing of truth is not so far-fetched or strange. Sports, art, even board games all provide space where inhibitions can be removed and character revealed. Thus, this vehicle of fantasy allows for the exploration of questions that deeply concern human beings. For example, characters who, motivated by love rather than self-interest, sacrifice themselves to save others. And, in their willing surrender to death, victory over death is achieved. To illustrate, I have selected the climaxes of two novels which capture this.

Sydney Carton of Charles Dickens's A Tale of Two Cities lays down his life for Lucie Monet, her husband Charles Darnay, and their child. Darnay, an innocent man, is held in the Conciergerie prison to be guillotined as an enemy of the Republic during the French Revolution. Carton and Darnay are doppelgangers, and Carton, motivated by his love for Lucie, infiltrates the prison, chemically knocks out Darnay, and trades places with him. Carton is executed in Darnay's place. This selfless act not only saves Darnay but Carton himself, in so far as his sacrifice unwittingly frees him from a life of lethargy and self-pity.

<sup>4</sup>Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Lord of the Rings*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967.

<sup>5</sup>Pepys, Samuel, Robert Latham, and William Matthews. *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: A New and Complete Transcription*. Berkeley: U of California, 1970, 202.

<sup>6</sup>Ryken, Leland. *The Christian Imagination: The Practice of Faith in Literature and Writing*. Colorado Springs, CO: Shaw, 2002, 70.



<sup>7</sup> Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities*. London: Dent, 1906.

<sup>8</sup> Rowling, J. K., and Mary GrandPré. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. New York, NY: Arthur A. Levine, 2007, 678.

<sup>9</sup> He also calls it "eucatastrophe"

<sup>10</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., and Peter S. Beagle. *The Tolkien Reader*, 68-69.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*. New York: MacMillan Pub. 1952, 50.

Although Carton is killed, Darnay, Lucie, and their child escape the very jaws of death.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, the culmination of the Harry Potter series is Harry's surrender to death. In order for Voldemort to be truly defeated, Harry must submit and be killed. Bitter and terrible as it is, Harry's willing surrender is the only way to destroy the Horcrux living inside him. But death was not the end, for he rises from the grave, triumphant. Harry is finally free from the weight of Voldemort's Horcrux, and the land is free from Voldemort's reign of terror.

It is paradoxical that in submission to death, death is defeated. Rowling's character Dumbledore says: "The true master [of death] does not seek to run away from Death. He accepts that he must die."<sup>8</sup> This climactic deliverance is what Tolkien would call a "good catastrophe"<sup>9</sup> or more commonly, a "happy ending." Tolkien described this as the consolation of the fairy story. He elaborates:

"In its fairy tale- or other world- setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace...It does not deny the existence...of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary for the joy of deliverance, it denies...universal final defeat and in so far is evangelium, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief. It is the mark of a good fairy-story, of the higher and more complete kind, that how-

ever wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give to child or man that hears it, when the 'turn' comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given



by any form of literary art..."<sup>10</sup>

Tolkien himself believed that there is true magic to be found in fairy stories; that in journeying through a fictional tale, truly feeling despair along with story characters, and finally experiencing deliverance by the good catastrophe, the reader can actually receive a touch of unmerited joy. I see this as related to the discussed motif of death and resurrection. This theme of life emerging from submission to death in fantasy is apparently fairly universal. It can be found in some form in a variety of fantastic tales, from Homer's "The Iliad" to Disney's "Hercules" to "Star Wars." While one can dispute the reason for this universality, denying its existence would be very difficult. There is some weight, some power, some kind of profound meaning in the motif of death and resurrection.

The question is not then, whether this death and resurrection is significant, but why it is significant and where that significance comes from. As a Christian, I will present what I have come to believe. I see man's fascination with death and resurrection as a shadow or reflection of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christians believe the willing submission of Jesus to torture, humiliation, and death has somehow saved those who accept Him from death. We hold that the death of Jesus for the redemption of fallen man is not merely a story, but reality itself. He is the Person that we clumsily seek when we write and relish fantasy. The reason we are enchanted by these stories is that they echo His True Story. C.S. Lewis writes, "He sent the human race what I call good dreams: I mean those queer stories scattered all through the heathen religions about a god who dies and comes to life again, and by his death, has somehow given new life to men." Lewis and Tolkien, both enchanted by fantasy in many forms, believed that in Christ, myth meets history to defeat death once and for all.

For Lewis (an atheist from age 15 to 30), his recognition of joy through the guise of fantasy was what brought him to believe in Christ.

“I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralyzed much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings. And reverence itself did harm... But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday School associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could.”<sup>12</sup>

Through fiction, we may experience the joy of Christ, independent of any human construct of religion. Regardless of who we are or what we have heard about God, I believe the “good catastrophes” found in fantasy can bring us into contact with tangible, accessible grace. Christ promises deliverance from death, and His people can truly sing, “Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction? (Hosea 13:14, NIV)<sup>13</sup>”

Fiction is a sophisticated form of art. These tales do not ignore suffering and death, rather they contain characters who willingly submit to death. Such heroic figures do not do this out of selfish despair, but out of an overwhelming love that is stronger than fear of death. Faced with crushing darkness, they do not ignore it and they do not hopelessly commit suicide, but rather sacrifice themselves for others. Therefore, the best fictional tales are neither naive nor nihilistic. In exposure to fiction, readers can experience the Gospel: that love ultimately and truly defeats all darkness and despair. In fiction, we can see a glimpse of joy that echoes the truth of Christ: “Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might break the power of him who holds the power over death- that is, the devil- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death,” (Hebrews 2:14-5, NIV).<sup>14</sup>

Fantasy should not be dismissed as simple children’s stories, or as a fool’s paradise. I challenge readers to reflect on their favorite fictional stories and ask themselves what about those stories strikes them as powerful or true, and what they believe the source (if any) of that truth may be.

#### **About the Author:**

*Lydia Anderson grew up in Portland, OR. She will be graduating in Spring 2017 with a Bachelor of Science in environmental engineering from Cal Poly.*



<sup>12</sup> Lewis, C. S. Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967, 50.

<sup>13</sup> NIV Bible. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> NIV Bible. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2007.

# Among the Ruins: Finding Your Philosophy In Life's Darkest Moments

Caleb Gotthardt

<sup>1</sup> Ansari, Aziz, and Eric Klinenberg. *Modern Romance*. Penguin, 2015. 132.

<sup>2</sup> Braff, Zach. *Garden State*. Film. Fox Searchlight, 2004.

Choosing to study philosophy at a polytechnic university often seems like a cruel joke one plays on their over-supportive parents. The perceived “impracticality” of philosophy most likely stems from the modern belief that our current scientific knowledge has long since answered the questions that once troubled Socrates and Plato. It has not. Regardless, at Cal Poly, around 100 students (myself included) hold the title ‘philosophy major.’ Contrary to popular opinion, we do not smoke pipes in class nor do we live perpetually in the clouds. Concerned with the most fundamental questions of reality, philosophy, in its best forms, is the study of what it means to be human. Yet, whether your degree reads Bachelor of Philosophy, Mechanical Engineering, Art, Education, Kinesiology, Math, Biology, or Music, the questions of who we are remain unavoidable. In fact, I would argue that every decision, goal, and dream we embody ultimately emerges from our conscious and subconscious answers to the question: Why am I here?

This foundational question, however, by nature of its complexity and weighty self-reflection, often remains buried beneath surface-level conversations, mindless and endless social media content, and the hurriedness of college life. We grow increasingly numb to substantive interactions believing the lie that pursues comfort can mask depression. Further, it seems the gift of limitless options for “self-exploration” instead liberates us from encountering ourselves and our picture of the world. On-campus opportunities, social events, or online connections all provide shreds of self-discovery but can equally serve

the role of perpetual distractor. As comedian (and now public intellectual) Aziz Ansari writes, “The world is available to us, but that may be the problem.”

As much as we work to avoid reflective awareness, the basic questions of existence cannot be ignored indefinitely. And often their brutal encroachment on our lives arrives uninvited. At 4:00 A.M. on Wednesday of finals week, when the effects of sleep loss amass all at once, finals feel suddenly insignificant, and we ask, “Why am I doing this?” Or when an increasing dependence on alcohol or an abusive relationship has absorbed so much of our lives that our hatred for it still cannot overcome our thirst for it. Or when going home no longer feels like home, or to quote the film *Garden State*, “It’s like you feel homesick for a place that doesn’t even exist.”<sup>2</sup> Or when the death of someone close shatters our illusion of control, reminding us of our finitude and fragility. In these isolating and sometimes debilitating moments, we are all philosophers.

As long as the world makes sense, philosophizing, for most, is only a hobby—a “sport” for academics and perhaps weed-induced inspiration. But when your goals crumble, your destructive habits threaten your sanity, or your sources of meaning and love fade or disappear, philosophy becomes a survival tool, one that can cripple just as easily as it can assuage.

In the ruins of human brokenness we discover the true foundation of our lives—the philosophical glue holding our world together. We

may discover that our obsession with our GPA amounts to an insatiable thirst for recognition and quantifiable self-worth. Or that our constant search for adventure or adrenaline is fueled primarily by an attempt to fill the emptiness and monotony of daily ex-istence with something more fulfilling. Or that our Instagram following represents an attempt to convince ourselves of our worth—by assigning a number to our significance.

Regardless of the discovery, its form manifests itself in a familiar pattern. Psychologist and theo-logian Dr. Chuck DeGroat observes that “we’re often caught between the extremes of shame (our sense of unworthiness) and self-esteem (our exhausting attempt to make ourselves worthy)” In ef-fect, when we uncover the honest foundation of our picture of the world, we also discover that we tend to answer the question of our existence with increasingly futile means.

The struggle to answer the darkest questions of human reality transcends our individual attempts; society itself often experiences large-scale ideological transformations in moments where the previ-ous philosophy (or picture of the world) no longer appears adequate.

In the West we believed for centuries that with increased technology, political development, and scientific exploration, we would eventually discover our summon bonum, our highest good. We answered the question of existence with startling boldness: conquer nature, dispel the fanciful myths of religion, and let reason guide us towards humanistic harmony. However, in the heart of the 20th century we, as a society, began to question and ultimately abandon this project. Amid the promise of perfection, which once appeared both tangible and palpable, the modern project evapo-rated with a haunting mist.

Peter Leithart, in his book *Solomon Among The Postmoderns*, discusses this transcendent, more alarming societal shift: “Postmodernity is... the recognition of modernity’s failures and an embrace of the fragmentation and dissolution of

politics, selves, language, life.” In other words, this age we inhabit—a postmodern age—represents a radical deconstruction of everything the so-called En-lightenment attempted to build. No longer do we trust the structures of our political systems for stability or the structures of our language to communicate the essence of our inner-selves or ideo-logical narratives to describe the “meaning of life.”<sup>3</sup> If you need further convincing, go to a modern art exhibit, watch any news coverage of the current election, listen to Kendrick Lamar’s newest album, or observe how many of your friends are using memes to express their deepest personal emotions.

When we as a society remove ourselves from the routines we develop to distract, we start to ask questions. Akin to individual reflection, we begin to collectively ask: What are we doing? What if our attempts at progress, running towards some illusory utopian society, were futile? What if our incredible capacity for technological innovation will never solve racism, systemic poverty, or death? What if humans aren’t as god-like as we hoped? Leithart offers his analysis: “Post-modernity... doesn’t bring anything new; it only unmasks the truth modernity tried to hide, that no one was really in control all along.”<sup>4</sup>

Our cultural moment is branded by the mass deconstruction of the pillars of modernist structures. In the dizzying array of individual and collective philosophies that permeates our daily existence, we have three choices: retreat back into the comfort of our monotonous, albeit safe (Western) lives, forge ahead with new sources of meaning, or crumble. Modernism is dead and we postmoderns now inhabit a world without a sturdy foundation for meaning.

In the movie *The Truman Show*, Truman Burbank (played by Jim Carrey) has been unknowingly living a completely fabricated existence for the purposes of a reality television show. His entire life has been crafted by TV produces, actors, and a massive bio-dome where every decision is calculated backstage. At the climax of the

<sup>3</sup> Leithart, Peter J. *Solomon Among The Postmoderns*. Brazos Press, 2008. 39.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.





movie, as you would expect, Truman uncovers the truth behind his life and dramatically exits his “world” to discover our world. We rejoice with Truman as he escapes the lie of his pseudo-reality, liberated to construct meaning for himself in our society. Despite the optimistic vision of *The Truman Show*’s conclusion, I’ve always wanted a sequel, a movie where Truman must struggle to reconstruct his beliefs about life in the “real” world. When your world shatters, even if it was a broken world, it is messy. The initial celebration and freedom of a new, fuller understanding of the world fades quickly, and then we are left to sort out the implications of this new life alone.

The world-shattering arrival of Postmodernism commenced in much the same way. When modern ideals collapsed we were left to create meaning for ourselves, equal parts freeing and daunting. And this is us, too. As individuals, as independent college students, we are left without our parents’ beliefs, without the culture of our hometown, to discover if our beliefs make sense in this new world we inhabit. Many of us will understandably prefer not to engage with this challenge and instead seek familiarity: whether in clubs, sororities, academics, or churches. However, familiarity can be elusive; comfort unstable. The foundation may be shaken at any moment.

When the foundation shakes, however, it implies the house was already broken. In many ways, the ability to accurately gauge your picture of the world requires enduring many painful and lonely moments. Forcing a radically new perspective on the meaning of your existence is foolish if your perspective already appears adequate. Only when a certain picture reveals devastating cracks are we able to authentically engage with our quest for meaning. For some, the cracks of global suffering will deconstruct the belief in a benevolent God. For others, the logical outflow of a purely natural-istic picture of the world will collapse under the weight of existential longing. And for the many in between, the moments of emptiness and apparent meaninglessness will invite genuine contemplation: Why am I here?

In the Gospel of Matthew we encounter the familiar (for those who attended and paid attention in Sunday School) parable of a construction project. Two houses, one built on a deep, rock foundation; one built on sand. The storms come and beat relentlessly upon both houses, and one house, the one built on a firm foundation, emerges from the inevitable storm still standing.

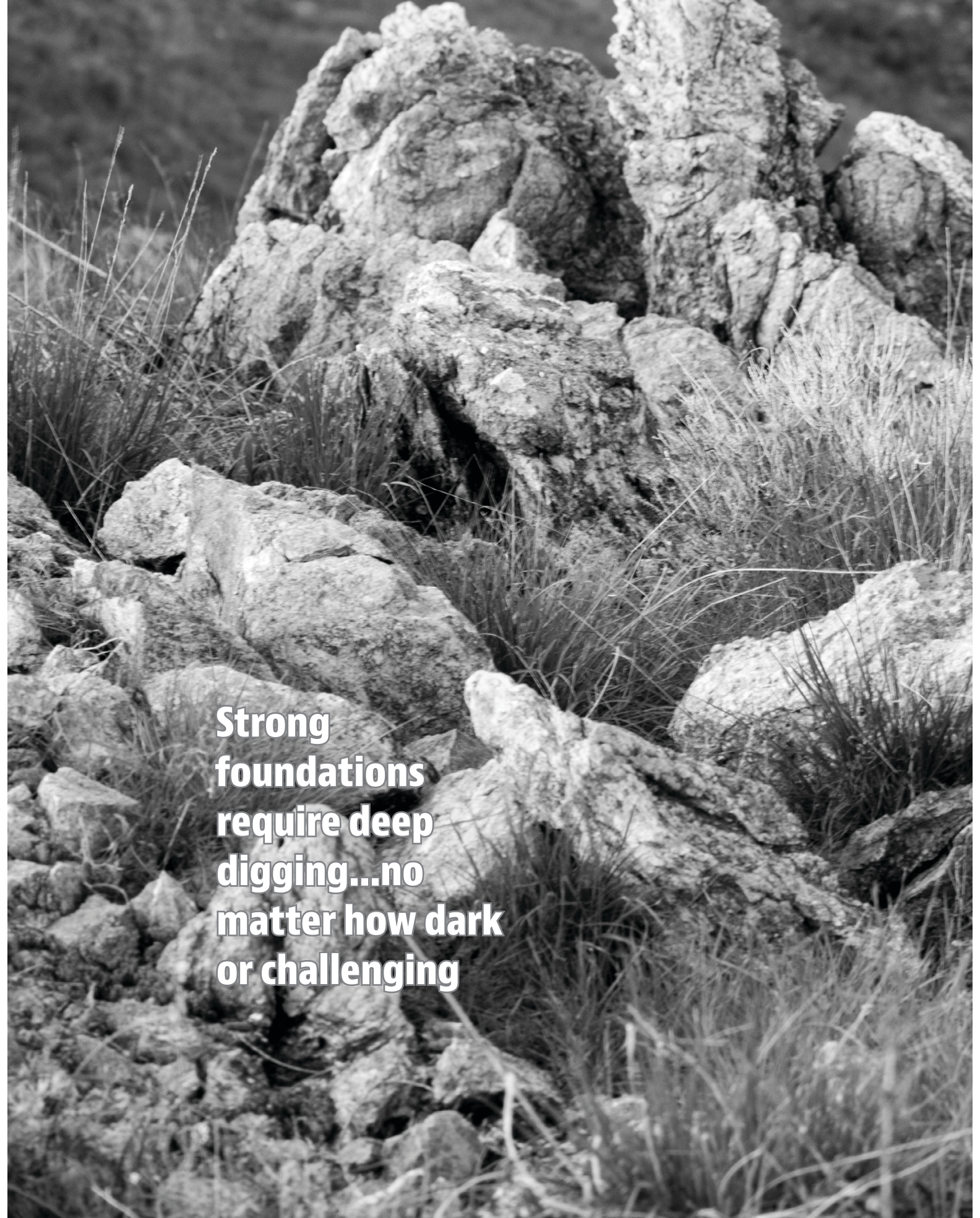
Jesus says: “everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them... he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock.” (Luke 6:46, emphasis added).

Strong foundations require deep digging, a relentless appetite for truth and a willingness to peer intently into the questions of human life, no matter how dark or how challenging. Jesus’ claim cuts straight to the heart of our search for foundation. At Aletheia, we’re attempting to build our house on rock. We have gathered as Christians, built around the foundation of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, with an ever-increasing desire to dig deeper foundations. We are wrestling with the questions of suffering, evil, death, joy, and meaning—and we are striving to seek answers boldly but humbly, quick to admit when we don’t know the answer. We don’t claim to hold a monopoly on truth, and we understand that any search for truth is muddled by an age of uncertainty. But we place hope and we find solace in the One who claims to build foundations, to answer the darkest questions, and ultimately, to renew the very brokenness that brings us to our knees in the first place. In the words of Augustine, “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.”<sup>5</sup>

#### ***About the Author:***

*Caleb Gotthardt is a 4th year philosophy major at Cal Poly. He enjoys theological discussions over coffee, surfing at dusk, and Terrence Malick films.*





**Strong  
foundations  
require deep  
digging...no  
matter how dark  
or challenging**



# Call Home

Liam Madden

<sup>1</sup>Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. New York: Scribner, 1958. Print, 104-105.

<sup>2</sup>Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*. New York: Harper & Row, 1977. Print, 321.

Take out your cellphone and wonder: whence comes its light? In the sun, hydrogen atoms collide with each other to form helium. The nucleus is moving towards a more tight-knit community. Hydrogen in its overwhelming solitude is too lonely and uranium in its fascist distanti-ality is too impersonal. They move towards iron, a nucleus with a population big enough to survive and thrive and small enough to stay account-able and not be overcrowded. This movement towards a lasting and sustainable culture releases energy more efficiently than anything else known in the universe.

The sun pours out its power like paint, and as it does so, it calls on us to paint into the periph-ery. It invites us to dance for no reason but the dance itself! The paint will dry, but it dries into a painting, not some sad mess on the floor. The sun will burn out but that is why it burns! If we take the example of paint splattered in one spot on a canvas, looking at the periphery we see thinner paint, yet more complex patterns. Thus the energy of the sun manifests itself on earth. First as supersonic lightning and volcanic eruptions. Then life in the ocean begins: biolog-ical life, so much less efficient than the sun, but capable of such profound creativity!

Life evolves slowly and steadily until impressions reflected from the sun echo back from the horizon. Eventually archetypal sense memories become symbols organized as information. The stream of pictures begins to revolve so quick-ly that it passes the threshold of perception and becomes a blur then a film: a continuous picture. Something new is born and seeing with new eyes the old world lighted by the old sun, it does not stop at burning branches but digs up

ancient trees to burn, releasing dormant energy biding in the darkness. It shakes the foundations of the world with its power. It burns coal and “the sun’s warmth is challenged forth for heat, which in turn is ordered to deliver steam whose pressure turns the wheels that keep a factory running.”<sup>2</sup> These turbines turn electromagnets to produce current, which is stepped up through transformers to travel along power lines and stepped down to pass through the outlet in the wall into your phone, where chemicals store this to be used slowly and at your discretion, like a balance spring in a watch that does not release all its energy at once, but holds back time from slipping. All this for the constant light glaring up at your face, so delicate and precise compared to the explosive and awesome power of the sun above it. Now look up from your phone to glance at the people around you. Consider how many of their down-turned faces glow from liquid-crystal displays. The dance is becoming a march, no longer moving toward a finale and curtain fall but into a doom. What happened since this new world came to be?

In the Roaring Twenties, across the ocean, gears were turning in Germany. Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* expressed the inhuman world technology prom-ised and Martin Buber found “that modern de-velopments [had] expunged almost every trace of a life in which human beings confront each other and have meaningful relationships.”<sup>1</sup> Our world is sick, but is there a cure? Buber, a Ger-man philosopher, goes on to say, “The sickness of our age is unlike that of any other and yet belongs with the sicknesses of all. The history of cultures is not a stadium of eons in which one runner after another must cover the same circle of death, cheerfully and unconsciously. A



nameless path leads through their ascensions and declines. It is not a path of progress and development. It is a descent through the spirals of the spiritual underworld but could also be called an ascent to the innermost, subtlest, most intricate turn that knows no Beyond and even less any Backward but only the unheard of return—the breakthrough. Shall we have to follow this path all the way to the end, to the test of the final darkness?”

The uranium on earth formed in distant supernovae. Perhaps, our civilization, like the stars, will explode. The difference is that we have a choice. Hydrogen naturally tends towards the bigger elements, but we choose to give up our solitary freedom. And sometimes we go too far and lose ourselves. Right now, our humanity is threatened.

***About the Author:***

*Liam Madden is a fifth year mechanical engineering/mathematics student from Seattle, WA. He loves hiking, reading, and hanging out with friends.*



# Go Not to Lethe\*

Liam Madden

\*Keats, John. Ode on Melancholy. Rheinbach-Hilberath, 1993.

<sup>1</sup>Pascal, Blaise. Pensées: Blaise Pascal. Paris: Garnier, 1962. Print.

<sup>2</sup>Teamcoco. "Louis C.K. Hates Cell Phones." YouTube. YouTube, 2013. Web. 04 June 2016.

<sup>3</sup>Nietzsche, Friedrich. The Gay Science. New York: Vintage Books, 1974, 126.

## The danger and darkness of technology

The French philosopher Blaise Pascal tells us that "all of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone."<sup>1</sup> We are scared to be alone. We are unable to sleep without dreaming innumerable dreams; we are scared of the dark. We are scared of what will happen if we stop making "sunlight." Out of fear we forget what is there when the lights are off, we forget about dreams and so sleepwalk through life in a waking dream. In the dark about who we really are, we make a society for ourselves where even when we're together, we're alone. Can we find our way out?

The comedian Louis CK tells us, "You need to build an ability to just be yourself and not be doing something. That's what the phones are taking away. Is the ability to just sit there, like this. That's being a person, right. [...] Underneath everything in your life there's that thing, that empty, forever empty, you know what I'm talking about? [...] That knowledge that it's all for nothing and you're alone, you know, it's

down there. And sometimes when things clear away and you're not watching anything, you're in your car and you start going, 'Ooooooh here it comes, that I'm alone.'<sup>2</sup> He goes on to recount a story about driving in the car when Bruce Springsteen's *Jungleland* came on. He wanted to reach for his phone and randomly text someone, but instead he pulled over and wept.

Perhaps, we are afraid of weeping, of grieving the impermanence of it all. We need some light, just a little, to grasp at in the dark. But this light consumes us in the end and we realize that the darkness was the true light from the start.

Nietzsche's madman prophesies thus, "What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning?"<sup>3</sup>



He speaks of the death of God, but the Hebrew prophet Isaiah shows that those who follow God must also walk through what King David called the “valley of the shadow of death.”

Isaiah prophesies thus, “Who is among you that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of His servant, that walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. Behold, all you who kindle a fire, who encircle yourselves with firebrands, [who] walk in the light of your fire and among the brands you have set ablaze. This you will have from My hand: you will lie down in torment” (Isaiah 50:10-11, NASB).

But what does it mean to walk in darkness without lanterns? For King David it meant trusting in the Lord for light. He sings, “You light my lamp; the Lord my God illumines my darkness” (Psalm 18:28, NASB). On the other hand, “in death there is no remembrance of You; in Sheol who will give You praise?” (Psalm 6:5, NASB). King Hezekiah prays, “for Sheol cannot thank You, death cannot praise You; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your faithfulness” (Isaiah 38:18 NASB). Those who go down to Sheol, drink of

the Lethe River and fall into oblivion, lying down under sheets of insomnia.

But how does technology fit into all this? Cars, cell phones, televisions, and computers are not some new danger, but a new manifestation of our oldest one. We should not place the blame on them, instead recognizing that holding onto our independence from them is a modern way for us to face our inner darkness. In fact, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger said that, “to rebel helplessly against [technology] and curse it as the work of the devil [...] comes to the same as [...] a stultified compulsion to push on blindly with technology.”<sup>4</sup>

Technology itself only becomes dangerous when we can’t turn off our bedroom light before we tuck ourselves in. The danger does not come from the monsters lurking under the bed, but from the temptation of the closet light. When twilight comes we must be ready to turn off our “artificial midnight sun”<sup>5</sup> and face the darkness. Only then is it even possible to sleep in Peace (Shalom), only then can we be made to “lie down in green pastures” (Psalm 23:2, NASB).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*. New York: Harper & Row, 1977. Print, 321.

<sup>5</sup>Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. New York: Scribner, 1958. Print, 120.

<sup>6</sup>New American Standard Bible. La Habra, CA: Lockman Foundation, 1977. Print.





# Revisiting the Concept of Scientism:

## An Interview with MIT Professor Dr. Ian Hutchinson.

Edited by Anelise Powers

Dr. Ian Hutchinson is a Professor of Nuclear Science and Engineering at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He obtained his undergraduate degree from Cambridge University before getting his Ph.D. from Australian National University.

During February of 2016 Dr. Hutchinson joined Cal Poly Professor and Director of Jazz Studies, Dr. Paul Rinzler in a dialogue about scientism, the belief that science is the only real knowledge there is, at Cal Poly's annual Veritas Forum.

### What is knowledge outside of science?

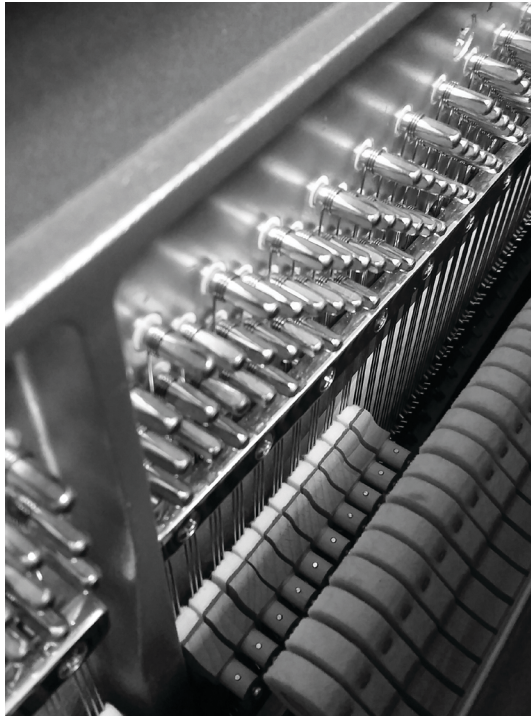
It usually does not possess the degree of clarity we expect from the natural sciences. It might be something like music. Music can be described and reproduced in a sort of scientific form, or the action of instruments can be described scientifically. So we can have a scientific description of what two instruments lashing together is. The electrons in the surface of the metal interact with one another and transfer an impulse to the ion lattice and it propagates out and couples to the air and produces compressional waves that travel through the air to the audience and that then excites their ears and so forth. That's a scientific description. But if you've given that kind of description you haven't been able to describe the music because music is about the symphony orchestra and the kinds of ideas, sounds, and expressions, that the composer and

the orchestra is trying to get across. Music only becomes music, in many ways, in the ear of the listener because there is an interaction with that person's human experience. Music is something we cannot readily analyze in a meaningful way by simply making measurements and producing a mathematical description. This is an example of the way in which not all the things we know are susceptible to the approach the natural sciences have.

### Do you view scientism as strictly a radical position of few scientists or as having a more far-reaching effect? Does scientism affect other disciplines?

It's both. There are scientists who advocate scientism and there are other scientists who don't and don't believe in scientism. But, there are also some very outspoken scientists. Science popularizes those who adopt the position that, basically, science is by far and away the best, and probably, the only real knowledge there is. It actually isn't the case that most people declare scientism explicitly. There really aren't too many people that say, "I believe in scientism". Instead it's usually implicit and so, particularly in some of the critics of religion, there is an implicit kind of scientism. If you read, for example, Richard Dawkins' book, *The God Delusion*, on half a dozen different occasions in the book he basically





assumes, and speaks as if, science is all the real knowledge there is. But he doesn't say that's what he believes he just takes it as an unspoken presumption.

In other disciplines, there has been a really strong influence of scientism. As far back as the beginning of the 19th century there were moves to try to bring all of knowledge to, what was considered to be, a state of positive knowledge. The positivists of the early 19th century essentially adopted a scientific presupposition and, particularly in the area of sociology, they set out to try to turn that into positive knowledge. So Auguste Comte, who is the main founder of positivism in the early 19th century, basically set out to make sociology into a discipline like the natural sciences. This had a very strong influence on a number of humanities disciplines like sociology and so forth, and has even up until today.

Over the decades there have been people who have strongly criticized that attempt and that intention. One of them, for example, was Friedrich Hayek, who around the time of the second world war, wrote a whole book about scientism. He was one of the first people to use the word, "sci-

entism", as what I take to be its current meaning. He emphasized how barren and fruitless the attempt to turn the nonscientific disciplines into sciences was. [The growth of scientism] was largely, I think, a kind of reaction to the enormous prestige the natural sciences had gained. People thought that it would be better to be seen as being [scientific], so there was a great deal of effort in that direction.

It wasn't just science envy; people genuinely thought they could turn these disciplines into sciences. For example, the president of the American Historical Society in 1925 gave a very famous lecture in which he talked about history having laws, the laws of history being as definite as the laws of gravity. He had in mind that there were certain laws you could apply to history and that history could be turned into a scientific discipline if we could just discover these laws. I think since then there has probably been a move away from the rather more explicit scientism but I think it's still part of the academic environment.

## Why is scientism worth talking about?

What I'm interested in is the relationship between Christianity and science. I think scientism is one of the most confounding factors in making sense of the relationship between Christianity and science. Historically, Christianity was in many respects a fertile philosophical and theological environment in which science, as we know it, got going. The early natural scientists of the 17th century were almost all Christians. Even throughout the following centuries Christians were extremely active and some of them were the greatest scientists of history. So on the one hand, historically Christianity and science were once closely allied with each other. But in the past century or so there's been a strong impression of the opposite; there's been a myth that science and Christianity have always been at war and are inevitably at war. The role scientism

image The photograph of the interior of a piano shows the complexity of this instrument to produce its sound. If music can be defined scientifically is discussed in the section "What is Knowledge Outside of Science."



plays in this, to make the long story short, is that Christianity and science are not inevitably at war but in fact they are or can be very closely supportive of one another. Christianity and scientism are inevitably at loggerheads with one another.

Scientism as it has been practiced over the last couple centuries has many of the traits and characteristics of a religion. In fact, Auguste Comte's movement that he founded, the Positivists, did in fact become a literal religion. They had services of commemoration, they had various sacraments, and it was secular but to the world they seemed all the things a religion has and they serve the same purpose. So there is a good reason why Christianity and scientism are at loggerheads because essentially Scientism is, or in large measure is, a rival religion. The other thing to say is that, yes, scientism has an argument with Christianity and religion in general, but it also has a big argument with all the other non-science disciplines. If scientism is true, than that runs down and denigrates all kinds of other academic knowledge and disciplines like history, or literature, or philosophy, or ethics, or a whole

list of things that you could think of in the humanities that are not scientific disciplines.

### **Did you used to have the impression that science and faith were at odds?**

I grew-up in a non-Christian family and wasn't a believer until I went to college but, I wasn't ignorant of Christianity and its claims. The school I was in, from time to time, had services that students were obliged to attend. I know that doesn't happen much these days but it did in those days. I actually don't think I had the strong belief that the reason Christianity was implausible was because of science. I think it was more that I thought Christianity was defunked; it didn't seem to have a very lively message, or to me as a high school student, anything that was particularly attractive. I don't think I thought that science was necessarily all the knowledge there is and actually, I had what these days would be considered the dubious benefits of a classical education. I studied Greek and Latin in school and so forth, so I don't think I was scientific in that way. But I certainly, at college, came to a





completely new understanding of Christianity, in part because of the influence of some friends, and in part because of hearing lectures by a man, Michael Green.

## **When you became a Christian, in college, was there a need to reconcile your academic knowledge with Christianity?**

One of the things I benefited from when I became a Christian at Cambridge was a very active Intersarsity Christian Fellowship chapter in my college so I had friends with whom I could do Bible study. But I have to admit; I never really thought there was a conflict between science and religion. I already knew a lot about science, I already knew a bit about the Bible and Christianity, and it didn't seem to me that I was committing intellectual suicide to take Christianity seriously. There were things I thought about because they were topical questions: "how do you make sense of the first few chapters of Genesis in the context of the scientific understanding of the cosmos?" and so forth. But I suppose I was

never strongly tempted to require Genesis to be interpreted literally, and it didn't seem a very vital part of Christian doctrine to do so.

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While Scientism and Christianity may be at war, Dr. Hutchinson articulates the position that this not be the case. Furthermore, a Christian perspective does not necessarily negate all scientific reason while pursuing topical questions such as those of our origins, for example. It is in the spirit of the Veritas Forum that we hope to continue asking life's hardest questions, such as these.

### ***About the Author:***

*Anelise Powers is a 4th year at Cal Poly as a political science major, originally from Scotts Valley, CA. She has been involved with The Cal Poly Veritas Forum and in her free time she enjoys coffee, going to the beach, browsing pictures of French bulldogs and reading Sherlock Holmes stories.*



# Shedding Light on the Character of God

Lucas Dodd

<sup>1</sup>Overheim, R. Daniel, and David L. Wagner. *Light and Color*. New York: Wiley, 1982. Print.

Since the dawn of humanity, we have been fascinated by light. It is both a fundamental component of our universe as well as an entity of inspiration. Light is something upon which our very existence depends; without it, our eyes would be useless, our planet would grow unsustainably cold, and our electronic devices would become useless plastic trinkets. For millennia, we have been examining its nature and musing on its splendor. For many, it is a symbol of truth that sheds light on the divine. And while it is beyond human comprehension to fully appreciate its physical complexity, we have made quantum leaps in discovery over thousands of years.

In essence, light is a form of energy contained in subatomic “packets” of electromagnetic radiation called photons. But it has taken a very long time for us to understand this. Early thinkers of science toyed with various theories about the physical nature of light. For instance, some of the ancient Greeks believed that vision and light were synonymous, whereas others thought that our eyes project “visual rays” that allow us to see. At the end of the first millennium A.D., the Arab scholar Alhazen discovered that light is an independent entity whereas our eyes are merely receivers.<sup>1</sup>

By the seventeenth century, the work of Johannes Kepler, Christian Huygens, Willebrod Snell, and René Descartes took geometrical optics close to our current understanding. In 1704, Newton described basic color theory and ray optics in his publication, *Opticks*. Through his experiments with prisms and basic colored

objects, Newton discovered that color is a property of light itself, rather than a property of materials. He found that white light actually contains the full spectrum of colors, and that objects selectively reflect and absorb different sections of this spectrum to give them their hue. *Opticks* was a key work in scientific history, empowering researchers for centuries to come.

Although *Opticks* proved revelatory in its era, disagreement persisted among scientists. No one was certain whether the fundamental unit of light was a particle or a wave. Newton himself believed light existed in small particles that he called “corpuscles;” whereas others held that light propagated in longitudinal waves. Around a hundred years later, Thomas Young’s double slit experiment showed that light exhibited interference patterns typical of transverse waves, like sound waves or ripples on a pond. This provided strong evidence in favor of the wave theory of light.

Groundbreaking discoveries continued to follow. In 1862, James Maxwell encapsulated electricity, magnetism, and light into one phenomenon, explaining light as a manifestation of electromagnetic radiation. In 1900, Max Planck proposed that light was emitted in quanta – discrete, subatomic units of energy with sporadic mathematical behavior. Five years later, Albert Einstein expounded upon Planck’s work, explaining that light, in the form of photons, simultaneously behaves as a particle and wave. Einstein unraveled hundreds of years of mystery, and to this day his work has revolutionized our perspective.

# Besides sparking our pursuit of knowledge light inspires



Besides sparking our pursuit of knowledge, light inspires the human imagination. Light is unique among substances in that it has the capacity to make manifest – it exposes things to observation. Furthermore, in regards to life, it can warm, guide, protect, and sustain. As such, the photonic thread that remained scientifically unexamined until recent times has been silently interwoven into every aspect of our culture.

For early humans, fire and the stars lit the ancient night, becoming sources of refuge and comfort. Among pagan religions, astrology and celestial worship became common practice. For example, ancient people on the Isle of Britain constructed Stonehenge in alignment with various solar and lunar calendar events, likely for religious practices. Mesopotamian ziggurats were large, tiered temples designed to worship divine beings: by building toward the heavens, they could more directly approach the gods. Egyptian and Mesoamerican pyramids shared in both the traditions of celestially aligned architecture and of large, elevated construction as a means of worship.

Light also took the stage among the Abrahamic monotheists. Many passages in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic scriptures employ it to symbolize God's presence. Jews, Christians, and Muslims all see God as a guiding light – a supreme source of joy and direction. They dichotomize life with and without God as the difference between day and night: life with him possesses the clarity, beauty, and safety of daytime, whereas life apart from him is like being in darkness. For instance, during the 11th century B.C., David, the second

king of Israel, penned many of the poetic psalms in the Bible. David often used light to paint a picture of God's role in his life, saying, "The Lord is my light and my salvation,"<sup>2</sup> and, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."<sup>3</sup> Judeo-Christian scriptures are rich with dozens of similar examples. And the Qur'an says, "God is the Light of the heavens and the earth ... God guides whoever he will to his Light,"<sup>4</sup> and goes on to describe him as being like a lamp inside a glass orb of the universe. These three religions agree that God is the supreme source of everything, and that as a light source brightens its surroundings, the universe in its entirety reflects back his glory.

Many other writers and thinkers throughout history have used light as a symbol for truth. In his Allegory of the Cave,<sup>5</sup> Plato compares the revealing nature of fire with that of sunshine. He explains that gaining proper awareness is as radically transformative as stepping outside from a dingy, fire-lit cave. Even today, the Star Wars saga presents the moral divide between good and evil as a separation between light and dark, its plot orbiting around a continual battle between the two sides of the Force.

By no means are these examples of light in various ideologies an exhaustive representation of human experience and belief – this is just the tip of the iceberg. Many other traditions also use light in unique and colorful ways.

We Christians find meaning and purpose in our study and admiration of light because we believe photons are something God has made. Like learning about an artist through his work, we can see God's character displayed in his creations. This gives relevancy to our literary and scientific examinations of light.

Like many religions and philosophies in the world, Christianity uses light to describe the divide between good and evil, to represent divine protection and guidance, and claims that the heavens are an indicator of God's glory (i.e. Psalm 19). Furthermore, Christ spoke of light

<sup>2</sup>Psalm 27:1

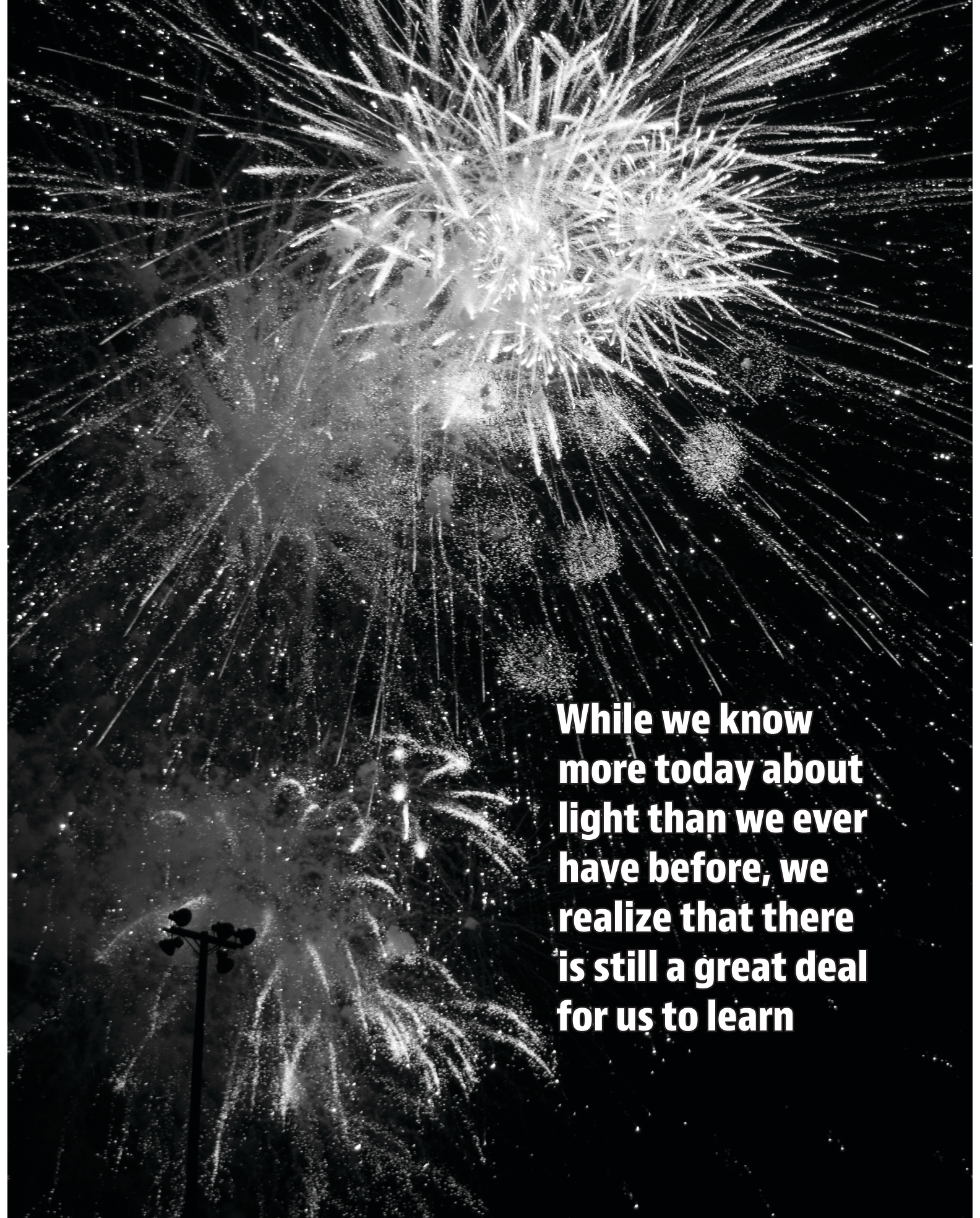
<sup>3</sup>Psalm 119:105

<sup>4</sup>S., Abdel Haleem M. A. &quot;Light, 24:35.&quot; The Qur'an: A New Translation. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. 223.Print.

<sup>5</sup> Plato. &quot;Allegory of the Cave.&quot; HistoryGuide.org. Steven Kreis, 13 Apr. 2012. Web.







**While we know  
more today about  
light than we ever  
have before, we  
realize that there  
is still a great deal  
for us to learn**

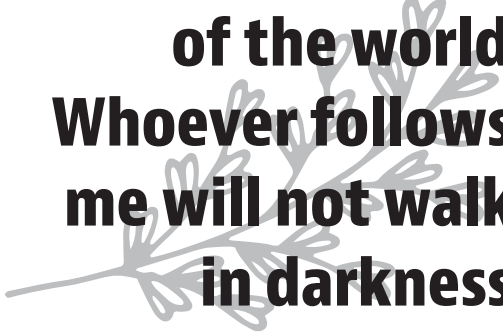


in a number of his teachings. He said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”<sup>6</sup> This metaphor serves not to express that Christ will simply be a source of moral guidance for his followers, nor does it indicate these followers will be perfect Christ-reflectors. This metaphor says Christ himself is illumination, and that amidst the world’s darkness he offers life, available to anyone who would ask for it.

Incorporating today’s modern scientific knowledge, we can reexamine ancient analogies such as these to unveil deeper layers to the truths of the Bible. For instance, when we look at an object, our vision translates this reflected light into an image. However, our eyes cannot distinguish between emitted and reflected light. As one physics textbook puts it, “We make no distinction between self-luminous objects and reflective objects.”<sup>7</sup> Except for things like electricity, fire, and sunshine, almost everything we see is reflected light. So if Christ is “the light of the world” – if God is like a great light source shining throughout our universe – it could be said that in some way, nothing is self-luminous but rather everything is reflective. This modern knowledge broadens our insight into ancient biblical texts.

Additionally, the Bible describes Jesus as the revelation of God’s light and a picture of God, “He is the radiance of his glory, the express image of his character.”<sup>8</sup> If we adhere to modern color theory, then we can look at this text with additional clarity. Christ, as “the radiance of [God’s] glory,” is like a rainbow demonstrating the full spectrum of God’s nature. As wavelengths of light are the physical manifestation of electromagnetic energy, similarly Christ is the physical manifestation of God. Every attribute of Jesus’ life can be thought of as a color revealing an aspect of God’s nature. Parallels could likewise be inferred between the quantum physics of photons and Christian theology; unfortunately, that is a task beyond the scope of this article.

# I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness



<sup>6</sup> John 8:12

<sup>7</sup> Knight, Randall Dewey. *Physics for Scientists and Engineers: A Strategic Approach*. 3rd ed. Boston: Pearson, 2013. Page 656. Print.

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 1:3

Light helps us to make sense of what is true, what is noble, what is life-giving and good in this world. Simultaneously a necessity and a joy, light peaks our curiosity, gives us vision, shows us the divine, and without it, we die. With such a pivotal role in our lives, it makes sense why we have so extensively studied it.

From Newtonian and Keplerian optics to quantum mechanics and special relativity, our knowledge of light only grows richer over time, and Christians see God as the inventor of it all. While we know more today about light than we ever have before, we realize that there is still a great deal for us to learn. As we progress in our technical knowledge, may we never lose our color vision toward God.

## ***About the Author:***

*Lucas Dodd (a.k.a. Ken Dodd) is a homegrown native of North County San Diego. Outside his coursework, he likes baking, poetry-writing, and hiking around San Luis Obispo. He fellowships at Grace Church located on the corner of Osos St. and Pismo St. Lucas is studying aerospace engineering with a concentration in aeronautics.*

# Graffiti

Rachel Bell

image The Translation: "Words fly away, writings remain."

You happen upon a miracle of architecture, a great cathedral shimmering in the evening sun. You stare up at this building that has captured you with its presence, made your jaw drop in awe. You take a step closer to explore it, see what's inside, and discover more of it for yourself. But then you are shocked, because covering this building—every facet, wall, and surface—is graffiti. Now, as you read some of the words you may discover that not all of it is obscene or hateful. No, there are actually some sweet, decent notes that people have left for you to see. And they are intermingled with the words you wish to blot out of your brain.

This building is Christianity. The skeleton of the building, the load-bearing pillars and stone foundation, hold it up and hold it together. These are the fundamental elements of Christianity: the belief in a relational triune God, whose Son, Jesus Christ, God-incarnate, in his life, death, and resurrection provides and promises restoration to our broken world. The graffiti is all of the unnecessary adornments placed around Christianity's core structure. These tags have become a part of the building, but over time they fade and new ones are added. They are often cultural in nature, with numerous justifications for why they exist. But they are by nature separate from the building—they do not support its weight and vary with the perspective of each person who looks at it. Among these tags belong ideas on political leanings, artistic tastes, and even ideology regarding the consumption of alcohol. Visitors to the building of Christianity often disagree on whether or not these cultural tags complement or detract from its beauty. But throughout its history, Christianity's cultural affectations have always been there in some form. This cultural graffiti affects common

perceptions of Christianity, and it affects the ideas secular culture forms about it. Sometimes, the tags obscure the stained-glass windows so that one must scrape away the spray paint to see what lies beneath. And sometimes eye-catching splashes of color encourage travelers to take a closer look.

Although graffiti is often viewed in a negative light, there are many people who view it as art, a valuable part of culture that helps to define humanity's creative identity. Assumptions are dangerous when dealing with any aspect of culture, which is so very integrated into our personal lives and histories, hopes and dreams. Often and importantly, culture is a part of our treasured identities.

## Reflection:

How can Christians work alongside others with radically different perspectives in a way that fosters each of their strengths and values?

How can Christians empathetically engage with all types of cultures without violating their beliefs?

Are culture and religion capable of being separated? What would be the implications of this, if it were possible?

### *About the Author:*

*Rachel is a senior English major at Cal Poly with a minor in child development and a keen interest in creative writing. Due to her past experience living in China and traveling around the globe, she seeks to provide new perspectives about the complexities of life and the seemingly mundane. She enjoys collecting books, all things Greek, and culinary experimentation.*





Verba volant  
Scripta Manent



# Kintsukuroi:

## The Strength that Grace Provides

Shannon Feil

Kintsukuroi is a term attributed to the Japanese for their mending of broken pottery. Lacquer resin mixed with powdered gold, silver, or other precious metals is inlaid between the fragmented pieces. This style of repair does not hide the damage, but highlights them. By doing so the fragility of the bowl is not a source of shame or scorn, but rather esteemed for its new vitality and resilience. In Japanese culture, this process of mending is viewed even as an art form. The respective adage tied to this process is also translated as, “more beautiful for having been broken.”

The human psyche has been likened to many objects, often as a computer in our technologically inundated society, as well as an ethereal spirit residing in a machine. I would like to offer my own analogy: imagine the mind as an earthen, clay vessel—a ceramic bowl per se. The raw materials of composition are endowed by our parents; our natural inclinations, leanings, and attitudes take partly from them. As progeny we are greatly shaped by early relationships, considerably so by family and other kin. Upon the potter’s wheel the hands of experience play another essential role in our structure. Sentiments, perspectives, and worldviews take lasting form in the kiln of our personal choices and desires. We are colored by insight, filled with knowledge. The mind, though resilient, is also fragile. We are fractured by difficulty. We are shattered by loss. Not simply the loss of loved ones, but the loss of opportunities, health, or stability. It is easier to see how one is formed, shaped, and even broken. However, the process of mending isn’t as intuitive.

My life is akin to that clay vessel and very early on I was shattered by loss.

When I was just on the cusp of my teenage years, I lost both of my parents three months apart. My father first to suicide and then my mother in a car accident. A few years earlier I had been connected with the church, but after climbing out of a crashed van, waking up in the hospital, and knowing that my mom hadn’t made it out alive, I asked myself, “If God is really loving, why would He take away my family? Why did bad things like this happen to me or anyone if He was truly good and in control? How could Christianity make sense of the great amount of suffering that existed in the world?” I was faced with questions I could not answer. I was overwhelmed with feelings, confusion, sadness, and anxiety, that had no outlet. It was at this point that I began keeping God at an eternal arm’s length way. I spent high school careening through various homes of neighbors, relatives, and friends. College was the fresh start I was desperately looking for. However, when I arrived amid smiling, excited peers, vehicles spilling over with clothes, groceries, and furniture, it hit me how different I was from them. Vital ties in my life had been severed and the resulting spider web of damage was a source of great shame. I did my best to cover the cracks, smooth away the differences and simply blend in. Kintsukuroi is a term I neither knew nor was its method of mending something I desired. I didn’t allow people to see my brokenness, because was I scared that they would simply add to it.

Yet, there was small part of me that really wanted to know others. I wanted to try to learn

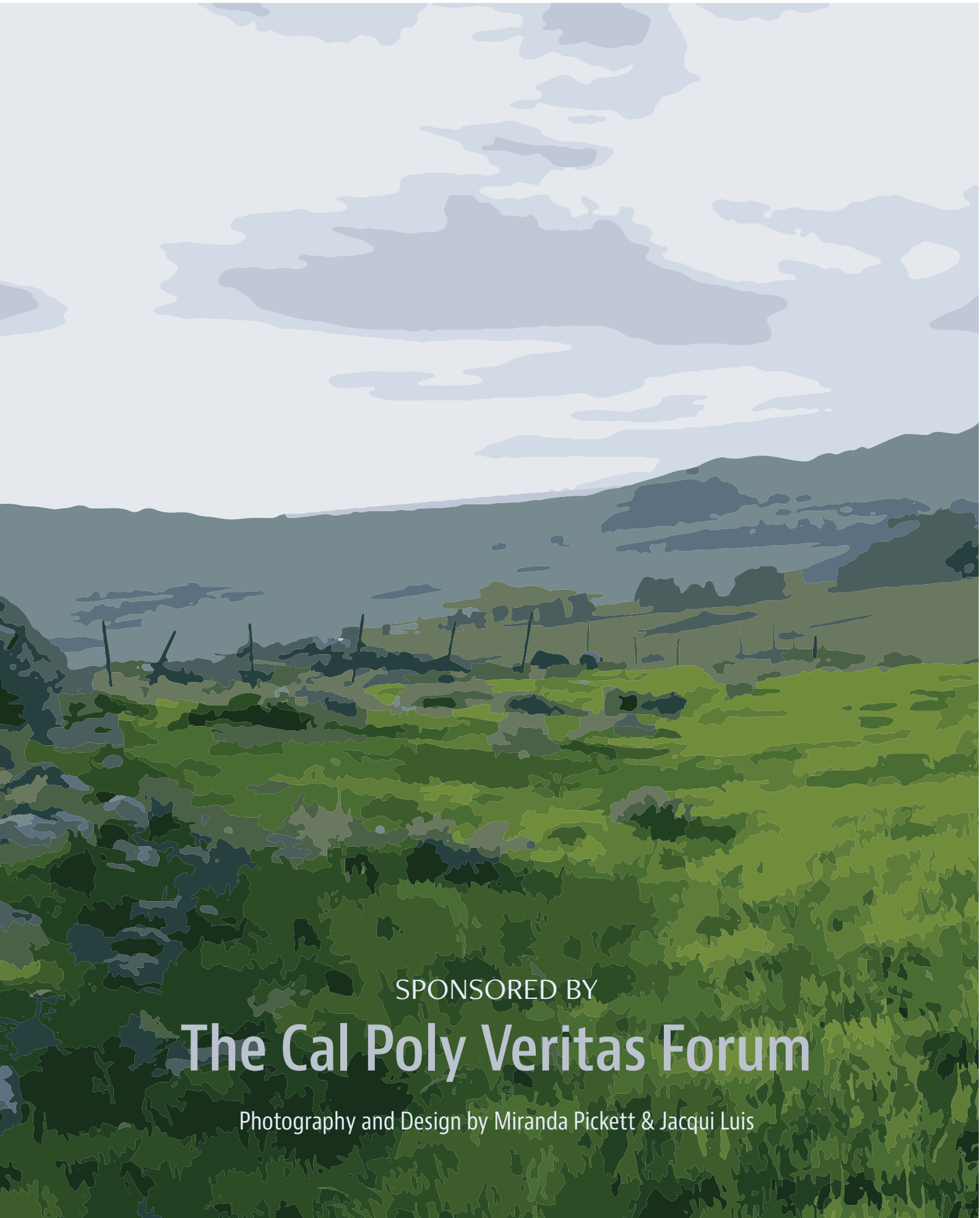
how to stave off the fear of intimacy and begin to trust others. The first people that ever-so-gently began to embrace all of who I am were in my campus Christian ministry. I met people who truly wanted to understand me and remind that there was a God who already knew me even better. They weren't afraid to hear about the many challenges I faced. Nor did they offer trite explanations. I showed people my scars, and instead of brokenness they saw strength. For the the first time in my life, I didn't feel terribly ashamed of all that had happened to me. I found comfort and encouragement for being seen for who I was beyond the fractured pieces of my life.

There is a verse in the Apostle Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians that I came across the summer after I started college, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." Now as a recent graduate I understand much more of what that really means. Each of us whether this be early on or later in life will be fractured by the difficulties that will befall us. We are made from finite substances that can and will, with enough time, be broken, be it our bodies, hearts, hopes or dear relationships. We often believe that healing involves covering the scars of our broken selves, but in my life, it has been taking the risk to be vulnerable and continuing to ask the hard questions, that restoration has arrived. It has not come easily nor in an expected timeframe, but the pieces of my life, although still jagged at points, have been held together by the strength that God's grace provides.

***About the Author:***

*Shannon Feil is a Master's student at Claremont Graduate University studying educational evaluation. She is a recent psychology graduate of California Polytechnic State University. Her areas of interest include resilience, meaningfulness, positive psychology, and effective teaching methodology.*





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