

Agathos

Volume 1, Number 1

Lessons from Creation

Amanda Perkins

Starting at the Beginning of Justice

Professor Justin Marks

Kingdom Mindfulness: A Mind Full of What?

Olivia Cannon

“But ask the beasts ...”

Professor Owen Strachan

The Moral Realism and Spiritual Idealism of Christianity

Ryan Ward

I Look To the Hills, Redemption within Creation

June Woo

A Tree Planted by the Water

Rob Gregory

A Casual Conversation

Michelle Hong

My Testimony

The Joseph and Alice McKeen Study Center
&
The Christian Fellowship at Bowdoin

From the Editors:

Thank you for reading this inaugural edition of the Bowdoin Agathos. We are excited to introduce this opportunity to hear from Christian students, faculty, alumni and friends of the Christian Fellowship at Bowdoin and the Joseph and Alice McKeen Study Center. We aim to add a Christian perspective to the many other voices present on the Bowdoin campus, and to demonstrate to those beyond this fellowship of believers the thoughtful side of followers of Christ in this community. We hope that this journal will provide a forum for future conversations about issues surrounding Christians at Bowdoin College.

It is appropriate as we create this journal to begin with a look at creation itself. Creation truths lie at the very heart of the Christian teachings, and we can imagine no subject of interest to the lives of the Bowdoin students that can be understood without some thought given to human beginnings. We take the Bible narrative about creation as the starting point for informed conversations and instructions on a number of issues ranging from worldly conflict to Christian mindfulness.

Perhaps this journal will serve as a vehicle for future groups of Christian students and Bowdoin community members to give their faithful witness in this otherwise diverse campus culture. We invite you to consider the perspectives offered here openly and critically, giving serious consideration to our humble attempt to represent the great truths which have been proclaimed by Christians for two thousand years. Bowdoin's first president Joseph McKeen stated at the close of his inaugural address, and we adopt his words here for this journal, "... that it may eminently contribute to the advancement of useful knowledge, the religion of Jesus Christ, the best interests of man, and the glory of God."

Respectfully,

Ryan Ward '17

Sam Swain '18

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Lessons from Creation

Amanda Perkins	4
Starting at the Beginning of Justice	
Professor Justin Marks	6
Kingdom Mindfulness: A Mind Full of What?	
Olivia Cannon	8
Seeing is Believing	
Professor Owen Strachan	10
The Moral Realism and Spiritual Idealism of Christianity	
Ryan Ward	16
I Look To the Hills, Redemption within Creation	
June Woo	19
A Tree Planted by the Water	
Rob Gregory	20
A Casual Conversation	
Michelle Hong	24
My Testimony	

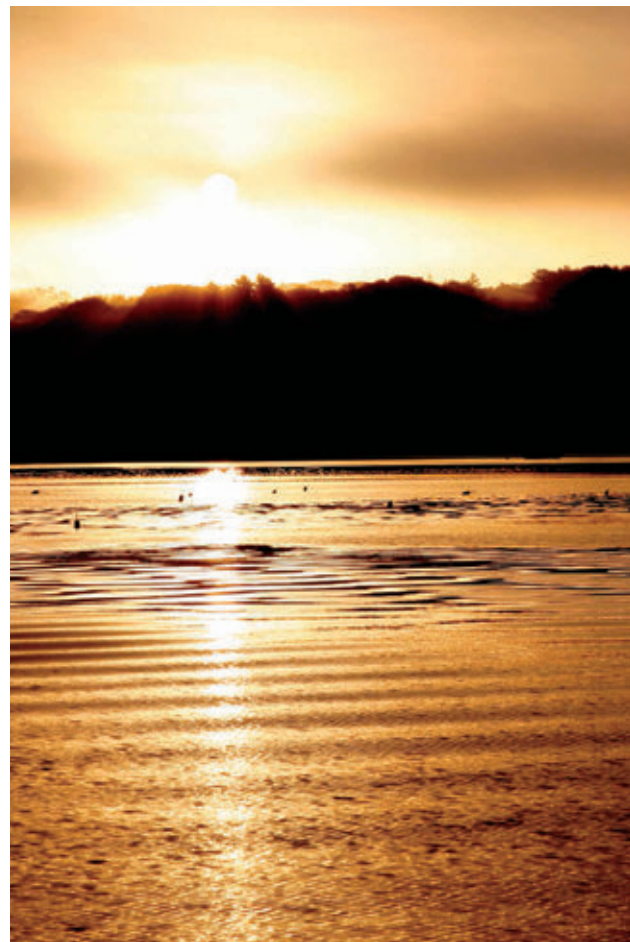
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The Joseph and Alice McKeen Study Center
&
The Christian Fellowship at Bowdoin

Starting at the Beginning of Justice

Amanda Perkins, Bowdoin Class of 2018

Have you ever heard of socially motivated divestment? Climate change? Environmental justice? These form some of the most galvanizing movements on the Bowdoin College Campus, grounded in each instance in some conception of justice. But whose justice and on what grounds are the claims and demands of *justice* to be normative for the shared life of the Bowdoin community? And if you use the words “creation” and “justice” in the same sentence, do your thoughts go only as far as the Green Bowdoin Alliance or Bowdoin Climate Action? If so, you have fallen short of the transformative perspective that a biblical understanding of creation holds for us in addressing injustice wherever it is found.



Looking at the world (everything from the land to the animals to us!) as formed by God requires us to place value in everything created, and charges us

with responsibility over this creation, and calls us in some way to be participants in its restoration. To answer the question of what shape that participation takes is also to answer the question of what it means to be human. What does it mean to live life in *creatureliness* before our Creator God?

You can probably think of several reasons that the created world is objectively and subjectively “good.” It all fits together in a perfect pattern that produces life. Without a world so finely tuned in its physical constants we would not survive. This world is beautiful aesthetically, scientifically, mathematically, and in a thousand other ways. In this appraisal of the *goodness* of the created order you stand in agreement with God. He who made the sun, the mountains, the fish, the flowers, declared that all of these things were “good.”¹ And what about us? The humans? God said that we were “*very good*.”² Something about you and me sets us apart from the rest of the created order. We know it by the way we are set apart to order and control the world around us, for our own use and benefit. The inference to be drawn from creation understood this way is that there is deeper spiritual purpose intended for humankind. When God created humanity, he made us “in his own image.”³ We are God’s self-portraits. Like God, we all have the capacity for relationship, for responsibility, and for love.

We might think of man created in God’s image as in some way a self-portrait by the three persons of the Trinity: “let us make man in *our* image.” What does that mean for the way we look at others? Every person around us carries with them the stamp of the Creator. Every person you meet on the Bowdoin campus is impressed with the image and representation of the God who made us. Surely that sets a different foundation for the significant weight we place on the value of human life.

I would illustrate it this way. Suppose that you gave me your self-portrait, one you had been working on for months, and entrusted to me the responsibility to care for it. If I negligently spilled my

1 Ge 1:10ff

2 Ge 1:31, emphasis added

3 Ge 1:27

coffee all over it, or decided I would put the canvas to better use for my own art project, or sliced it to pieces and vandalized it with slanderous words, you would justly take great offense at my unjust behavior. My actions toward your image in that case range between ambivalence and aggressive hatred towards you. Your offense is justified because of the effort and care you expended to create this piece of artwork. Your sense of injustice is further grounded in the awareness that I have defaced and spoiled an image of *you*. The harm I caused to your self-portrait is harm I have caused to you by disfiguring the meaningful representation of yourself which *you* created. In that sense, the damage we do to each other with every act of neglect and malignant intention we may understand as damage done to the image of our Creator.⁴ It is for this reason that we may locate the value of human life in the concept offered by the biblical account of creation as a reflection of God’s person, with each one made as an image bearer by divine love and care.

And yet there is more. Being persons created in the image of God implies not only a simple individualist standard for human rights, but furthermore charges us with responsibilities in the way that the *image bearer* represents the character and attributes of the creator God whose image he was meant to reflect. When a king is called away from his kingdom, how does he ensure his kingdom’s safety until his return? He sets in place representatives who think, feel, and act like him to care for the people and the land just as he would. Like Tolkien’s Stewards of Gondor, humankind in stewardship is responsible *to* the Creator and *for* the creation, with all that implies about dependence on both the Creator and the rest of creation, as well as certain duties to both Creator and the rest of creation. As Adam named the animals and cared for and conserved the land, stewards of creation advance the conditions which promote peace, meaning, and productivity in the land.⁵ If stewardship entails right relationships and just treatment for everyone, then we might ask why? It is for answers to that deeper question that I am drawn to the creation narrative of the Bible which describes stewards with privileges of rulership, but occupying those offices only as subjects under the Creator-King who created all things. And, more importantly,

4 Ge 9:6, Jas 3:9

5 Gen 2:15, 19-20

this Creator-King creates his garden-shaped world with motivations of love for all that he made. “*And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*” As God made it *good*, we are charged in that way to seek and uphold the *good* in our aspirations for justice in all of its expressions on our campus – economic justice, environmental justice, and social justice



So look around you. Is creation still “good”? Is our water pure and plentiful? Does the land thrive and grow without harm? Is there peace among the nations? Do we find equality between men and women? Black and white? I am humbled by our collective failure as stewards of God’s creation. I admit my part in our failure to maintain God’s “goodness” in creation. Moreover, we have been active participants in the disintegration of a garden meant by our Creator for human flourishing. This failure-admitting attitude is a place for us to begin in our collective aim at greater justice.

We must admit as justice-seekers that we are the active participants in the rebellion against the *good*. We are those who have marred the image of the Creator over all of creation, most importantly that image written into the fabric of our own life. We have converted the God-given attributes that make us look like him, from our creativity to our scientific understanding to our capacity for relationship, and redirected all of these capacities for selfish and un-godlike purposes. Might we begin a quest for justice by admitting that we have forgotten our place in the created world, where God declared all things *good*, and then declared the human governors of his creation to be *very good*? If we start at that beginning, it’s a very good place to start.

Kingdom Mindfulness: A Mind Full of What?

Professor Justin Marks, Bowdoin College Mathematics

In the recent months, I have become intrigued by the culturally popular concept of mindfulness. I have frequently seen and heard mindfulness mentioned on the Bowdoin campus. What is it? What is its purpose? Is it something I personally want in my life?

I left mid-coast Maine for a spring break on the sunny shores of California, but the “mindfulness” buzzword followed me coast to coast. Sitting down to wait for the creation of my personalized acai bowl in downtown Palo Alto, I spied a colorful, worn book lying on the communal table: “Living in the Moment: with Mindfulness Meditations” by Anna Black. Grateful for the opportunity to develop a better grasp of mindfulness, I flipped through the wrinkled pages. Black defines mindfulness as “deliberately paying attention to things we normally would not even notice, and becoming aware of our present moment experience as it arises, non-judgmentally, and with kindness and compassion.” Black proceeds to describe exercises and practices to enhance mindfulness.

My soul resonates with much of Black’s mindfulness definition. I am an advocate of paying attention to the simplicities of life often overlooked in our fast-paced society. I agree that we cannot dwell on the past or be anxious about the future. It is essential to our understanding of both our past and our future that we consider the current moment and be fully alive now. Additionally, a heart of love, including kindness and compassion, is necessary to favorably enhance the lives of the individuals we encounter from moment to moment.

I find ample evidence in the life of Jesus to support these aspects of mindfulness. In Matthew 14:19, Jesus thanked his Father for the loaves and fishes, recognizing that the simple lunch of a young boy was a gift from His Father in heaven. He did not overlook the blessing in the present moment, and the one lunch became lunch for the entire multitude. Jesus was often moved with compassion to act for good. For instance, he miraculously fed thousands of people (Matthew 15:32), taught spiritual truths (Mark 6:34), healed the sick (Matthew 14:14, Matthew 20:34, Mark 1:41), and raised the dead to life (Luke 7:12-15), all because of His compassion.

In Luke 10:38-42, Jesus encouraged Martha to avoid worry and anxiety, and applauded Mary for being present and listening to His teaching. In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus directs us to not worry about tomorrow. The foundation for our freedom from worry is our identity as sons/daughters of a good Father who will provide for us, just as He provides for the sparrows and the lilies. Furthermore, faith in God regarding the future is something that is expressed as love in the present. Paul refers to this as “faith expressing itself in love” (Galatians 5:6).

On the other hand, there is one word of Black’s definition which causes me to hesitate, and that is the word “non-judgmentally”. When I observe the response of Jesus to his circumstances, he frequently delineates between good and bad, right and wrong, holy and unholy.

In 1 John 3:8, we learn, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil”. In order to destroy the works of the devil, there must be a judgment regarding which works are in fact of the devil. Consider the flipping of the tables in the temple (Matthew 21:12-13), the healing of the crippled woman (Luke 13:10-16), the deliverance from demons of the man in Gadarenes (Mark 5:1-20), and the rebuke of Peter (Matthew 16:21-23). In each of these instances, Jesus makes a judgment. He judges the greed and corruption of the moneychangers and merchants bad, and holiness of the temple good. He judges a crippled back bad, and a healthy, able body good. He judges demon possession as bad, and freedom from demons and sanity good. He judges an earthly mindset bad, and a heavenly mindset good.

The example of Peter’s mindset is particularly relevant, as it reminds us that God cares deeply about mindfulness: of which ideas are our minds full? In Philippians 4:8, Paul commands us to have minds fixed on what is true, noble, pure, excellent, and praiseworthy. In Colossians 3:2, he tells us to fix our minds on things above, in the heavenly realm. In Romans 8:5-8, Paul invites us to fix our mind on the Spirit, not the flesh, because a mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, while a mind set on the flesh is death. In these passages, we understand that we are



encouraged to be mindful, not just of the material world that we can see and feel, but, even more importantly, of the spiritual realm. And this is the dimension where the cultural notion of mindfulness falls short of the biblical notion of mindfulness. If our awareness is only tuned to the material, earthly realm, we will miss the substantive reality of the moment. Peter missed the heavenly revelation that Jesus’ death by crucifixion was a necessary sacrifice to institute forgiveness, and that Jesus’ resurrection from the dead would be a fountain of abundant life for those who believe. Although the cultural notion of mindfulness resembles the truth in many ways, it is a counterfeit to the notion of mindfulness modeled by Jesus and presented in scripture, in which judgments are indeed required and the spiritual dimension outshines the earthly dimension.

In my life, mindfulness involves filling my mind with spiritual truth and being sensitive to the Holy Spirit. I meditate daily on scripture, immersing my mind in the realities of the spiritual dimension. As I listen to the Holy Spirit throughout the day, He communicates in pictures and words, often intended to be shared with another individual for their

edification. These practices are foundational aspects of following Jesus. Accordingly, I am an advocate of a spiritual mindfulness rooted in the truth of a *layered* created world that is more than the material, more than the visible, more than the temporal.

Rejuvenated by my acai bowl, I crossed the street and met a homeless man who was declaring the truth of Jesus Christ in a public square. He shared that he needed prayer for his neck, where a cancerous tumor had developed. I laid my hand on his neck and released healing to him. Afterwards, I encouraged him for his boldness and creative presentation of the gospel, even in the midst of a false gospel message delivered by nearby individuals representing a particular cult. It was a moment of compassionate, spiritually-aware, fully-present, and rightly-judging mindfulness. Do I always engage the world in this fashion? No. But as I follow Jesus, who set the perfect example of mindfulness, I will be conformed to His image, from glory to glory.

Seeing is Believing

Olivia Cannon, Bowdoin Class of 2017

*“The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
Night after night they display knowledge.”
Psalm 19:1-2*

*“But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the
birds of the heavens, and they will tell you; or the bushes
of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the
sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not
know that the hand of the Lord has done this?”
Job 12:7-9*

I have found that many things in life seem hidden to us only because we do not contemplate them.

If there is one thing every human can agree on, it is that this Earth is incredibly beautiful. Put any of us on top of a mountain, or in front of an ocean at dusk, or anywhere in autumn, and likely he will stop in his tracks, even just for a moment. Even the most jaded among us will concede that fine, it's pretty—they're just bored with it.

What gets me is that it doesn't have to be beautiful. There is no good reason why a world created by chance, a planet solely utile, should be beautiful. Appreciating the world for what it does for us is one thing, but beauty is something that transcends usefulness. When we think of efficiency, do we not think of gray, heavy machinery, of cities, of factories? Yet nature, which is in many ways more efficient than any of our inventions (for who of us knows how to turn carbon dioxide back into oxygen?), is intricately and delicately beautiful. An unforgiving force might have well created an army of robots—yet here we find ourselves, surrounded by a world as delicate as it is harsh, as beautiful as it is practical.

But why? Someone vaguely contemplating this might conclude, “some general life force really likes us.” The truth is, God loves us, and He wants us to know who He is. The art says something about the Artist—that He made us, that He loves us, and that He has a life for us more wonderful than we could ever imagine.

Many say that this world was created by chance.

A million rolls of the dice, in succession, which all happened to be favorable. Whenever I look at nature, though, I cannot imagine its perfection emerging from chance. If I tried to balance an ecosystem, to make it work with even a thousand days of planning, all the animals and plants would certainly die. Every time humans try to manipulate nature, we—intelligent beings—almost always manage to hurt it, throwing off the balance. For all the good we might do, through medicine, politics, agriculture, it seems like for every problem we solve, ten more are created (I shudder to think of things such as global warming and ozone depletion). If chance made the world, we should be able to make it better, but all we seem to be able to do is mess it up. Despite our best efforts, our lack of understanding of the created order condemns us to failure when we try to make the world over in our own image. Our failure, as rational beings, to order things on the grand scale of creation suggests that the order we see is imposed by a higher Will. And this order is more righteous and beautiful than even the furthest depths of our understanding.

There are a thousand miracles reason cannot explain. Why does frozen rain become billions of stunningly beautiful, soft, gentle crystals? Why does sunlight feel like a warm embrace? Why do flowers exist in every color of the rainbow, each more beautiful than the next?

All I know is that whenever I close my eyes and throw things together, hoping for the best, I make a mess. When I was little, playing with colors, I always, no matter what, made brown. It seems impossible that this world, beautiful and pleasing in so many ways, could have come from chance. I know that it was made by a Creator, one who wanted to show us His glory, who gave us our senses so we might contemplate this majesty and come to Him. The Bible says that “by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,” (Colossians 1:16), and furthermore, it affirms that “his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made” (Romans 1:20). His glory is right there in front of us, and we can choose to recognize it or not.

This world didn't have to be beautiful, but it is. That, to me, is a perfect example of grace. Every time I look at Creation, I am left in awe not only of God's beauty, but also of the fact that He invites us to partake in it. God created the world and made it stunningly beautiful, and the sheer magnitude of it, the way each leaf and berry is its own masterpiece but the whole thing is a wonderful collage, is too



much for any of us to comprehend—yet it is the world that He invites us to live in with Him. I see nature and I see a world that leaves me in silent awe, wanting to soak in its beauty with every pore. In it I become at once humbled and amazed, because I know that my God is bigger and more beautiful still than every wonder on Earth, and yet He wants to share all that with me.

In God is life. “It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens” (Jeremiah 10:12). In everything He made, He shows us His grace by giving us more than just what we need to exist (for is beauty or pleasure necessary for survival?)—and also shows us who He is: a God more incredible than our deepest visions.

Therefore Creation is and was more than happenstance. It's a gift and an invitation, an image of the world we were meant to live in and a testament to who God is. And it's a gift that merits a response.



The Moral Realism and Spiritual Idealism of Christianity

Professor Owen Strachan, Bowdoin Class of 2003

It's odd, isn't it? Of all the places you could have ended up at college, you are at Bowdoin. You go to school amidst pines that speak more to the unsettled eighteenth-century American frontier than the modern urban technopolis. To get to class many months of the year, to do the most basic of activities like eating and exercising, you must wear the equivalent of an ultra-down sleeping bag on your person. To go to a mall, you must do the truly unthinkable, and drive for 45 minutes.

Yet the whole experience of Bowdoin is strangely magical. For starters, you're on one of the most beautiful college campuses in the world. You are surrounded by hyper-educated men and

But here's what is odd about that, at least for many Polar Bears: you're asking those meta-questions at a time in which your life has yet to settle. You're still young. You don't have it all figured out. Life, in other words, has not necessarily made its claim on you. The world can seem in such a situation like an endless dream. You have won the academic lottery, and now you may embark upon your intellectual idyll. Reality can seem a long ways away.

If you identify with this perspective — and I certainly did, with many of my friends and classmates — it can be difficult to see that life will not always remain this way. Surely you know that. But though a simple proposition, it's a true one. All of a



women who have mastered their field of study. On an hourly basis, you eat like a king or queen. And most significantly, you have the privilege of asking the great questions of life, and of having the time to think them through. In fact, that is precisely what you are supposed to be doing: thinking about life, about the deepest and highest things, about the purpose of your existence.

sudden, in a blink, life can change, and you can find your youth suddenly and unalterably behind you.

Let's get this out in plain terms: death is real. Suffering is real. Heartbreak will happen. Not every dream comes true. In these and other ways, all of us find, eventually, that life intrudes. This is why I mentioned earlier that it is odd that it is now that you are encountering and asking the great questions

of life. To answer those questions well, you really *need* to have tasted bitter fruit. Otherwise, you risk answering these queries superficially, partially, from a book, because someone else said so.

So what am I suggesting? Are you supposed to take some sort of miracle-maturation pill and then, in a couple of minutes, address the existential realities before you with a kind of timeless sagacity? No, you need not do so. Here is what I propose instead. As you consider different worldviews, different ideologies, ask a simple question: is this morally realistic?

In other words, does this system of belief speak truly about the world? Or does it offer you a convenient fiction?

Rival Worldviews

Let's flesh this out. I don't want to go after hard-and-fast worldviews here. Instead, I want to target certain mindsets people might adopt as they make their way through college and, beyond it, adulthood.

Hedonism. Not that any college student would embrace such a mindset, of course. That's unthinkable.

In all seriousness, hedonism is a fun way to live. You get to shuck off morals and constraints and rules and do whatever you want to do. As a young person, this is easy to pull off. You don't have much in the way of responsibility. No one is dependent on you.

And so you can lose yourself in whatever indulgence suits your fancy. As Tom Wolfe showed in *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, for a good number of modern students, this means a lot of drinking, partying, and sex (or at least pretending to have a lot of each). It's easy to feel entitled to this kind of life today. You worked hard in high school, you're just out to have a little fun, no one's getting hurt, that sort of thing.

But here's what hedonism doesn't prepare you for: life. Specifically, its difficulty. When you have some assignments to do and you want to blow off some steam, it works well. But hedonism fails miserably as a worldview, a way-of-life, when your mother is dying of cancer, when you fall into terrible legal trouble, when you get laid off from the job you fought hard for, when the guy you recently hooked up with inexplicably starts ignoring you in the dining hall. It's fun to lose yourself in pleasure with someone, but when you confront the physical,

psychological, emotional, and moral reality of an abortion, you find that your hedonistic choices, so effortless in the making, have surprisingly rough edges.

Furthermore, hedonism has nothing to say about the terrible realities of life in this broken world. Oppression of women by dictatorial religions? Water shortages in Africa? Terrorists blowing up marketplaces and killing two-year-olds? What does hedonism have to say to moral quandaries like these? Essentially, it urges you to just forget about them, lose yourself in your privilege, your safety, your protected life. When it comes to moral realism, hedonism offers you none. It's the buddy who always wants to party and never wants to think about real life. Yes, it seems now like the party will never end. But it most assuredly does, and will.

Success. Maybe you don't incline toward partying. You don't make a sport of debauchery. You've got bigger things on your mind. You're looking at the long term. Here you are at Bowdoin. If you hit your marks and keep your head down, you'll end up with a great job out of college, and before you know it, you'll be on your way to big money, and you'll never look back. You've been groomed to perform, you do perform, and you will perform. That's what drives you.

That's all well and good. There's nothing wrong with making money, or even lots of it. But this is the worst-kept secret in the world: success does not in itself fill you up. You can be the best in the world in your field, make the equivalent of a small country's GDP, and live with a gnawing sense that you haven't proved anything. Tomorrow you have to wake up and do it all over again.

One of the more fascinating illustrations of this reality is Michael Jordan, the greatest basketball player of all time. Michael Leahy, a *Washington Post* sportswriter, interviewed Jordan in his retirement before he came back to play for the Wizards. Jordan had no peace in his post-playing years. "*Nothin' compares to bein' it,*" he told Leahy. It was as if he was saying, in Leahy's mind, "*that he regretted ever having left it, that what he had in its place was not nearly enough.*" In other words, here was a man who had everything — hundreds of millions of dollars, a guaranteed first-ballot Hall of Famer, immense power and influence — and yet had nothing at all.

Success as a mindset, a driving life force, will fail you. You don't have to chase big money or celebrity, though. Perhaps you want to be the top scholar in your chosen field. It will still fail you. Why? Because life is inescapably hard. The sacrifices you make in order to be successful will have real consequences. You are more than a machine. You are more than a mere producer or achiever. Furthermore, your life is given you not merely so that you can invest your gifts but so that you can help others. It is easy to miss this on the path to success. Sure, maybe you give some money to a cause, a charity. Maybe you volunteer a little time here and there. But that won't fire you up like the drug of money or power or achievement. And that is how you know that success as a mindset ultimately fails.

Goodness. This might seem odd on the heels of the previous mindset, but it's a powerful draw for many. Some who would never dream of chasing wealth or fame, and who have no strong taste for uninhibited excess, will instead devote themselves to good causes. They'll labor toward that end, toiling to bring justice, healing, and hope to the world. On the face of it, this is a good thing.

But there is a problem with this worldview as well. The pursuit of goodness in itself addresses the world beyond us. It does not, however, address us internally. We are not good people, you see. We think we are. And many of us aren't terrible, relatively speaking. Inside ourselves, though, in the quiet of our own counsel, we know that we are not good. We are impatient. We are unkind to those who disagree with us. We hate them. We are jealous of those who have what we do not. Even if devoted to the welfare of others, we are aware at times of a deadness within us, a lack of caring for those we serve.

If we allow ourselves to see it, furthermore, we realize that we are proud. We may generally want to unleash goodness in the world. But even as we pursue that noble end in our heart, we pat ourselves on the back. We congratulate ourselves for not being like other people who don't sacrifice as we do. If we are not careful, we can easily make serving others about serving our own egos. We can lose sight of our frailty, our own brokenness, and think that we are better than other people, and that we don't need them—they need us. We may not start out this way, but it's shocking how easy it is to end up like this. The

Aristotelian ethical mean can be hard to find when it seems like you're accomplishing so much and others are accomplishing so little.

Apathy. Perhaps all this intensity and activity is not really your thing. Your life is characterized more by apathy than anything else. That's not to say that you're uninterested or lazy about everything. Perhaps you're actually quite successful in your core pursuits. You're not, however, particularly interested in diving in the world, getting your hands dirty, improving yourself or others.

You have pastimes that you like to do, maybe a hobby or two. You may not be unkind; you might not be unpleasant. But there is no real gravitational center to your life. You do what suits you, generally, and that's pretty much it. You see some sort of vague path in your future but don't get stressed about its lack of definition. You don't really do a lot for anyone else, but neither do you go out of your way to harm anyone.

This kind of life isn't set up like a moving target as others are. If others rate captains of industry, research scholars, or superstar athletes as their avatars, the patron saint of the apathetic person is the "Dude," Jeff Lebowski, the type who is annoyed by those who have a conscience. But that's just the problem: there's an innate knowledge in all of us that it's morally problematic to cave in on ourselves. We intuitively know that life isn't meant to be wasted. We see someone with obvious talent and there's something in us that wants to see them use it. Few things are worse in life than to see the gifted squander themselves.

When I went to Bowdoin, video games hadn't yet gripped students as they now have, but several of my friends, including two who were preternaturally bright, nearly lost themselves playing first-person shooter games. It was awful to watch. You didn't need to be an uptight partisan to see that this wasn't ideal. It was in fact devastatingly selfish. Many people today want to live this kind of life, or at least find themselves slouching into it, but they wouldn't if they knew the terrible torpor and wastefulness that awaited them.

Skepticism. Maybe you're not merely apathetic. Maybe you're actively skeptical. You're like a film critic from the *New Yorker*—except that you critique not merely a work dealing with life, but life itself. You

have an opinion about most everything, but there is a common thread that pulls together your threads of thought: none of them measure up.

But here's the thing: you can tear down (and perhaps you really do have a good critical eye), but what can you offer in the place of that which you immolate with a cutting phrase or a condescending sneer? Do you have a positive vision of how life should be? Do you have any solutions? You cast a withering eye at those who actually believe in something, but when it comes down to it, what do you believe in?

There is actually an answer to that. The skeptic typically believes in him or herself. That's the end of it. *I myself*, the self-realized. The philosopher Martin Buber famously spoke of the central social and philosophical reality of existence as "I-Thou." The skeptic says yes to the first and no to the second, thank you very much.

Skepticism does not measure up to cold-eyed moral realism. Sure, it comprehends that things are wrong in the world. But it fails to offer any basis for positive action in the world, despite the fact that we are all in some way inclined toward positive action, at least for a time. Skepticism is not self-sustaining. It offers no comfort for life's great questions. It provides no foundation for moral judgment. It is made to attack, built to strip down, and that's what it accomplishes. This is of course inconsistent with the way we live and move and have our being in the world. We are inclined to moral behavior, to structure, to hope, even if we don't think we want to be.

Evil. Let's dial this up. Perhaps your worldview is not merely shaded towards the dark. Perhaps your righteous cause is evil itself. You think that you should perpetrate evil against others — that's your right and your meaning.

This sounds very *gauche* to say in public, I know. *Of course* people don't think this way, right? Wrong. People do. Look honestly at the world. There's plenty of needless violence and suffering, isn't there? Many of us like to pretend this side of the world doesn't exist, maybe because we're able by our background to pull that off. But here's the thing: it does.

And as I've said, you may not only agree with that sentiment, but you might live by it in some way. You might want to hurt others. You might live

out your days trying to get back at someone who seriously wounded you in the past. That pain is real. I remember reading Jim Harrison's *Dalva*, about a woman who plots revenge on a man who forced himself on her, and being chilled by how easy — and understandable in a human way — it would be to fashion one's entire existence around anger and hatred. The problem is that this force is never reconciled. The hunger for revenge is not sated.

Evil, furthermore, does not constitute a ground for moral or spiritual action. How does devoting oneself to hatred equip you in any way to care for a dying friend? How does it sustain you when your family members are broken by a tragic life event? It might seem right for you to be able to take vengeance on others, but is that a consistent moral principle — in other words, is that how you want others to treat you when you wrong them?

Synthesis. In all of the foregoing, I have been pointing out what I consider obvious difficulties with several of the most common worldviews of young college students. In other words, I'm pointing out





basic flaws along moral lines of several popular ways of life. If you actually engage your conscience and examine yourself honestly, it's not hard to see that our outlook is not often morally realistic. In fact, we naturally try to dodge a fully honest perspective on life. We don't want to think much about it, and so we busy ourselves with the inclinations of our nature — fun, achievement, goodness, apathy, skepticism, evil.

If these worldviews falter in different and significant ways, it's important to know that there is one that offers you a powerfully realistic view of the world: Christianity. Many times when you hear evangelicals talking about their faith, they highlight things like eternal life, Jesus as the divine human, and God's presence within them. These are ethereal realities that are quite mysterious to contemplate. But Christianity has on-the-ground import as well. When it comes to real life in this world, it is shockingly clear-eyed.

What do I mean? The Bible doesn't pretend that everything's great in this world. It's not airy-fairy in that regard. It's totally up-front about the fallenness of this place. And it doesn't isolate certain people as the culprits for this problem, as we are prone to do in our politics or ethics.

It distributes blame evenly: "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," according to Romans 3:23. There you have it. Everybody's off; everybody fails to live rightly before God, the creator.

The Bible, you see, starts us in the middle of things. For all the philosophical effort people have put into contemplating admittedly mind-bending realities like so-called determinism, the Bible announces that we are not at the beginning of the story. Much has already happened. We're lost, separated from God. As a result, we run away from God and embrace lesser things. We pretend that gratifying our sexual desires will complete us, make us whole, satisfy our deeper longings. We lose ourselves in our work, our vocation, imagining that work or success offer us ultimate fulfillment. We throw ourselves into a cause, zealously pursuing it, all the while ignoring our unfading penchant for self-righteousness. We selfishly opt of the real world with its real problems, choosing instead to try and drown out our conscience, numbing it until it no longer functions but lies inert and catatonic.

This is what the Scripture teaches us. It is morally realistic, and blissfully so. It calls out everyone,

whether a rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-27), a self-righteous zealot (Luke 18:9-14), or a selfish traitor (Matthew 27:3-8). But it doesn't stop there. The Bible doesn't reward those who think they are naturally better than these types of people, it calls everyone to repentance in the name of the crucified and resurrected Christ (Romans 10:9).

Christianity doesn't pretend evil doesn't exist. We all know it does, and so do the biblical authors. What your conscience whispers to you, the Bible speaks plainly to you. Where you and I think about morality in our own terms, prioritizing certain behaviors, ignoring our own shortcomings, the Bible declares that we are all fallen. We know deep down that our worldviews have flaws. The Bible declares that in full, and refuses to let us off the hook. It won't let us focus on our favorite value or pursuit and ignore the weighty aspects of life. In ministering reality to us, it yields the hope that we don't really want, the truth that we don't really want to hear, the perspective that allows us, as C. S. Lewis argued, to see all else by it.

Conclusion But here's the truly wondrous thing. Christianity is not only morally realistic, ethically gritty. It is also spiritually idealistic. In other words, despite the depravity of this world, our hearts still incline toward hope. We still live with purpose. We have a natural affinity for those that want to improve.

We see someone sick, and we want them to get well; we see someone trapped, and we want them to be sprung.

The spiritual idealism of Scripture centers not in an abstraction, though, but in a person. Jesus Christ descended into this world to take our sin and to cleanse us of it. Thus we are offered not only realism in the Bible, but idealism, hope, pure hope. Wherever we are, in whatever state we find ourselves, we may call upon the Lord and be saved from sin and death and hell (Psalm 91:15). We need not perish without purpose. We can live forever with God, worshipping him, released from so many earthly battles, set free to love a being who is and who deserves absolute love. Perhaps all this sounds rather out there, a bit too much to take in. That makes sense. College is, as I noted, a magical and odd season of life. But realism is not long in the offing. The hard truths of this world will soon intrude. When they do, we may well find that our worldview is lacking, that we are unable to solve the problems we face, and that we have need of something — someone — greater than ourselves.

I Look To the Hills, Redemption within Creation

Ryan Ward, Bowdoin Class of 2017

The Bible begins with the familiar yet bold proclamation: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” This one verse firmly establishes a fundamental truth about God’s place in the universe[1]. He is the creator of all that was, all that is, and all that will be[2]. He is the maker before whom we are exposed and to whom we must give an account. Not only is our natural environment His creation, but we are also shaped by His hands and made in the image of God. All of this is established in the first chapter of Genesis, which lays the foundation for the rest of the scripture that follows.

Creation is not just an item of history which we study merely for the sake of knowing the origins of life. It is a doctrine of profound importance to all who share in the life that is granted through God’s creation. Its present relevance is established by this revelation in Psalm 19:

*The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.”*

This passage tells us that creation is rich with content about the character and attributes of God. It declares the glory of God made known to all who inhabit creation. This allows us to see more in creation than the wonder it imparts by its own merit. It tells us that God created the heavens and earth in a way that reveals a part of His divine nature. Thus, it becomes our task to discover this knowledge for ourselves on the basis of what has already been made plain to us.

But merely looking at the stars in the heavens cannot reveal the whole of this knowledge to us. By use of our own reason, we might be able to look at the natural world and conclude that some higher power must account for what we see. This may be a justifiable reaction to the glory of creation, but it cannot succeed in revealing all the attributes of the God who is responsible for it. Furthermore, reason alone cannot discern the purpose in creation or how humans should live as a part of it.

Thankfully, we are not left unaided in this endeavor. Through scripture, God’s nature and purposes are described in terms of His creation. In order to understand the attributes of God, who is unseen, scripture makes reference to things that we can see. In the Old Testament, God is repeatedly described using examples of the things he has done. Creation and biblical history thus work together. Tangible clues drawn from creation itself, as well as from the history of the people of Israel, inform us meaningfully, even if only partially. The prophet Isaiah writes,

*Who has measured the waters in the
hollow of his hand
and marked off the heavens with a span,
enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure
and weighed the mountains in scales
and the hills in a balance?
Who has measured the Spirit of the Lord,
or what man shows him his counsel?
(Isaiah 40:12-13)*

This rhetorical questioning emphasizes the power of God in creation. Isaiah speaks in terms that man can understand to emphasize the unthinkable power of God. For if it is the case that He has created the world, how can anyone presume to know better than the Lord? The appeal to God’s power over creation directs us to visible evidence of the invisible nature of God.

In Isaiah chapter 40, the prophet speaks to the Israelites in their future captivity in Babylon. The words “Comfort, comfort my people” begin the chapter, which were made famous as the first line of Handel’s Christmas oratorio Messiah. The power of God expressed in the verses above might be seen in any other context as a justification for God’s judgment. Indeed, God does use His power over earthly rulers to punish Israel for its disobedience, but the context of this remark indicates that it is not a pretext for divine judgment. Instead, it is a promise of God’s power to redeem His people. The verses above act as a reminder to the afflicted that God has the power to redeem them from their suffering.



I wish to draw two lessons from this passage. First, the power of God is visible in the things He has created. The God who measured the mountains in scales must also have power over the whole of creation, including mankind. This is one of the most fundamental implications of Genesis 1:1. This is a tremendous source of hope for the Israelites, for this assures them that no worldly army can overpower the God they serve. But it also means that disobedience in the face of God will be met with the power of His judgment.

Second, and fortunately for us, there is another side to understanding God through his creation. God uses His tremendous power first revealed in creation for the redemption of all He has made. The people of Israel disobeyed God’s commandments, and they brought His righteous judgment upon themselves. However, God did not abandon them to their enemies forever. Instead, He proclaims the redemption of His people in Isaiah 44:

*Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it;
shout, O depths of the earth;
break forth into singing, O mountains,
O forest, and every tree in it!*

*For the Lord has redeemed Jacob
and will be glorified in Jacob.
24 Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer,
who formed you from the womb:
I am the Lord, who made all things,
who alone stretched out the heavens,
who spread out the earth by myself.*

Notice how this passage connects the portrayal of God as creator and God as redeemer. Isaiah says that God has not only formed us in the womb, but has also created the heavens and the earth. Even with this infinite power, he has redeemed His people Israel out of the hands of their enemies. Indeed, these two roles are so interwoven that God the creator cannot be understood apart from His role as redeemer.

This has tremendous implications in considering our own place within creation. The history of mankind bears witness to the sinfulness which it has borne since its very first generation. Genesis 3 gives the account of Adam and Eve, the first humans of God’s creation, and also the first to sin against their maker. Upon their act of disobedience, God’s good creation became tainted by the evil introduced into it by mankind. The rest of the Old Testament reveals

the effects of this sin upon the earth, specifically within the history of the nation of Israel.

Despite the apparent hopelessness of this situation, we can still find hope within these stories of Israel's history. For God made His power known to the exiles by appealing to the power we can witness in creation. By this power, they are assured that their redemption will come soon. This is the hope in the story, and it is the same source of hope we all have for the redemption of all nations of the earth.

God did not abandon Israel in its sinfulness, and neither has he abandoned his creation generally, nor mankind specifically. In His greatest show of authority over creation, he took on human flesh and entered into creation in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. In a stunning reversal of roles, the God who created the earth and the stars took upon Himself the weakness of human flesh. This was done so that we might see more clearly His purpose in creation.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. Whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.
(Colossians 1:15-17)

This establishes Christ as the ultimate revelation of God to mankind. For in the Incarnation, the Creator took upon Himself the mantle of creation. The One in whom all things hold together has walked the earth, making his testimony known to the whole of mankind. In a paradoxical way, this humbling resulted in the revelation of God's ultimate power over creation. Paul writes of Jesus in Philippians 2,

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name ...

Death by crucifixion is no obvious display of divine strength. In Jesus' anguished last breaths on the cross, there seems to be no indication that this should grant him the exaltation that Paul speaks of. However, it is in this ultimate weakness that God's greatest victory is revealed. For after three days in the grave, Christ rose from the dead. In this moment,

God established His power over death. Just as God proved His power over the oppressors of Israel, the resurrection has proven His power to redeem mankind from the tyranny of death.

The Bible continually portrays creation not only as a past event, but a present reality continuing to testify to its Creator. By completing His redemptive work through the flesh of Jesus Christ, our own salvation becomes just as real and visible as the world we live in. However, the redemption of creation is not complete.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pain of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:22-23)

The redemptive work of Christ has been completed through the resurrection, but we still await the day that it will be fully revealed in the healing of creation. Since we are the "firstfruits of the spirit," we are united in our fallen nature with all of creation. However, Christ has united the perfection of human nature with the original goodness of creation in his redemptive act of death and resurrection. In doing so, he has given us the promise of a restored life for mankind and creation as a whole.

This promise reveals to us the hope that we have in our own lives. For although we yearn in brokenness with all creation, God has revealed His commitment to us as our redeemer. This allows us to live with faith in the power of God to extend His love to us, and save us from our present condition. With an eye to past failures and looking forward to future redemption, we are assured that the groans of creation will at last be satisfied by God, who has proven his power to redeem.

If you hear no response to your own personal groanings, I commend to you the advice of Israel's greatest King, David:

I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
(Psalm 121: 1-2.)

A Tree Planted by the Water

June Woo, Bowdoin Class of 2016

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit." (Jeremiah 17:5, 7-8 ESV)

Creation reveals the world as it was meant to be, through the world as it is. The language that forms that connection is apparent in the many ways that the scriptures teach this in terms of that. In the passage quoted here, the man who trusts in his creator is like a tree planted by the water. When Job is without confidence in the future, he says, "He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone, and my hope has he pulled up like a tree." (Job 19:10) David describes the righteous man with the same metaphor; he also is "like a tree planted by streams of water." (Psalm 1:3)

In this passage, the issue is one of confidence. I have always admired people with confidence. Those who are not afraid of what others think of them or how they are viewed. Those who voice their thoughts and opinions even if they may be contrary to what others think or believe. Those who are so comfortable in their own skin that they can laugh at themselves rather than getting defensive or feeling that they need to prove themselves in some way.

In contrast to what I admired, I was a very shy person growing up. My teacher's note on my second grade report card read "needs to talk more". Being shy and lacking confidence can be two different things, but I was shy in part because I lacked confidence. When I moved to the United States as a five-year-old, I began school without knowing how to speak English. It took me a while to open up, and even after learning English, I remained shy. In fact, I still don't like talking in class, and if I am honest with myself, it's because I don't feel that I have anything of value to say, and I don't want to say something and appear ignorant. My dislike of talking in class largely resides in my concern for what others will think of me. But slowly I'm learning to become more confident.

I've realized that self-confidence doesn't come from the self, but it comes from placing my confidence outside of myself. When I place my confidence in my own abilities, how well I do in school or how well I can play a sport, this confidence undoubtedly breaks at some point. A bad mark on a paper or a lost game can affect my confidence, because it resides in my temporal identity as a well-performing student or athlete. But when I place my confidence in Christ, I am confident in who He has made me to be. How well I perform or how well I am perceived doesn't affect my eternal identity in Christ.

It's a quiet confidence that can't be arrogant because it's not about anything that I am or anything that I do, but about who He is and what He has done for me. It's a confidence that I work towards every day.

I have found a reason to be confident, because Jesus considered me worthy that He willingly died in my place on the cross so that I could live. If the creator of the universe values me so much, I can't treat myself as if I were worthless and reject the love that He has showered on me. But at the same time, I can't be proud or conceited because it is my sin that caused Jesus' death. It's not that I was sinless, but God made me sinless through faith, sending His only son to die on behalf of my sins. But Jesus' righteousness outweighed my sins, as He conquered death and rose again, giving me yet another reason to be confident; He will come back one day and set right all of the suffering and brokenness in the world.

I can be confident because a better future awaits, and those who trust in the Lord will be richly rewarded.

For me, this is a confidence that can't be shattered, because it does not stem from my own fluctuating abilities, traits, present circumstances, or how I am perceived. It is rather rooted in an all-powerful, unchanging, and faithful God. A God who never fails me, a God who loves me and provides for me. Because of Him, I can be confident, like a tree planted by the water.

The Conflict that Grew Out of a Casual Conversation

Robert Gregory, InterVarsity Staff at Bowdoin College

Genesis 3.1(b) *He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'"*

Genesis 3.14-15 *The LORD God said to the serpent:*

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

A casual conversation between the woman and a crafty, but merely created, serpent, is the Biblical account for the origins of human conflict. And it is of greatest importance to know why.

The serpent was aiming directly at Eve's desires, adding to them a desire to be like the Creator rather than dependent on Him. Before the temptation, Eve

possessed no such desire to be like God. Created in the image of God, the temptation awoke in Eve a desire for what she did not have, a desire she did not need for life in the garden. That is how temptation works.

Eve miscalculated her capacity to resist the temptation to live her life in the garden independently of God who created her. With the casual question, "Did God actually say ...?" the serpent pried open the doors of temptation, and Eve alone could not close them. God would have to do that for her.

God's first promise to help Eve was heard in His judicial verdict pronounced on the serpent, quoted above. The first surprise is that this promise to Eve would be embedded in a sentence given the

serpent. The divine initiative expressed in the "I will ..." of this first gospel pronouncement in the Holy Scriptures has to do in the first instance not with an offer of peace, but with a promise to make enmity or hostility between these new friends. The second surprise is that Eve and Adam were third-party beneficiaries of God's judgment on the serpent. God would put hostility where it was absent, and the hostility that God would interpose between Eve and the serpent, according to this promise, would descend to her offspring and his offspring.

God's promise to invest divine anger, animosity and hostility is the unexpected beginning of God's covenant with creation that Christians call the *offer of the Gospel*. This offer, in its most basic terms, has to do with enmity, the woman, and some mutual bruising between these antagonists. In the study of the creation texts of the Bible, we are able to discern the outlines of what it means to live as creatures made in the image of the Creator, of life in an ordered universe, lived within the norms offered by a God who redeems everything that he has made.

In this essay we are looking at the casual alliance that the woman Eve established with the serpent. Why should an alliance so easily entered prove so difficult to exit voluntarily? Why shouldn't Eve, by her free will, be able to honor the single negative command God gave to Adam to limit life in the garden? Surely God's rich provision for Eve and Adam in the garden setting provided them more than adequate grounds and motive to honor that command.

"You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Genesis 2.16-17

The difficulty we have with grasping disordered desire is in reconciling that with a world of "created goods" that God called good in his 6th day pronouncement.

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Genesis 1.31

If the creation is good, how can human desires for it be wrong?



Martin Luther described Eve's disordered desires as a self-enclosure "*incurvatus in se*." Oxford Professor of Ethics Oliver O'Donovan explains, that rather than accepting the world of creation as good, Eve chose to "divide the good world God has made into two "worlds", one good and the other evil, and we make our own contingent perspectives the criterion for the division. And this gives a new, negative sense to the term "world", which we have hitherto spoken of positively as God's creation. This negative sense is characteristic of the New Testament, and points to the reality a constructed world, a world of our own imagination, pitched over against the created world and in opposition to it." (New College Lecture Series, 2007, Lecture 2-Admiring, Professor Oliver O'Donovan)

The argument from Genesis 3 is that God has set himself in opposition to the imaginary world. That is a fundamental antagonism that God announced in our beginning text. What do we learn from this principle?

Observation One: For the *free will* of Eve (and Adam) acting independent of their creator, it seems the direct command of God alone was not sufficient inducement to obedience. Eve failed to resist the temptation by free will alone. Indeed, it was in the nature of the temptation that she ventured to exercise her free will independent of God and his ordering words. The temptation, by implication, was: “figure it out for yourself Eve, you do not need God to be wise.” Eve foolishly accepted the serpent’s idea of life without limits. This is the faint caricature that passes too easily as true freedom.

In her alliance with the serpent, the woman lost her innocence, and gained an understanding of evil unnecessary for her life in the garden. The *free will* of the woman, examined in light of the Apostle Paul’s analysis in Romans 1, was suppressing the truth she was created to disclose in acts of obedience to her maker. If there would be hostility between the serpent and the woman, God himself would have to create it. Friendship with the serpent was a casual alliance which could be dissolved only by a force greater than Eve possessed.

Observation Two: The divine plan to implant hostility and antagonism into Eve’s new-found friendship with evil is the foundation to God’s covenant response to it. Demands for justice are not in short supply these days. But the Old Testament prophet understood that justice and divine anger toward evil were paired. *Correct me, O LORD, but in justice; not in your anger, lest you bring me to nothing.* Jeremiah 10:24. God promised to invest in Eve’s relationship with the serpent an enmity or antagonism where it did not exist. The response of God to evil is one of justice, and the terms of justice belong to God alone. As Isaiah wrote:

*Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD,
or what man shows him his counsel?
Whom did he consult,
and who made him understand?
Who taught him the path of justice,
and taught him knowledge,
and showed him the way of understanding?
(Isaiah 40.13-14)*

A careful reading of Genesis 3 provides an understanding of the long-term implications of the moral and spiritual breach between the first human pair and their Maker. The scriptures unfold the rest

of the history of human sin at its own pace. The promise expressed in terms of judgment would be followed by many unpleasant consequences: warfare, bruising, punishment and death.

Observation three. God promised to make two humanities, *your offspring* and *her offspring*. Jesus spoke clearly about these things in the gospel of John:

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.” John 8.44-47

The Apostle John elaborated on the Master’s teaching about this:

Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.
1 John 3.7-10.

It is in the context of these teachings that we better understand the implied promise of God in Genesis 3.15 to separate humanity on the terms of this God-ordained hostility. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, says John, and this is the fulfillment of the Genesis 3.15 promise of enmity and hostility, not only between the woman and the serpent, but between his seed and her seed.

We are aiming for the truth about matters that go beyond human understanding when we consider the divine purposes for allowing evil and sin to taint the

entire human race. It is tempting to let our arrows of conjecture fly and then rush to paint the bull’s eye around them to prove that we hit the target. We learn from the creation narrative that temptation urged Eve to distance herself from God’s word. The way Jesus overcame temptation was by remembering and relying upon the written word. Jesus said,

“It is written ...” Matthew 4.4.

Stanley Hauerwas writing in *First Things* (May 1995) reminds us that Christians cannot be Christians without enemies. The enemies peculiar to Christians, those who are the “offspring” of the woman, are only understandable in the light of the rest of the scriptures that make these matters plain. Many of our prayers to be relieved of conflict are undoubtedly pleas for God to relieve us of conflict he has created for us. A greater understanding of the place of conflict and having the right enemies is needed. Quoting Hauerwas:

Our difficulty is not that we have conflicts, but that as modern people we have not had the courage to force the conflicts we ought to have had. Instead, we have comforted ourselves with the ideology of pluralism, forgetting that pluralism is the peace treaty left over from past wars that now benefits the victors of those wars.

One hopes that God is using this time to remind the Church that Christianity is unintelligible without enemies. Indeed, the whole point of Christianity is to produce the right kind of enemies.

The last enemy to be destroyed, according to St. Paul, is death itself (1 Corinthians 15.26). The offspring of the promise, according to Paul’s letter to the Galatian church, is Christ himself (Galatians 3.16). That this was also Jesus’s understanding may be evident in the way he referred to his own mother, Mary, as “woman.” Twice in the Gospel of John, Jesus spoke to his mother and called her “woman”—not mother, just “woman.” Jesus refers to his mother as “woman”, both in the first miracle of making water from wine (John 2.4) and later as he speaks to her from the cross (John 19.26). There is no shortage of commentators who find in these words a measure of disrespect and rudeness that would not be expected from the Son of God.

The life was one of conflict. It was a life lived among enemies who would nail him to a Roman cross. Could it be that Jesus recognized in his mother Mary the imminent fulfillment of the promise of an “offspring of the woman” we read of in Genesis 3.15? And that this promise was realized in Christ himself as the offspring of *this* woman? The conflict ends with the death of death itself.

Hebrews 2.14 says it this way:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.

That is the gospel. God fulfilled in the seed of the woman the promised enmity to destroy the one who had the power over death. The life of the Savior was lived with enemies, conflict, hostility, and bruising. The final surprise, however, is that the anger of God falls not on all rebel humanity, but his only son Jesus.

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

Isaiah 53:5



My Testimony

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God is a sensitive topic for most people. Growing up in Texas, it never seemed that way. At home, there are just as many people who genuinely use the phrases, “God bless you,” or even, “The Lord is testing me,” as there are people who use them flippantly. Since coming to Bowdoin, I’ve only ever heard them used sarcastically, and I’ve been guilty of making light of religion myself. But, my aversion to religion started before coming here. In high school, I surrounded myself with people who loved to hate the concept of God. I joined the debate team and reveled in a community that worshiped atheist philosophy. I looked forward to having more of that at Bowdoin where I felt that I could freely question religion and God without backlash. Bowdoin was a gateway to the rest of the world, and I was sure there was more truth out there than Christianity.

I think part of my insistence on atheism was a desire to not conform to the world I was living in. I like independence, and I couldn’t stand being told what to do and what to believe. I had grown up passively going to church, because my grandparents

were devout Christians. It was just something my family did. I remember my grandfather calling me to his room to pray over me a few weeks before he passed away. He wept and begged God to bless me with faith, but all I could respond with was bewilderment at a show of desperation I had never seen in him before. I couldn’t make myself believe for anyone’s sake. As soon as I didn’t have to go to church anymore, I stopped. I thought my convictions of equality and justice and the modern church’s reactions to issues like homosexuality and women’s rights were at odds by definition, and if I had to choose, my conscience forced me to choose equality and justice. In my teenage determination to champion all social movements, I blindly followed the current of culture and never stopped to hear the other side out.

For a few years I had a huge attachment to my sense of self. It was all about me. I wanted to do well in school, succeed, be independent, and have fun—all for my own sake. It worked out well for a while. I have unforgettable memories from high school, and

I’ve met amazing people and had amazing experiences during my first two years at Bowdoin. I was totally fine. I wasn’t searching for a religion to fix my life, but I still had questions; I always had a gnawing feeling that there was something there I didn’t quite understand. I had a sustained curiosity about Christianity that would resurface time to time, but like many non-believers, I couldn’t understand how Christians could trust in a God they couldn’t see or hear. Even worse to me was the hypocrisy of setting a moral standard even they couldn’t meet. I couldn’t rationalize it in my head, so I just ignored Him. But, even when I rejected Him over and over again, missing call after call, His steadfast love endured.



Early last semester, a chance conversation with a Christian friend led to an invitation to the Joseph and Alice McKeen Study Center at Bowdoin. I came with clenched fists, expecting to hate what I heard but also wondering what would happen if I didn’t. While I didn’t immediately get perfect answers, I got enough to make me doubt whether I knew as much as I thought I did and to further spark my curiosity. Soon, I found myself at a Bible study on Ephesians 2:4-10, which says,

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no

one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

These are the words that saved me. I had never really read the Bible before. I had learned many of the stories, but reading the verses of Ephesians directly was entirely different.

I can’t explain what changed in me except that I finally felt the love of God. My eyes were opened to the fact that the Christian life is not about doing good things and being a good person in order to earn God’s favor. No one is worthy. That’s the point. We had to be redeemed, and who could redeem us but our Creator. A relationship with God is not a vending machine. You don’t put money in and automatically get what you pay for. We don’t even have money. All of us are broke and penniless. We don’t pray, do good deeds, and expect salvation. We have been graced with salvation. I have been graced with salvation. It doesn’t come for free, though. Jesus is the one who paid for my sins with his blood, and it is my faith in that fact that saves me.

Jesus was also the answer to my other looming misunderstanding about God. It frustrated me that God would ask us to trust in him without making himself obvious to us. If we can't see or hear him, how can we be expected to know he's there? Ephesians 3 told me that He did make Himself obvious to us. Paul says in verses 8-12,

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

What more could I ask? Jesus coming as a man was God revealing himself to us and showing us his true nature. He was literally a human that could be seen and heard. God came to us. He sought after us. All we have to do is open our eyes and turn to him. The crushing magnitude of this broke the hardness in my heart. How great Jesus' love must be for him to come and dirty his hands with this cold world we live in. Just because I've never seen a love like that anywhere else, that doesn't mean it doesn't exist. If anyone could have the capacity to love like that, it would be God. The simplicity of it blew me away. In my rebellion, I was complicating a plain truth.

While at first it seemed like serendipity brought me to God, my situation feels too ideal to be chance. There have been countless occasions when I could have picked up a Bible or taken a minute to search Google for explanations. Instead, He made it so that I would read the Ephesians verses the first time I came to Bible study here. He made it so that I would cross paths with mentors who could answer my questions and direct me to the Scripture I needed to read.

I have never before had the opportunity to study Scripture with the intensity of an academic discipline as I do here at a college study center. After coming to faith, my mom told me she had been praying that I would have a friend who would invite me to go to church with them. I believe this was God's way of

answering that prayer. Looking back and seeing that in context of my grandfather's prayer for my faith, I see that God truly does answer prayers, and nothing has been a coincidence.

The hardest part about explaining my faith has been explaining what has changed. It doesn't look like much has happened. I'm still a student at Bowdoin. I still have the same friends. I look the same. But, inside, my world has been turned upside down in a way I don't think I can overstate. All my priorities have changed, and now everything is about God. It actually feels like falling in love. Everything I do feels different because I'm living for God. I think about Him all the time. I want to be the kind of person He would want me to be. He has given me a new heart to see temptation for what it is. I'll never be perfect at it—in fact I'll always be pretty bad at it—but He is gracing me with the ability to be better at following him.

The last semester has been like a feast. It was only after meeting Jesus that I realized I was starved of the Word, and I've been eating up every bit of Scripture I can find. All of it has spoken to me and revealed that I've been rejecting the very answers I've been seeking. Christianity is not at odds with equality and justice. I was remembering isolated examples of Christians showing their imperfect humanity. All are equal before God, and God is pure justice. My conscience was not wrong to choose equality and justice, but it was missing the most important piece: The source of equality, justice, and my conscience is God. I didn't need a religion to structure my life, and a religion is not what I'm walking into. This is between God and me, independent of the church. I know I don't understand all the details and minutia of Scripture, and I may never understand all of it. But, I've accepted the basic truths that I think I must have subconsciously known my whole life. God is my Creator, and Jesus is my redeemer. It is truly a gift that God has given me. I ran from Him, but He said, "You are mine." I forgot about my grandfather's prayer for years, but God didn't. I'm sure there will be seasons in my life when I stray from Him, but, as He has already proven to me He will keep me close.



Massachusetts Hall



Massachusetts Hall is the oldest building on the Bowdoin Campus. Joseph and Alice McKeen moved into Massachusetts Hall and took up residence upon Mr. McKeen becoming the first president of Bowdoin College in the fall of 1802.