

hear here

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

• justice

• affirmation

• control

• knowledge

pursuit

about us

OUR MISSION

hearhere is a selection, in print, of artistic mediums and content that expresses the thoughts of individual Christians. Created for the surrounding Claremont community, its content showcases and stimulates conversation on Christianity's tangible relevance in every aspect of people's lives. It hopes to provide new perspectives by combining modern intellectual thought with centuries of Christian tradition.

OUR NAME

Our name embodies our hopes and motivations for the journal: to hear and to be here. We want to hear: to listen to everyone, to be mindful, to have open ears for all voices, and of course to listen for the voice of God in everything we do. In Mark 4:9, Jesus proclaims, "He who has ears, let him hear." We plan to be a very real manifestation of that statement. We also want to be here: to be present, to acknowledge the issues of our campus and of our time, and to serve the needs of the Claremont Colleges. Lastly, we hope that as people hear our name, they will gather around to listen to what we have to say and what God has to say to every one of us.

OUR PEOPLE

hearhere is made up of students, alumni, and faculty of all five undergraduate colleges of the Claremont Consortium.

5 colleges

15 hometowns

20 majors

1 journal, part of a network of 23 other Christian collegiate journals across the country

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Letter from the Editor

Dear reader,

In your hands is the inaugural issue of hearhere, a journal of Christian thought at the Claremont Colleges. The Consortium is a unique place where debating issues of life and our world is celebrated, and we hope to bring new perspectives into these discussions.

We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who willingly died on a cross to bear the sins of our broken world. We believe that the love of Christ is not a privilege to be taken for granted, but rather a call for Christianity to break free from the walls of the church and the bounds of a compartmentalized faith. We hope hearhere shows how an unfettered faith flows naturally into our thoughts, our art, and our lives.

The theme for our first journal is Pursuit. We are all pursuing something, whether it's knowledge, affirmation, justice, control, or even something unknown. At hearhere, we pursue in Christ truth, beauty, and life through a variety of mediums. Whether it's poetry, photography, science, or reflection, every Christian's pursuit of God manifests itself in a different way. Ultimately, we hope that at least one medium resonates with you, guiding you towards new answers for old questions and new questions to discuss together.

In Christ,

Ethan Tom



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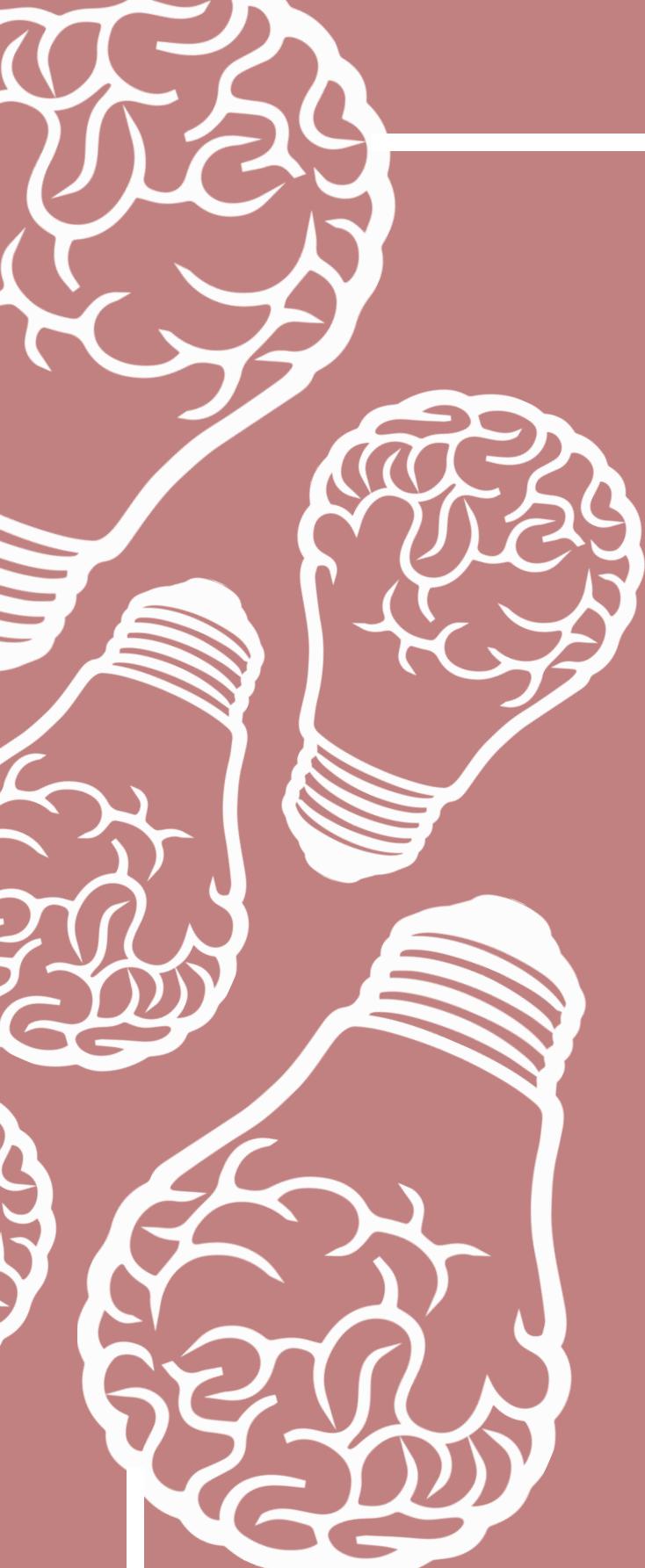
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WHERE'S THE LOGIC IN *RELIGION* ?

TIt was a quiet afternoon in March of my sophomore year of high school when my Bible instructor asked the class a very odd question. “What would you do if you died and found out that you could spend eternity either in heaven with Buddha or in hell with Jesus? Any thoughts?” After a few minutes of silence, someone piped back, “What would you do, Mr. James?” “Well personally,” he said, “I would rather spend eternity in hell with Jesus.” After another moment of silence, several classmates murmured their agreement and it wasn’t long before most of the class had voiced their support for his opinion. But having snapped awake in my back corner seat for this one question, I suddenly felt rather uncomfortable.

For the next few days I began to deeply ponder my instructor’s statement. While I had always strongly held to the belief that the god and religion I followed was the only truth, his inquiry had opened up new unanswered questions. What if Buddha was real? What if Buddha was actually the true god? Would I truly follow Jesus to the depths of hell even if I knew the stories about him were lies? Days turned into weeks and after a couple months, I came to the following conclusion: If I am a creature with a brain capable of reason, able to discern between truth and lie, then shouldn’t I use these natural abilities to find the true god?

My next step was to begin scouring other religions and sciences to come to a conclusion on whether a god really did exist and what kind of god this being was. These months turned into several years where I had amassed a wealth of concrete physical and metaphysical evidence for truth of Christianity, the God of the Bible, the living truth of Jesus. I had reached a point where I had thoughtfully reasoned out my belief, and

had acquired the knowledge to defend my standpoint. And it was at this point that I had entered a new phase of my truth searching, which was to accurately present a case for the truth of what I had found to be true. My new mission is formally defined as the study of apologetics.

Apologetics, according to the Oxford Dictionary is defined as “reasoned arguments in writings in justification for something, typically a theory or religious doctrine.”¹ According to the Bible, it means to be “prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks [us] for a reason for the hope that is in [us]... (English Standard Version, 1 Peter 3.15). Unlike its assumed meaning, apologetics is not about apologizing for one’s beliefs or convictions. It is rather about firmly defending one’s beliefs and convictions with reason. As a religious person, I am convinced that a person who claims the truth of a religion ought to be willing and able to defend its truth with reason. While it is true that religion itself is founded on supernatural events and principles, I believe that it ought to manifest itself in the laws of nature and time in order to be considered sensible. For example, as written history cannot be changed and is considered fact, religious doctrine ought not contradict it in order to be considered sensible. If a religious book were to claim that George Washington, the first president of the United States, did not exist, one would not consider the text to be accurate or sensible.

What I hope to present over the course of the next several issues is a solid reasoning for the existence of a god, an exploration of what kind of god it might be, and the conclusive evidence for the God of the Christian Bible. I would like to share with you why I believe Christianity to be the only truth, based on the fundamental contradictions of all other religions, and why the chief pursuit of mankind ought to be geared toward the truth

of God, which is manifested in all lesser truths. Beginning with the proof for the existence of God in the next issue, I plan to dive through essential topics of religion by using the arguments of the greatest thinkers, scientists, and historians. In this process, if I can even stimulate a random discussion about religion with a friend, then I will have met my goal.

Looking back now, what unsettled me so much about my instructor’s opinion was not so much that he loved Jesus enough to follow him into hell, but rather his unflinching willingness to confine himself to blind faith. While I marvel at his courage to commit himself to such a statement, I strongly believe that believing Christians and people of all other faiths ought to have reasons for their beliefs rather than be attached to ideas even if those beliefs are proved false or untrue. Perhaps if I had known these things that quiet day back in March, I may have raised my hand or approached Mr. James after class to tell him that the beliefs we most strongly cling onto should have the most overwhelming evidence to support them. Because in the end, only faith tethered to a clearly reasoned conviction is something worth risking the pits of hell for.

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¹<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/apologetics>



god has torn the veil

How do I pursue the Lord with all of my mind
when my desires stray instead?

When insanity is constantly caving in
and anxieties war in my head?

How do I breathe in this suffocating sadness
when all else seems to fail?

When I've fainted every time I've risen
and life tastes bitter and stale?

How do I seize each deceitful thought
when I no longer know what is true?

When sobriety is rampant with piercing pain
and my heart is hopeless and blue?

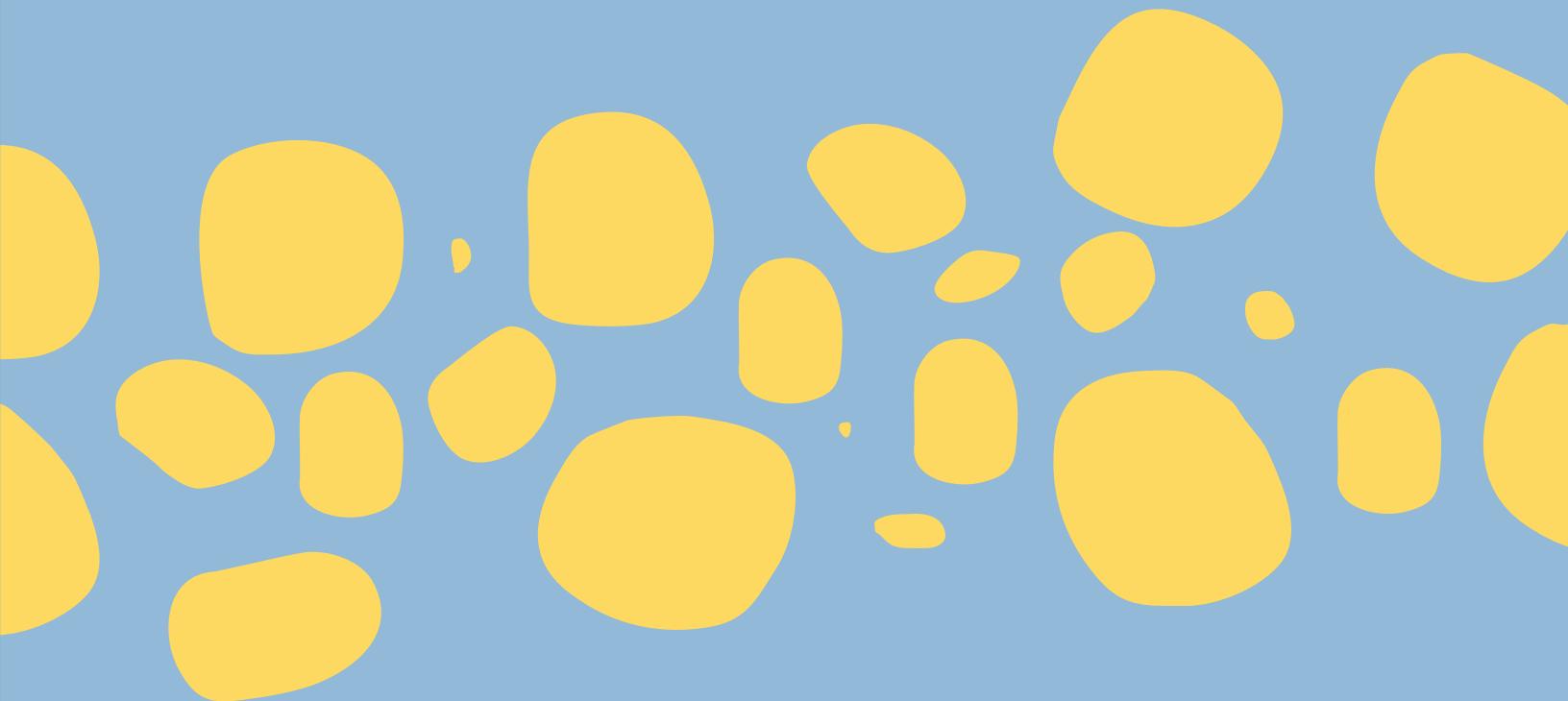
Broken in spirit, I wept before God,
“Bring light to my eyes; I am dead.”

Then my heart trembled with sudden joy,
for I saw my Christ’s blood shed.

Rejoice! My God has torn the veil
behind which my face had cowered.
The curtain of sin is now a futile cloth,
and the strength in me is empowered.



why am I writing this email? reflections on working towards happiness



It's dead week, and I'm spending all day grinding through course material that I *know* I will forget after my final. I'm at my internship – formatting graphs, fetching lunch – a sad vacuum of intellectual curiosity. It's 3am in my room – and after making it through a whole day of non-stop class, meetings, work, and studying, I can't help but close my eyes for a moment and let out a sigh of frustration. I remember the day I got into CMC – the pure bliss from seeing those magical words on my

computer screen, that feeling of undiluted, limitless happiness from achieving a goal at least four years in the making. But now, even though I'm at CMC, I've never been more tired. And in this moment, I ask myself, why? What am I working towards, and why does this work make me the opposite of happy?

Nobel Prize winners in economics Daniel Kahneman and Angus Deaton define happiness two ways: life satisfaction, how we feel

when we reflect on life, and emotional well-being, our day-to-day emotional state.¹ While I often feel satisfied with my life at the end of the semester, the onslaught of work throughout the year is emotionally exhausting. Relying on this definition of happiness, how can I make each moment of my life more meaningful and enjoyable, even in the most mundane tasks?

Many people, myself included, work tirelessly for the promise of relaxation or a sense of progress and impact through our work. We believe accomplishing these goals will offer us happiness. However, research says otherwise. Kahneman and Deaton's 2010 study and a 2016 follow up analysis² found that income, a proxy for leisure time, does not lead to greater emotional well-being (16489, *Short Advisor Perspectives*).³ A certain standard of living is beneficial, but there are only marginal or even negative returns past this threshold (Nickerson et al. 531). This phenomenon occurs because people inherently have hedonic adaptation, a biological process that over time attenuates the "long-term emotional or hedonic impact of favorable and unfavorable circumstances" (Frederick and Loewenstein 302).⁴ Numerous large-scale financial well-being studies also support this finding.⁵ Once people obtain a certain standard of living, they adjust to it. American consumerism is built on this discontentment – our constant need for more, and the underlying unhappiness that continuously feeds it. Worldwide, there is no correlation between per capita income and well-being across the globe (after controlling for human rights) (Frederick and Loewenstein 313).

So, if income is not a fulfilling reason to work, how does achieving something great

translate to long-term emotional well-being? Common forms of achievement such as fulfilling one's potential and job success are surrounded by conflicting literature. Some studies claim these kinds of achievement are detrimental to happiness while other studies cite slight or significant positive effects.⁶ The common thread across these studies, however, is that happiness requires a constant cycle of achievement to replenish our desire for progress. Not everyone can have their dream position, but those who do find that continual attainment of new goals requires more and more sacrifice (Seppälä 2006). The only goals that sustainably provide happiness are non-zero sum (non-competitive) goals. This type of work, ranging from political involvement to commitment to family, is not reliant on fulfilling a certain objective, but rather is fulfilling in and of itself (Headey 213).

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a past head of University of Chicago's psychology department, defines this type of self-fulfilling work as "flow" – "being completely involved in an activity for its own sake". Flow occurs when an activity is appropriately challenging to our current skill set, leading to benefits such as higher engagement and happiness" (Abuhamdeh and Csikszentmihalyi 317). However, while people in flow enjoy their work, it requires control over our surrounding circumstances to ensure our work is continually challenging and self-fulfilling. As students at the 5Cs, we all know that such control is impossible to attain. Even the altruistic non-zero sum goals mentioned before such as political involvement or nonprofit work have dull moments. No one can escape the time-sucking nature of emails. Furthermore, the unfortunate reality of a career

is that most of us have to drudge through non-engaging work to reach a position where we can make flow-inducing decisions.

Perhaps then the issue lies not in the work itself, but in our perspective on reality. While there are many value systems that can alter one's perspective, I have found that what Jesus teaches is remarkably similar to flow – to not worry about our financial returns or achievement, but to still commit ourselves to our work. However, while flow theory simply encourages us to be excited about our work (Bradberry Forbes.com), Christianity offers us an actual reason to be. My belief in God's nature as a sovereign being gives me hope that I am working for a larger purpose. Political movements and charities can be easily twisted by a corrupt leader, whereas God is a leader whom I can follow. I trust that my work will bring about happiness to someone else even if I do not see the result myself (English Standard Version, 1 Cor. 3.9). My work is just one stitch in the grand design of a beautiful tapestry. Tasks are no longer stepping stones along an endless path, but individually curated parts that ripple into a grand effect. Even the worst of tasks – emails – have meaning when I truly believe good will come from them. Since I believe God is a being worth of dedicating my life to, following God's command to contribute to the world is a worthwhile endeavor regardless of how mundane or repetitive the task (English Standard Version, Col. 3.23).

Christianity's doctrine works hand in hand with scientific mechanisms to give us happiness irrespective of the task. However, hope in religion is not an instant solution. I often struggle with trusting that my work has

meaning, and by no means have I achieved flow all the time. Nevertheless, I have found the effort of changing my perspective worthwhile. Understanding that my work, emails and all, fits into a larger picture brings satisfaction and purpose to my to-do list. Despite the difficulty of achieving flow in day-to-day tasks, I encourage you to also critically evaluate whether flow is present in your work and whether your perspective on work (i.e. the value system that helps you achieve flow) is worthy of following. By examining the nature and purpose of our work, we can all strive to attain more meaning in even the most routine tasks.

Footnotes

¹Some referenced studies in this article will refer to happiness as life satisfaction when under Kahneman and Deaton's definition what they are measuring is defined as emotional well-being

²This independent follow-up analysis was done to observe the effect of changes in purchasing power and geography

³The study did find that higher income does lead toward greater life satisfaction

⁴Hedonic adaptation applies to pecuniary changes, not life-changing decisions such as a change in family members

⁵Easterlin 2003; Lucas 2007; Brickman, Coates, and Janoff-Bulman 1978

⁶Headey 2008; Keller, Samuel, Bergman, and Semmer 2014; Pan and Zhou 2013; Burke 2001

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WHO DOES GOD LOOK

“I can respect what you believe, but why would I follow that white colonizers’ religion?”

This is a common response to my Christian faith when I am in conversation with someone who is not Christian. It’s an understandable response, and an important reminder for myself and all Christians of the imperial attitude of historical Christianity. Similarly, it emphasizes how Christianity’s praxis is often dissonant with its central figure, Jesus Christ, who consistently clashed with power by teaching and modeling servitude and relentlessly advocating for oppressed people.

Even with this dissonance, considering Christianity a white colonizers’ religion is particularly valid today in the United States. A twisting of Judeo-Christian Scriptures was a main driving force of European colonialism and American neo-colonialism. As colonizers believed themselves to be God’s chosen, they imagined themselves and only themselves to be made in the image of God, resulting in Jesus’ popular image becoming one that mirrors today’s powerful - a handsome, clean, white man.

While God may be largely imagined in the image of whiteness today, it is not new for the powerful to imagine themselves as gods.
Many

ancient civilizations operated by “divine rule,” the idea that political leadership was granted by the divine. Jesus’ people, Israel, were ruled cruelly by the Roman Empire. Caesar, the emperor, enforced worship of himself, his image plastered everywhere to ensure his subjects never forgot. This is eerily familiar for those of us who have been in church before. We see white Jesus in statues, stained glass windows, and even Sunday school books, looking up to and worshipping Him, while our subconscious more and more associates divinity with whiteness. While the “divine rule” of individuals is less of a focus in today’s world powers, the subconscious association of divinity with whiteness and male-ness does its own part to uphold power structures.

But one of the miracles of the Gospel is that it brings to light the falsity of divine rule, and breaks the ties of the faithful to divine rule. Jesus’ story begins by declaring that the Gospel (“good news”) is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (English Standard Version, Mark 1.1). Jesus, a poor, working-class refugee, who was executed by the church and state, is declared the Son of God. This defies Caesar’s power and shifts the perception of divinity, declaring that the Kingdom of God is not ruled by the rich and powerful, but by a

OK LIKE?

"Jesus consistently clashed with power by teaching and modeling servitude and relentlessly advocating for oppressed people."

God who stands alongside and identifies with the poor, marginalized, and oppressed. This subversive narrative is still relevant today, as the Gospel shifts perceptions of divinity away from whiteness, maleness, and other places where power exists.

Sadly, the church is largely missing this message. In my own position as a committed ally to marginalized communities, I believe it is necessary for me to engage with people's experiences of marginalization and search for God in the midst of their stories. I believe that the true power and hope of the Gospel exists in the myriad ways that marginal communities are finding Christ's incarnation to affirm their humanity and divinity, breaking the false popular narratives of Jesus' association with power.

African American faith leaders like James Cone, Lisa Sharon Harper, Delores Williams, and Martin Luther King Jr., and the communities both leading up to and stemming from their influence, have profoundly shifted the way that I see God. In the 1800s, enslaved people resisted their slavers' pacifying, oppressive faith, interpreting a different faith within their secret community gatherings which "led some slaves to external rebellion [and] helped slaves to assert and

maintain a sense of personal value" (Raboteau Christianity Today). The late James Cone, a prominent liberation theologian and advocate for contextual theology, describes his interpretation of God's incarnation: "God is identified with the oppressed to the point that their experience becomes God's own experience," and further, "The blackness of God means that God has made the oppressed condition God's own condition" (Cone 1986). By declaring God's identification with blackness, Cone and the communities he influences are doing the same thing that God did by incarnating as Jesus and not Caesar – denying power the divinity it tries to hoard and empowering through a divine sense of self-worth and righteousness to resist.

Similarly, symptoms of patriarchy like rape culture, wage discrimination, and uneven expectations of emotional labor have been overwhelmingly perpetuated by the church through silence towards the issues and fearful clinging to outdated models of leadership. It's no wonder, as men hold a large majority of leadership positions in church institutions, that the church has not found much of a remedy for these injustices that are faced mostly by women. Still, women make up a larger percentage of committed church attendees than men globally, and movements in the past century have piggybacked off of women's rights social movements to reclaim the Image of God. The Episcopal church as an institution has even begun to use gender neutral language for God, relieving women from triggers associated with a male God. A growing movement of women theologians around the continent of Asia are reclaiming the lordship of Jesus as "the complete opposite of patriarchy" – while patriarchy is competitive and insecure, Jesus is patient, interruptible, and gentle (Kyung 1990). And feminist theolo-

gians, like Elizabeth Johnson, have begun to use “She” language for God (Johnson 1992). Similar to Cone, they are claiming Christ’s existence on their side of gender justice and restoring the divine image to women.

During the story of creation, God declares that all of humanity is made in God’s image (English Standard Version, Genesis 1.26). While human forces intentionally or unintentionally attempt to strip divine image from each other, they can never succeed because it is really not up to them, and the two movements detailed above are among many instances where marginalized people are encountering this fundamental truth. They defy modern Christianity’s tie to power, and reclaim the truth that God has bestowed on them from the beginning – that they themselves are made in the image of the divine.

Perhaps a better question than the title of this article would be its reverse: “Who looks like God?” And the answer would be simple: all of humanity.

The different ways that marginalized people are “imagining” God provides a particularly strong message, that they will not let the powerful strip them of the divinity that God has bestowed upon them. God has never faltered in affirming the image of the divine present in all people, and has emphasized this truth for marginalized and oppressed people through Jesus. It is certainly a testament to God’s tangible presence that many diverse communities have rallied together around their solidarity with the living God.

As a white man, I’ve found God by stepping away from my assumptions of privilege, following and learning from leaders who have fought to keep their hope and faith in the face of societal oppression. I believe slashing of popular images of divinity holds a message

for those of us experiencing various forms of power and privilege. If true divinity completely contradicts power by saying that divinity exists at the bottom of the societal ladder, those of us born into more privileged states should confront and denounce our privilege; if what I’ve said is true, not doing so puts us against God. We must embrace the true suffering Jesus, and work toward building a true unity where people of all levels of privilege are interacting, moving closer to each others’ levels, and living in the community of God.

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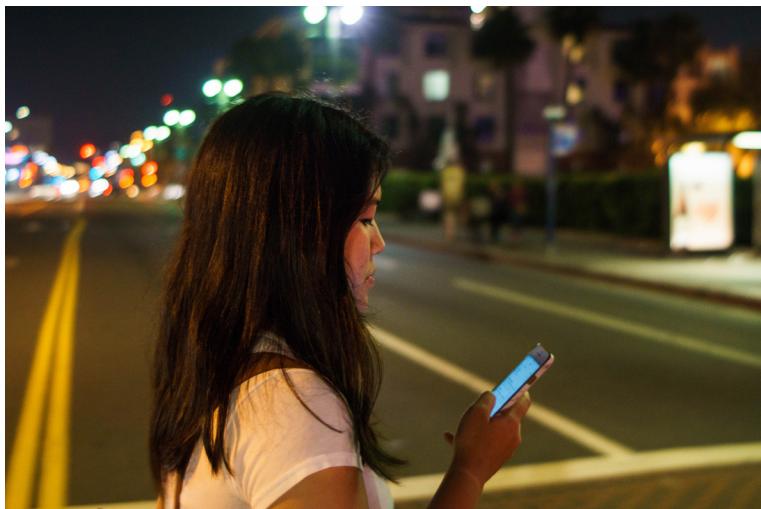
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PHOTO | SAMUEL LIN

vision



I WANT TO SEE



In major metropolitan areas, artificial light often obstructs views of the night sky. In the same way, modern life is filled with artificial light – flashy social media posts, the allure of wealth, and the glamour of fame and achievement all flood our vision, hindering us from seeing the true source of light.

THE TRUTH.



John 8:12

"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"

WORDS | JULIE CHO

PRAYER AND *THE BRAIN*

A Meta-Analysis of Neurological Activity
During Christian Prayer



Christian Prayer: Communicating with a Personal God

Christianity centers on the relationship between humans and God. This relationship, similar to many human relationships, is built on communication, often achieved through prayer. Contrary to popular opinion, prayer can be more than kneeling with eyes closed and hands together while confessing all of your wrongdoings or asking for things you want. According to Baesler (1999), a prominent researcher of Christianity and health, prayer is “a type of spiritual communication between an individual(s) and God,” which can involve – but isn’t limited to – adoration, petition, thanksgiving, meditation, and contemplation.

Recently, neuroscientists have become interested in examining religions and their practices, particularly prayer and meditation, which have been correlated with well-being (Carey, 2004). Presbyterians who prayed more often scored higher on mental health outcomes compared to those who prayed less frequently (Meisenhelder & Chandler, 2000). For college students in the UK, frequency of prayer predicted lower depression, lower anxiety, and greater self-esteem (Maltby, Lewis, & Day, 1999). Furthermore, greater personal devotion, measured through colloquial prayer and self-re-

ported attachment to God, was correlated with greater life satisfaction and lower psychological distress (Hackney & Sanders, 2003). Neurological studies, however, have yet to examine direct correlations between prayer and health. Instead, neuroscientists have focused on observing the functionality of the brain during prayer. Compiling the results from two prominent social neuroscience studies on Christian prayer, we can tentatively conclude that prayer may be neurally comparable to talking to another human being. Furthermore, we will explore how this neurological conclusion can be complementary to – instead of conflicting with – the Christian theology of a personal and responsive God.

Current Studies on Prayer and the Brain

Theory of mind in prayer

So far, there have been a very limited number of published studies centered on directly investigating brain areas related to social cognition during Christian prayer. One of the few studies used fMRI to examine Danish Christians praying to God, who was not specifically defined in the study (Schjoedt, Stødkilde-Jørgensen, Geertz, & Roepstorff, 2009). As a control, the participants were asked to silently make wishes to Santa Claus with eyes closed because they

all believed that God was real, but that Santa was a fictional character (Schjoedt et al., 2009). The results showed increased activation in temporo-parietal junction (TPJ), the temporopolar region, and the anterior medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) – all areas involved in mentalizing or understanding others – when praying to God compared to when they were making wishes to Santa (Schjoedt et al., 2009).

The TPJ, temporopolar region, and anterior mPFC are the main areas associated with “theory of mind,” which is the inherent and automatic ability in humans to understand

**“prayer can be
more than
kneeling with eyes closed
& hands together while
confessing all of your
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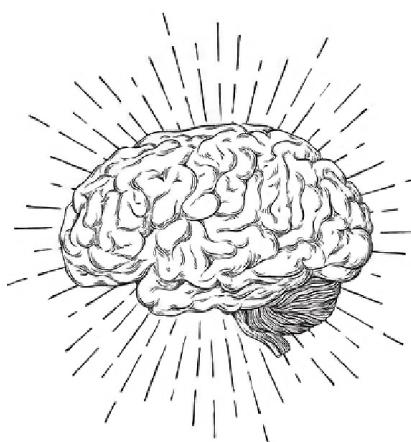
and predict the thoughts, motivations, and actions of others (Gallagher & Frith, 2003). The TPJ is involved in social attention, eye-movement observations (Caruana, Brock, & Woolgar, 2015), and assessing intentionality and efforts

of others' actions (Mizuguchi, Nakata, & Kanosue, 2016); specifically for Christians in prayer, the TPJ could be involved in understanding God's actions or will. The temporopolar region has been associated with autobiographical memory (Dolan, Lane, Chua, & Fletcher, 2000) and processing of social narratives (Olson, Plotzker, & Ezzyat, 2007), which could be involved in the recounting of personal daily experiences to God. The anterior mPFC is activated during the mentalization of the self and others (Gallagher & Frith, 2003), indicating that subjects believed that God has a mental state, unlike a fictitious Santa Claus.

These findings suggest that the participants in the study mainly think of and attempt to communicate to God as a physical being, rather than as an abstract entity or a fictional character (Schjoedt et al., 2009). Also, this conclusion aligns with the Christian concept of an intentional God who we can communicate with. However, the control condition for this study is questionable; the content addressed in making wishes to Santa Claus may be very different compared to praying to God, which could range from very personal requests to words of appreciation to recounting one's day. In fact, some of the participants later reported that they had ran out of things to wish for be-

cause they had to perform each task six times for a span of 30 seconds (Schjoedt et al., 2009). Therefore, this study calls for further comparisons of talking to God and talking to a real person, such as a loved one.

Communicating with loved ones
Specifically addressing this point of further investigation, Neubauer (2014) used fMRI to observe Pentecostal Chris-



tians as they silently prayed, imagined and spoke to a loved one, or imagined and named a series of animals (control). In this study, the prayer condition was once again vaguely defined as praying in the participant's "usual way," while the loved one condition asked participants to "imagine a loved one was present and silently express their love and gratitude for ways in which that person has helped them" (Neubauer, 2014). The mPFC, TPJ, and posterior cingulate, all regions associated with the

theory of mind, were activated during both prayer and speaking to a loved one compared to the control (Neubauer, 2014). Furthermore, the areas involved in imagining and processing fictional figures (i.e. Cinderella), as opposed to real people (i.e. George Bush), such as the left lateral inferior frontal gyrus (Abraham, Von Cramon, & Schubotz, 2008), were not activated when subjects were praying to God (Neubauer, 2014). These results support the claim that personal prayer to God is comparable to speaking to a real human being, as opposed to a fictional character.

The activation patterns between prayer and talking to a loved one, however, were not completely overlapping. Interestingly, the insula was activated more during prayer when compared to speaking to a loved one (Neubauer, 2014). The insula is involved in many functions, including interoceptive awareness, emotional response, and the detection of pain and disgust (Menon & Uddin, 2010). This increased activity in the insula during prayer indicates that subjects may have placed more emotional salience in prayer than in conversing with loved ones. The results indicating a stronger emotional connection to God over close family and friends are especially intriguing because prioritizing

God above all else is an idea common accepted in Christian theology. In the New Testament, there are several mentions of following and loving Jesus more than family. For example, Jesus tells the disciples in the gospel of Matthew that “anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10.37, NIV). Again, we see a convergence in neurological and theological evidence characterizing a personal relationship with God for Christians.

Implications

It is important to note here that although this review has focused on neurological evidences supporting the interpersonal nature of prayer and the belief in a personal God, subjective religious experiences do not need to be legitimized by science in any way. The neurological perspective is simply another lens through which we can understand the experience of prayer. This review aims to converge the neurological and theological perspectives instead of using one to support or reject the other and vice versa. In fact, this neurological examination has limitations and flaws, just like the theological approach we can use to understand prayer. One implication of these findings is comfort during hard times. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells people to “come to me all you who are weary and

burdened, and I will give you rest” (New International Version, Matthew 11.28). Just as people often turn to loved ones to process or receive support in the midst of struggles, many Christians seek relational support from God. In fact, Christian self-reports of loneliness have shown that individuals with a stronger faith, measured by the practical exercising of their faith and their cognitive knowledge about the Christian faith, are less likely to be lonely than those with a weaker faith (Le Roux, 2002). Le Roux (2002) claims that this trend may be due to the intimate personal relationship with the omnipresent, omniscient, and loving God of the Christian faith, which may alleviate the negative emotions of feeling alone, unrecognized, or unloved.

Although many further studies must be performed to better characterize the relationship between prayer and the brain, we have tentatively concluded that neurologically, communication with God in Christianity is similar to communication with another person. These neurological findings

this trend may be due to the intimate personal relationship with the omnipresent, omniscient, & loving God of the Christian faith which may alleviate the negative emotions of feeling alone, unrecognized, or unloved.

are consistent with the Christian theological portrayal of a personal, communicative God, showing that neuroscience and theology can both be used to understand personal religious experiences.

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becoming LOVE

We see the Golden Rule everywhere. Hinduism: One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self. This, in brief, is the rule of dharma.

Buddhism: Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.

Confucianism: What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others.

Christianity: Love your neighbor as yourself.

Nearly every seminal philosopher or religious thinker has claimed a variant of the maxim "do unto others as you would have done to yourself". At first glance, the second clause as you would have done to yourself seems self-evident and all too easy to overlook. The emphasis rests mostly on the first clause. But if the implied self-regard in the Golden Rule is supposed to be common knowledge to all of us then why has "self-care" become such a nontrivial issue as of late? It seems that we have forgotten something essential and germane that should be all-too-familiar with each one of us. I would conjecture that many of us have forgotten the basis of how we are to "do unto ourselves", and that if we are to have any idea of how to do unto others in compliance with the wisest sources of wisdom, we first need to come to an understanding of how to love ourselves.

If we do not, taking the maxim without a sufficient understanding of the self-referential nature of the rule runs certain risks. Without an embodied understanding that we are loved before we go to care for someone else, we risk allowing our own insecurities and fears to affect our capacity to love. For example, when I have doubts and am beset with uncertainty whether I am cared for (the

question of "am I lovable?" is a major question I struggle with on a perennial basis), I tend to oscillate between the two poles of either beginning to strive to earn others' love or acting defensively to shield myself from the painful possibility that I am not worthy of love. I have found that when I am sucked into either pole, I tend to do more damage to the people around me because I burden them with a job that should not be theirs, or I withdraw from them entirely. The more I reflect on the golden rule, the more I am convinced that the love being espoused by each of the sources is not a conditional kind of love (I am loved because of I am, have, or offer X), but really an agape type of love. An agape love is one in which our entire selves is accepted and valued without condition. If our self-regard can only be derived from an agape type of love, the love that we beget pursuant to the rule cannot be of a conditional nature. Here's why:

Nothing that we do or possess, no matter how much love or admiration we earn from our neighbors, can ensure that we will have the self-regard to see ourselves as steadfastly lovable. For one, being 5 inches taller, .5 grade point average higher, or 50 G's a year richer won't make me any worthier. These are arbitrary distinctions that ask us to cultivate our "lovability" by striving for societal proxies that deem us as lovable. In fact, these are the things that get in the way of us loving ourselves. To have to hustle for worthiness and love is to start from the wrong foot. Surround-

“True belonging forms the groundwork for being able to love others authentically and also to experience love authentically.”

ed by conditions, love has limited space to flourish, to deepen, and to root our sense of worthiness. Nothing that I do can earn the unconditional self-regard that we should all have for ourselves, and by consequence of it, for others.

So where do we look in our search for this unconditional self-regard? Where can we find a kind of agape love that extends to our own selves?

A first hunch may be that it begins with self-acceptance, which is a promising place to start, but we should be careful not to mistake the means for the end. Taken as the end-all-be-all, self-acceptance may mistakenly lead us to seek self-sufficiency in the way we regard ourselves and to nullify our need for others. Rather, we are looking for an experience of love that compels us to love others more authentically and without viewing it as a burden. Hence, what we should be looking for is not just self-acceptance, but also finding belonging to our own selves that spills over into belonging to others. I believe Brené Brown, creator of one of the top five viewed TED talks in the world, reveals such a dynamic when she says:

“Because true belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance.”

When we accept our true selves, we access the ability to belong. Belonging arrives into our lives when we have acknowledged all our faults and flaws and embraced our strengths and virtues with unconditional acceptance and equanimity. Belonging manifests when we

recognize we are imperfect and can accept this fact as a welcome truth that decouples our worth from perfection and opens the door to treat our imperfections with grace rather than shame. Belonging is made possible by extending compassion to ourselves just as we would a close friend.

True belonging forms the groundwork for being able to love others authentically and also to experience love authentically. When we are able to love ourselves for who we are now, instead of choosing to only love ourselves when certain preconditions have been met, we no longer have to strive for belonging or to fit in. Our true and original selves are given a space to belong, thorns and roses and all, and we set the stage for cultivating a love for who we are (and not who we are not yet or have yet to become). Ultimately, true belonging is the primary place from where we begin to illuminate the way to love and to be loved.

The Golden Rule suggests that when we forget how to love ourselves we run the risk of forgetting how to love others. Along the way we discover we can only love others as much as we love ourselves because our true north for understanding how to love our neighbor and our capacity to practice that love rests on the knowledge that we ourselves are loved, worthy of protection, and deserving of consideration. When we lose our bearings of this truth, we must return to a place of belonging, to see ourselves for who we are, and to cultivate our love for ourselves anew.

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Come out of hiding
You're safe here with Me
There's no need to cover
What I already see

The smell of musty sheets hit me as I plopped onto my bed face first. It was okay to finally let go. My held-back tears turned to sobs, quelling the silence. Welcome to my pity party of one.

You've got your reasons
But I hold your peace
You've been on lock-down
And I hold the key

An eerie silence followed as my sniffling subsided. I sat on my bed, unsure of what to do.

"Nana, are you okay?" my mom knocked.
I remained silent.
"Can you open the door? I want to see you."
No answer.
"I'm going to unlock the door, okay?"

As the key jiggled in the keyhole, I froze. I was finally getting the attention I yearned for, yet despite these fulfilled longings, my heart churned with fear. I was afraid for my mom to see me in such a vulnerable state, yet at the same I couldn't wait for her to see me like this. My heart craved for her to keep asking, to keep knocking, to keep trying to unlock the door as I remained unresponsively aloof.

"Tell me what's wrong," she said. We sat on the bed, her facing me. I desperately wanted to tell her—my mind was buzzing with words to say. But my mouth couldn't move. We sat there for a few minutes, her hand grazing my back.

It was dark. The unceasing voices in my mind drowned out my roommate's deep breathing. I wanted to cry and yell at the same time; attempts to muster up tears could not overcome this enduring hollowness. I stared at the door of my dorm room; as if waiting for the knob to turn.

No key.
No mother's voice.
No open door.
No one would come for me.

'Cause I loved you before you knew
it was love
And I saw it all, still I chose the
cross
And you were the one that I was
thinking of
When I rose from the grave

Curled up in bed like a little girl,
I asked God: "God, if you're there,
can you knock on the door?"

Now rid of the shackles, My victory's yours
I tore the veil for you to come close
There's no reason to stand at a distance anymore
You're not far from home

When I hold a pity party, He joins it.
When I lock the door, He opens it.
When I curl up in bed and hide, He sits beside me. When I pull emotional curtains over my heart, He gently opens them.
When I capitulate to those subtle whispers that tell me I'm broken and don't know what I'm doing with my life, He reminds me of my worth. Pesky whispers flee at the sound of His words.

out
of
hid

Hiding

Joining pity parties has always been God's speciality. In the same way that I put my head under the covers, King David (c. 1000 BCE) attempted to cover himself with darkness. He laments: "surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night" (English Standard Version, Psalm 139.11). Yet, to God, "the night is bright as the day" (English Standard Version, Psalm 139.12).

God sees me even in my fabricated darkness; I can't hide from Him.

Instead, I can hide with Him, hesitantly letting him open the door and sit beside my bed. In his gentleness, I find strength. Psalm 9:9 says, "The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble." His presence was my shelter for me not only that night, but many other nights as well. Over the years, He has been the one I run to and talk to about all my problems, big and small, comforting me in all my affliction (English Standard Version, 2 Corinthians 1.3-4).

He is with me.

*Now rid of the shackles, My victory's yours
I tore the veil for you to come close
There's no reason to stand at a distance anymore
You're not far from home*

God has been knocking at the door of my emo-

tional walls even before I wanted to let Him in. I'm broken, yet God chose to pursue me, an indecisive girl whose natural tendency is to close up and distance herself. And He chose to pursue you too. Ephesians 2:5-6 tells us that "even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved." When I deserved to remain in darkness, God sent Jesus, his only son, to die for my selfishness and ugliness. That was His ultimate pursuit.

If Jesus went through death to chase after me, locked doors are nothing to Him.

I also find comfort in Psalm 139:13-14: "for you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." The God who created the skies and land and sea chose to create me. Me! Like any artist, God knows His creation inside and out. Because He knows me better than I know myself, He speaks straight to my heart:

Hannah you *are* worthy.
Hannah you *are* beautiful.
Hannah you *are* loved.

Perhaps my mother chasing after me was a reflection of how God also seeks me. As I hide with Him, my identity is secure. To both of them, I'm a daughter worth pursuing, worth comforting, and worth loving. Showered in their adoration, I come out of hiding.

*And oh as you run
What hindered love
Will only become
Part of the story*

(Song lyrics: "Out of Hiding" by Steffany Gretzinger)

God the Father

Although every parent has their own parenting style, most parents can be placed somewhere on a spectrum between two extremes. On one end of the spectrum is the “tiger mom.” Almost every Asian-American is familiar with the “tiger mom” – the strict and highly demanding parenting style common with traditional Asian-American parents, which creates a dynamic of distant respect between the child and parent. On the other end of the spectrum is Western-style parenting: a more permissive, doting style of parenting in which the parent and child are more like two equals with a close kinship, without such an implicit power dynamic. Both styles have pros and cons, and parents often adopt bits of both styles.

In the Christian tradition, God the Father is described in both ways - a tiger dad and loving father - to the confusion of many young believers. While some emphasize the beauty of God’s loving character as a father, others emphasize God’s holiness and the importance of traditions, following commandments, revering Scripture and worshipping Him. What is the relationship between reverence and intimacy? What is God really like?

traditions,
commandments,
and strict reverence

I myself struggled deeply with these questions, becoming increasingly frustrated with the wall of ambiguous answers that I always seemed to run into. It wasn’t until I witnessed the relationship I was looking for firsthand that I started to discover a satisfying answer.

It was another routine day at our medical mission team’s makeshift clinic in the Dominican Republic. In the midst of the or-

dinariness was an older man - skinny, tanned, in his forties or fifties, wearing a green shirt. Nothing unusual, save for the fact that as he sat down in the chair across from the doctor, there was a definite pain in his eyes that he tried concealing under the shadow of his hat. I don’t remember the exact reason why he came in – something very general about back pain.. When the doctor routinely asked the patient if he was a Christian, the patient said no.

“Do you have any prayer requests?” I asked the patient offhandedly. I hovered my pen over the “no” checkbox on the paper I was required to fill out for each patient that came into the clinic. To my surprise, however, the man nodded, tears running down his face. I leaned in as he shakily whispered that he had been cheating on his wife with another woman. I was so shocked from his sudden confession to me and this doctor, two people he didn’t know at all, that I was left speechless. The doctor jumped in and, instead of judging this man, started telling this man about his life story – about how he grew up angry at the world, with a broken family and stole things from people’s cars and houses. How it was so difficult to find the love he was needing so badly until his wife started bringing him to church, where he first learned of God’s love, redemption, and saving grace. Through his wife and church family, the doctor was able to experience the beautiful juxtaposition of being unconditionally, personally loved by a mighty, majestic God. The doctor then asked if this man would like to experience this unique kind of relationship with God as well. Timidly, the man accepted, eyes shining. This was one of the first times that I had seen such raw yearning for intimacy with God and in this need for intimacy, I also saw reverence.

For the past few months, this man

must have been blindly grasping for something to pull him out of the darkness that he had drowned himself in. As we prayed together, I was lucky enough to witness the moment in which it seemed God had strongly grabbed hold of this man's hand, pulled him out of the darkness, and said, "Don't worry, son. I've got you."

This portrait of the intimacy Christ desires to have with us, although beautiful, still was clashing with the ideas of honoring and respecting God in my head however. It wasn't until I heard a message from my pastor one faithful Sunday morning that the two images and ideas of God came together for me.

"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground." (English Standard Version, John 8.3-11)

Suddenly it all clicked. The God of the Bible is a powerful God whom I am not worthy to stand in the presence of. There is no one in this world who is worthy of having relationship with Jesus Christ, yet alone an intimate one. Yet God, in His love and mercy, allows us and wants us to. My intimacy with God comes through my mistakes, trials, and pain, just as that patient's

introduction to God was also through his mistakes and pain. While it is important to remember the majesty and glory of God, I am reminded that He speaks to us in personal and individual ways. This doctor's testimony and the man's repentant heart that was so clearly desperate for a relationship with God made me see that religion and relationship are not necessarily opposites – in Christianity they go hand in hand. In the Old Testament, God's holiness and wrath on unrighteousness was emphasized through the law. In the New Testament, God's love and mercy are emphasized, through the personhood of Jesus Christ. God is both judge and redeemer, tiger dad and friend. The closer my relationship with God, the more I realize the importance and value of doing "religious" things, like going to church and reading the Bible. Similarly, the more I dig into his Word and am involved in the church, the greater I realize is His love for me and everyone around me. Each strengthens the other. This is the beauty and perfection of God as a Father.

I am still learning more and more about Christianity as a religion and my own personal relationship with God every day, but each of my experiences have made me more aware of the dual nature of God the Father, and how lucky we are to have both the all-powerful God and the loving Father by our side.



Reconstructing The Text

In almost every hotel that I have stayed in, I have found a copy of the Holy Bible in a nightstand or desk drawer. Perhaps even more remarkably, millions of mobile devices in the world today have a version of the Bible downloaded or readily accessible. Over its centuries of existence, the Bible, an ancient Hebrew and Greek text, has undergone drastic changes, yet has continued to spread across hundreds of languages and countless mediums. A glance into a few critical ways the Bible has evolved can explain

how it has become a widely accessible and influential text.

In the first few centuries following Jesus' death, the New Testament was finalized and added to the Old Testament, culminating in the creation of the Vulgate, one of the most well-known early translations of the Bible. Created around 405 by Saint Jerome, a Roman priest and theologian, the Vulgate was the first full Latin translation of the Bible. Since Hebrew and Greek, the original languages of the Bible, had become accessible only to priests and scholars,

the purpose of the “Vulgate,” which refers to the “vulgar” nature of Latin, was to serve the needs of the common people.

Initially, the Vulgate Bible was severely criticized for departing wildly from the original sacred texts. Other Biblical scholars and critics accused Jerome of making “mistakes through misinterpretation or carelessness,” yet Jerome himself fiercely defended his translation, famously saying, “I render, not word for word, but sense for sense,” when critics questioned his text’s faithfulness to the original.¹

This approach to biblical translation exposes the core difficulty of translation, a forced choice between semantic and communicative translation. According to Peter Newmark, a professor of English, in his 1981 book, *Approaches to Translation*, a semantic translation stays faithful to the original words and syntax of the original text, while the goal of a communicative translation is “to produce on the readers an effect as close as possible to that produced upon the readers of the original.”² The languages we are familiar with each have their own nuances, not to mention unique lexical and grammatical systems. Thus, when translating, one has to decide whether to prioritize the syllables and exact duplicate words or the beauty and elegance of the originals.³ In other words, is the substance and content of the original more important to convey, or is the literal text of the original more important to transfer?

To Jerome, the answer is clear. He cites the words of Horace, a revered Roman poet who says, “Try not to render words literally / Like some faithful translator,” to demonstrate that across all literary genres, translation is malleable – literal translation makes even the most eloquent poets and writers “hardly



articulate.”⁴ To St. Augustine, another highly influential philosopher of Jerome’s time, biblical translation exists to reveal to more people the salvation God offers and His divine will.⁵ Clearly, when salvation is at stake, translators must be maximally unambiguous and adhere to the sense of the original authors. Finally, a French translator named Nicolas Perrot d’Ab-

*"Try not to render words literally /
Like some faithful translator"*

lancourt known for his translation of classical Greek and Roman texts succinctly stated that “it is better to be unfaithful in the small in order to be faithful in the great.”⁶ It is the highest responsibility of the translator to ensure that the eloquence, beauty, and meaning of the originals shine through in the new translation.

In the 14th and 15th century, the first Bibles in English were produced by John Wycliffe and William Tyndale. Wycliffe was famously condemned as a heretic for his belief that people should only look the Scripture for guidance, rather than depend on the power and influence of the Roman Catholic Church. This unorthodox belief – that people should read Scripture for themselves in their own language – was the driving force behind creating the first full English Bible literally based on the Vulgate. Yet, over a century later, the Church still had not changed its ways, leading Tyndale to follow in the footsteps of Wycliffe by defying the established Catholic authorities. While the church decreed that only select people had the ability to interpret and preach from the Bible, Tyndale declared, “I defy the Pope and all his laws. If God spare my life ere many years, I will cause the boy that drives the plow to know more of the scriptures than you!”⁷ He would go on to illegally create and print thousands of English Bibles translated directly from Greek and Hebrew

texts, thanks to the advent of modern printing.

Both Wycliffe and Tyndale believed in making the Bible accessible to all people, in spite of the Church's orders and the severe punishment for heresy. Tyndale continually decried the practices of the Church, which included refusal to license his translation for common use.⁸ The Church was fundamentally wrong in denying people the freedom to read the Bible for themselves, in the common English language. For both men, translation was worth the ultimate price – both were persecuted until their death. Tyndale, who was burned at the stake, famously uttered these last words: "Lord, open the king of England's eyes." His prayer would eventually be answered, as Tyndale's Bible ceaselessly grew in popularity across England and would serve as the basis for the King James Version, which is still in use and has led to many modern translations as well.

In more modern times, the Bible's spread can be attributed to innovation, more so than translation. A Christian missionary group called Gideon International began The Bible Project in 1908, a movement to place a Bible in every hotel room across the United States. From then, over 1.8 billion copies of the Bible have been placed in hotel rooms around the world, paid for by individuals or donor organizations and distributed by Gideon missionaries.⁹ In 2008, a century after the first Gideon Bible was placed, one of the largest evangelical churches in the United States launched YouVersion, a free Bible app that reached over 300 million downloads last year.¹⁰ As smartphones and other mobile devices became more and more inseparable from us in our daily lives, the Bible adapted quickly to remain accessible to all. The app itself is a revelation: it contains over 600 Bible translations in more than 400 languages, all available at the tap of a finger.¹¹ For those

attending church or bible study, using a Bible app means no longer carrying a physical book and having a copy of the Bible at all times. The advent of the digital Bible has also brought more powerful tools to readers, such as searching for keywords, setting reminders to read, and having easy access to translations, commentaries, and more.

Despite the drastic physical changes it has undergone, the Bible still delivers a unified and unwavering message to people across generations. Translation has only made the Bible more accessible for all – whether one is reading from an ancient Hebrew manuscript or on the YouVersion app. As Paul writes in the Second Epistle to Timothy, chapter 3 verse 16, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (English Standard Version). While the Bible's content and format has evolved significantly, its intent remains steadfast and unequivocal.

Footnotes

¹Letter to Pammachius, 25

²Newmark, *Approaches to Translation*, 39

³Letter to Pammachius, 26

⁴Letter to Pammachius, 25-26

⁵The Use of Translations, 32

⁶To Monsieur Conrart, 160

⁷"Who Was William Tyndale?" GotQuestions.org, 21 Feb. 2018.

⁸An Answer to Thomas More's Dialogue, 90

⁹"Why There Are Bibles in Hotel Rooms." Today I Found Out, 26 May 2015.

¹⁰"YouVersion Bible App to Reach 300 Million Downloads by End of 2017." PR Newswire: News Distribution, Targeting and Monitoring, PRNewswire

¹¹O'Leary, Amy. "In the Beginning Was the Word; Now the Word Is on an App." The New York Times, 26 July 2013.

ENGAGE

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