

the LORD has a case  
**FOR / AGAINST**  
his people.

**AGATHOS**

*a journal of christian thought at bowdoin college*

# AGATHOS

(n.) whatever is true, honorable  
just, pure, admirable  
excellent  
praiseworthy

whatever is good

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# DEAR READER,

In the fall semester of 2015, Bowdoin College held its first campus-wide “teach-in” in over 30 years. In response to student demands for more dialogue on issues of social justice, the college convened panels and organized performances to address issues such as climate change, racism, and sexism, and to explain how these issues intersect to perpetuate injustice. Although this was only a one-time event, it is representative of a trend at Bowdoin and colleges across the country of students becoming more vocal and active in a fight to remedy the injustices they perceive in the world around them.

In this second volume of the Bowdoin Agathos, we will also be focusing our attention on justice. But this is not primarily a response to recent campus agitations, nor is it only an attempt to consciously address any particular issue occupying the attention of our campus. Our focus on justice stems from weekly Bible studies at the Joseph and Alice McKeen Christian Study Center, where sustained attention to God’s Word has led us to consider more deeply how the Gospel shapes our understanding of justice. Last year’s study of creation — the results of which can be found in the first volume of the Agathos — prompted us to think about how the structure of God’s creation orders our lives and makes our actions intelligible within the Biblical narrative of God’s plan of creation, redemption, and new creation. With this firm ground to stand upon, we embarked upon a study of how justice figures into this plan, and how we as disciples of Christ are called to do justice in a world created by God, disfigured by sin, and transformed by the good news of Jesus Christ.

Our present concern for justice is therefore not based upon the shifting sands of campus culture, but is grounded in the unchanging witness of the Gospel. Yet even as we are instructed to place our hope in the good news proclaimed by Christ, perennial questions about the nature of justice continue to challenge us to wrestle with its complexities. What we present to you in this issue is our collective attempt at communicating just a few of the ways we have come to better understand justice through a sustained study of God’s word. What we have to say in the following articles will not answer every question, and may in fact raise more questions than we can answer, but it is our hope that each contribution will lead to a deeper understanding of how a Biblically-informed conception of justice can transform our lives and the communities in which we live.

Sincerely,

Ryan Ward ‘17 and Sam Swain ‘18, Editors-in-Chief

# DO NOT PREACHETH

Mark T. Pascut | 10 years old

*The word of the Lord that cometh to Micah of Moresheth  
In the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judath*

**Micah**

Doom to those who hast devised iniquity and hast worked evil upon their beds!  
By the light of morning they dost it, because in their power ‘tis.  
Why dost ye covet fields and seize them?  
Ye deprive men of their home and inheritance with filthy arrogance!

**Micbaal**

‘Tis no time for judgment, ye villager.  
Mind thine own way and go back to where thou dost stay.

**Micah**

God himself proclaimeth: ‘Tis I myself art devising doom!  
Ye will no longer be able to go about arrogantly, forth it will be an evil time for ye.  
‘Tis I unchangeable in mine decree.

**Micbaal**

Do not preacheth! Nay! Ye mustn’t preacheth of such things!  
We have no fear. Disgrace won’t appear.  
Doth not Yahweh aideth those who aid themselves?

**Micah**

Nay, Sir! Thou hate the good and love the evil,  
‘Tis for thou to know judgment.  
O brother, what doth the Lord require of ye?  
Dost bring justice, dost love kindness.  
Dost walk humbly with God.

**Micbaal**

Well, villager, people walk with many gods. Worship freely!

**Micah**

But we walk with the Almighty God who is like none other  
Forever and ever, we shall walk.

Mark T. Pascut, 10 years old

Homeschooled

Brunswick ME

Mark’s favorite subject in school is Latin.

# CAN YOU LIVE WITH JUSTICE?

Alexandra Sadler | 16

This may seem, at first, like a throwaway question. Of course you almost certainly desire justice—even demand it. And how could you not, when faced with a world in which the oppression of your loved ones and fellow man seems an almost inescapable reality? What the question asks, however, is not whether you desire justice, but whether you can live with the consequences of it. Have you really sat down and grappled with your vision of justice and let it play out to its logical conclusion? Do you know exactly what it is you are demanding? Looking back in time at the Jewish community before and during the life of Jesus provides us with a cautionary example that has important implications for our own struggle with justice.

The Jewish people at the time of Jesus are not so different from ourselves and from modern heroes of social justice. They too were consumed by a desire for justice to be brought down upon their oppressors. This is clear in their yearning for the arrival of the Messiah, who would bring down the Lord's judgment. In the book of Micah, the narrator describes a world ravaged by sin and evil, in which "the godly has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among mankind" (Micah 7:2). Israel is at the mercy of its enemies, and the narrator longs for God to execute judgment, vindicating his own sin (v. 9) but trampling his people's oppressors underfoot "like the mire of the streets" and forcing them to "lick the dust like a serpent" (v. 10, 17).

The messianic figure anticipated by the Jewish people was thus expected to be militaristic and violent in nature, personally bringing down this crushing justice. The star of Jacob and scepter of Israel foretold in the book of Numbers would "crush the forehead of Moab" and "break down all the sons of Sheth"; he would "exercise dominion" and "destroy the survivors of cities" (Numbers 24:17-19). In Psalm

2, the Lord declares that his decree for the Messiah is that he will break the kings and rulers of the earth "with a rod of iron" and "dash them to pieces like pottery" (Psalm 2:9). He is described in Psalm 89 as a "warrior" (v. 19) and in Psalm 110 as the one who will

**The messianic figure anticipated by the Jewish people was thus expected to be militaristic and violent in nature, personally bringing down this crushing justice.**

"judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth" (v. 6).

Given the nature of these expectations, it makes sense that messianic movements in the times before and after Jesus were dominated by militaristic figures purporting to liberate the people of God through their superior physical strength and leadership in armed combat. Flavius Josephus, a prominent first-century Jewish historian, outlines in his renowned text, *Antiquities of the Jews*, a series of messianic movements, the majority of which are dominated by militarism and an attempt to conquer the Roman army. Athronges, for example, was admired for his "tall" stature and "strong hands" and named himself king and Messiah, leading a number of Jewish people in an unsuccessful rebellion against the Roman army (Josephus, *Antiq.*, 17:278). Judas of Galilee "exhorted the nation to assert their liberty" by drawing them into war after war and Simon bar Giora similarly launched an attack upon the Romans (Josephus, *Antiq.*, 18:4-7; *The Jewish War*, 2:521). For these self-proclaimed messianic figures to gain as much popularity as they did, it is evident that people not only wanted, but expected, a warrior.

The Jewish vision of justice at this time was so fixated on physical and violent liberation that the message of the Scriptures about the Messiah's demeanor and purpose became somewhat obscured. The prophecies of Isaiah 53, in particular, paint a contrary picture, describing the Messiah as a figure with "no beauty or majesty to attract us to him" and "nothing in his appearance that we should desire him," which would not indicate a particularly forceful or warlike stature (v. 2). Moreover, the Messiah is prophesied to

suffer (v. 3), to be "crushed for our iniquities" (v. 5), to be "oppressed and afflicted" and "led like a lamb to the slaughter" (v. 7). It is no wonder they could not reconcile the figure of Jesus with their expectations of the Messiah. Even Jesus' disciples, the first Christians, struggled to comprehend Jesus' mission of suffering, death and resurrection, because of their skewed expectations (John 20:9; Luke 18:34; Mark 8:32). Yet Jesus was indeed a fulfillment of these prophecies, as is evident in his crucifixion and in his proclamation to the disciples that "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

The selectivity of Jewish messianic expectation is particularly apparent in the Targums, which are early interpretive translations of the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic for a Jewish audience. The Targums have been known to modify, at times, the original meaning of the Hebrew texts to serve the purposes of the translator and this is apparent in the Targums' rendering of Isaiah 53, wherein messianic expectations of a crushing leader override Isaiah's prophecies of the Messiah's meekness and suffering. Verse 2, for example, which describes Jesus' inconspicuous appearance, reads in the Targums: "His face shall not be the face of a common person, neither His fear the fear of a commoner; but a holy brightness shall be His brightness, that every one who sees Him shall contemplate Him" (Tg. Isaiah 53:2). Verse 4 is also completely altered to portray the Messiah as a crushing leader, shifting from "we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted" to "we are considered crushed, smitten of the Lord, and afflicted" (Tg. Isaiah 53:4). Verse 7 provides a further example, with the phrase, "He was led like a lamb to the slaughter," becoming "He shall deliver over the mighty of the nations as a lamb to the slaughter" (Tg. Isaiah 53:7).

N.T. Wright, former canon theologian of Westminster Abbey and Bishop of Durham, would argue that the Jewish messianic expectation stems from their historical experience of God's justice, which he outlines in his book, *Evil and the Justice of God*. The pattern of God's acts of justice within the Jewish community is exemplified by his rescuing of the Israelites from their oppressors in a very tangible sense, as in their liberation from the Egyptians in the book of Exodus. Therefore, the Jewish expectation was that the Messiah would liberate them from their immediate persecutors—the

Romans—in a literal sense. What was neglected was the idea that the Messiah's mission was one of complete justice. In Matthew 10, Jesus announced to his disciples, "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). Jesus' sword is directed at the sinners and the unrepentant, as anticipated—but where it differs from Jewish expectations is that Jesus did not bring justice down upon any specific group of people, but upon evil itself, which resides within all of us. This is where the Jewish story becomes particularly applicable to our own struggle with justice.

In desiring a Messiah that would bring down the kind of king-crushing, militaristic justice they anticipated, the Jews were drawing a line of safety around themselves as God's chosen people and demanding that justice be brought down upon their oppressors. But John the Baptist warns: "do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Luke 3:8-9). In other words, no individual or group of people will be spared the axe of judgement, for as N. T. Wright comments, "the line between good and evil runs not between 'us' and 'them' but through every individual and every society" (*Evil and the Justice of God*, 43). If we demand, as the Jews did, that crushing justice be brought down upon evil, we must quake for ourselves, as the beam of justice must necessarily be pointed at aspects of our own souls. As the old saying goes: be careful what you wish for.

Fortunately, Jesus provided a far more perfect vision of justice than the one the Hebrews during the time of Jesus (or we) could have envisioned. He didn't simply mete out the penalties of evil. He defeated evil. He provided for our salvation, rescuing us from the consequences of a judgment that would leave every one of us destroyed.

**If we demand, as the Jews did, that crushing justice be brought down upon evil, we must quake for ourselves, as the beam of justice must necessarily be pointed at aspects of our own souls.**

*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might*

*be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1-4)*

This leads us once again to the question: can you live with your version of justice? Consider the classic question: if you were granted the opportunity to kill Hitler, would you take it? Now, substitute Hitler for any contemporary force of oppression. If given the chance, would you follow your desire for justice to its logical conclusion? And would you be willing for someone to enact your vision of justice upon yourself if you became the perpetrator? If you don't have a straight answer to this, perhaps it is time you sat down and thought it out. Because if we are going to demand justice, we must have a clear understanding of its implications, both for others and for ourselves.



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*While averse to conflict, Alex has a particular skill for seeing tensions in the world.*

*Bear with me a little longer and I will show you  
that there is more to be said in God's behalf.*

*I get my knowledge from afar;*

*I will ascribe justice to my Maker.*

*Be assured that my words are not false;  
one who has perfect knowledge is with you.*

*God is mighty, but despises no one;  
he is mighty, and firm in his purpose.*

*He does not keep the wicked alive  
but gives the afflicted their rights.*

*He does not take his eyes off the righteous;  
he enthrones them with kings  
and exalts them forever.*

*Job 36:2-7*

My dear friend,

Evil is something that can be identified. I know you may be able to feel it and recognize it, but you must see that it can also be universally named. This year you've daily felt the pressure of racial tension on campus, of the fear of personal safety in the surrounding neighborhood after cases of assault, and all of this on top of your own host of personal heartbreaks and trials that keep you awake at night. In the midst of this, I watched you struggle to account for the world as you saw it unfold before your eyes. The intensity of evil in the air seemed inconceivable to you.

Evil are the things and actions that are not good, and good is the quality and character of God, and all things bearing his name. There can be no grey; something is either of God or it is not. When you forget this, or don't fully appreciate it, you lose the power to name things as they are. When you encounter a threatening reality but have no vocabulary or understanding to reckon with it, the evil only grows in its fearfulness and power. It's sort of like a fear of big looming spaces overhead. It's the unknown which strikes terror into your heart; the rafters of the tall chapel ceiling could hold good, ill, or nothing at all. Of course, the ability to name evil only relieves you of the fear of the unknown. If you can in fact identify that a fire-breathing dragon had perched itself in the rafters above, you are still left with a fire-breathing dragon against which you are powerless.

The wonderful reality that God's goodness gives definition to the deficiency that is evil, not only supplies us with a moral order that can distinguish one from the other, but also provides us with an Authority who has complete sovereignty over it. "I ascribe justice to my Maker." But God is more than a moral dictionary; he is the Creator. The things made by the Creator are good and his order is just. He does not simply arbitrarily assign value. He calls his creation "good" because that is its intrinsic quality. Good is creation's intrinsic quality because it comes from him - God can only make good things. Anything other is a manipulation, a lesser derivative of the good things God has made. But Good (read: God) is higher and therefore ultimately more powerful than evil.

Furthermore, not only does God have this intrinsic power over the dark, but he gave us freedom from it as Jesus broke the bonds of death in his resurrection.

This is the hope I have in the face of darkness: evil is already in its place. It is not its own authority in the way that God is. There is no unconcluded struggle between two equal powers of Good and Evil. God in his divinity has always been more powerful than evil; Christ in his humanity invites us to enter into that victory once and for all. Obviously, there is still darkness in this world. The certainty of darkness' defeat is not yet manifest in this world that has already been broken into a million pieces. But you can be certain that God is authoritative over evil, and he has promised that all will be set right. Do not lose heart! Do not turn your eyes away from the broken things around you in discouragement! Suffering will not last and all darkness will come to an end. "Be assured that my words are not false; the one who has perfect knowledge is with you."

With Hope,

Amanda

# JUSTICE AND AUTHORITY

## *The Political Power of the Gospel*

Ryan Ward | 17

The idea that Christianity, and religion in general, is necessarily antithetical to the practice of political authority has enshrined itself as a commonplace in the much-cited "wall of separation" between church and state, which functions as an accepted cornerstone of our constitutional order. In liberal political theory, religion may have its own set of goods which it seeks within its own sphere, but the goods of political life belong wholly to the secular sphere which cannot allow judgment based upon religious principles not accepted by the political community as a whole. This separation is based upon the idea that political authority is a neutral arbiter of individually-held natural rights, which judges claims of right and wrong without recourse to any particular vision of political life that would privilege one person or group above another.

I do not wish to argue for or against the merits of this particular theory, but I do want to call attention to some issues that it raises, particularly with respect to our ideas of justice. Justice has long been recognized as a proper goal of political life, needed to ensure social harmony and the fulfillment of basic human needs. The definition of justice has been a point of contention for as long as humans have been theorizing about politics, but through all the debates, there has been agreement at least on the idea that justice is a political necessity. Whether justice is a virtue concerned with the proper ordering of natural goods (Aristotle), an artificial virtue originating in society for the protection and distribution of property (Hume), or just a basic principle of fairness in a free and equal society (Rawls), it always satisfies a need for social cohesion and has the good of society as its end.

But according to Christian doctrine, justice is much more than a political necessity that maintains acceptable social order. Justice is an attribute of God in his dealings with mankind, and is a fundamental aspect of his character as revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Christians, we are called to do justice according to God's command, and this is where we run into problems with modern conceptions of political authority. For if justice is properly

a political good which belongs in the secular political realm, then whatever we as Christians have to say about it may be good for us individually, but cannot be allowed to achieve social transformation in a pluralistic society. This has fostered the idea that political authority is necessarily opposed to divine authority, and that the former is the only sound basis upon which justice can be achieved in our political community. But I will argue that Christianity can overcome the surface-level conflict between political and divine authority by appealing to the Gospel proclaimed through Christ's death and resurrection.

### Justice in Ancient Israel

To begin with, it will be helpful to note that this problem is not unique to 21st century American society. In Christianity, this tension goes all the way back to the time of Jesus, when 1st century Palestine was subject to Roman rule and when the question of

...justice is much more than a political necessity that maintains acceptable social order.

how one could obey God's authority as a Roman citizen was very much relevant. Jesus' ministry took place in this context, and it is unsurprising that the issue came up

on occasion, most prominently when the Pharisees questioned Jesus on whether it was right to pay taxes to Caesar according to Jewish law (Mark 12:14). In his answer, Jesus avoided the condemnation which would have fallen on him for both denying Caesar's authority and for denying the authority of God's Law, and he at least suggested that the two could coexist in some way.

This coexistence must be understood in the context of the contemporary Jewish understanding of justice. In the Jewish political community, there could be no separation between worldly and divine authority, for God acted as the supreme Lawgiver and King. The understanding of justice which arose from this situation is evident in Micah, where the prophet condemns the unjust rulers who have abused God's people and perverted justice. In an oracle against the rulers of Israel, the prophet asks "Is it not for you to know justice- you who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin from off my people?" (Micah 3:2-3). The understanding is that justice cannot be defined by the

rulers, but is something which they must uphold in response to a proper understanding of what is good. The authority which God has given them has been distorted, turning the good which God revealed to them into evil, and causing the people of Israel to suffer as a result.

The authority God gave to the rulers was purely conditional, so upon their failure to do justice, he pronounced his judgment upon them: "Therefore, it shall be night to you, without vision, and darkness to you, without divination. The sun shall go down on the prophets, and the day shall be black over them." (Micah 3:6). The failure to do justice is not just a political problem, but it is a spiritual failure of the community to uphold God's law and do what is good for the nation as a whole. There can be no separation of political and divine authority, for the former is only held in accordance with God's will, and once it departs from the good that God has ordained, the community and its rulers are held responsible for their failure.

### Political Authority

This understanding of authority may have held for ancient Israel in the time of Micah's prophesy, but clearly that state of affairs did not last forever, and the question of how political authority relates to the authority of God had to be answered not only by Jews, but also by the early Christians living in the Roman Empire. The question must now be asked, how can this conception of justice as revealed by God and entrusted to the rulers of his people be applied in a situation where earthly political authorities claim the right to define and carry out justice themselves? The answer to this question depends upon a proper understanding of the nature of both divine and political authority. We are mistaken if we take the two as equal competitors in a neutral political realm, and that the triumph of one must come at the expense of the other. For since both political and divine authority have entirely different sources and ends, a proper understanding of these should hopefully clear up some of the confusion surrounding the role of Christianity in securing justice for the political community.

Political authority begins and ends in a particular society, and relies upon the preexisting material of a social community to achieve justice as defined in a certain way. This means that political authority

is both limited and contingent upon circumstances which allow it to compel citizens to act in a way that supposedly advances the good of society. Christian ethicist and political theologian Oliver O'Donovan argues in *The Ways of Judgment* that it "...arises where power, the execution of right, and the perpetuation of tradition are assured together in one coordinated agency." The authority of any political arrangement thus arises not out of a neutral, rational apprehension of how to achieve what is just, but only out of a set of contingent circumstances which exist in a particular society at a certain time.

Furthermore, the justice which such authority pursues can only be achieved by judgment according to certain shared presuppositions of what it means to be a just society. But this idea of justice is just as dependent upon social circumstances as the authority which claims the right to execute it. As philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre argues in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, conceptions of justice always arise out of "one particular type of practice-based community", and serve as a reflection of debates and practices internal to that society. Political authority then arises out of such a historically-conditioned society for the purpose of serving ends which are formed out of that same social order. This exposes the false pretenses upon which political authority claims power today. Rather than being a neutral arbiter which decides upon competing claims of justice, it is instead built upon the presuppositions which belong to the society in which it exists, and which necessarily privileges one theory of justice over another.

### Divine Authority

Just as we must rid ourselves of misconceptions of the neutrality of political authority, we must also be careful in how we define what exactly divine authority means in Christianity. Contrary to common belief, it is not simply based on adherence to an alternate, divinely ordained set of laws. That may have been the case for ancient Israel, but it takes a completely

different form following the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. All of the gospels emphasize different aspects of Jesus' authority, whether in teaching (Luke 4:32), forgiveness of sins (Matthew 9:6), casting out demons (Luke 4:36), or in healing a number of illnesses and disabilities. The authority Jesus claimed was not based upon any earthly political power, and through-

out his ministry he proved reluctant to claim titles of political authority for himself (John 6:15).

Instead, the main expression of Jesus' authority was actually in his crucifixion and resurrection, a point which is made especially clear in John's gospel. In the Good Shepherd discourse of John 10, Jesus says, "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again." (John 10:18) Even as Pilate told Jesus that he had the power to set him free or crucify him, Jesus answered by appealing to this same authority over death: "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above." (John 19:11)

In this particular act of voluntarily laying down his life, Jesus made a final judgment upon the sinfulness of humanity, but did so with the purpose of redeeming mankind. This follows the prophet's proclamation in Micah 3, where God's judgment came with the promise of redemption, envisioned in Micah 4 as a future where all nations would come to Zion to hear the word of the Lord. In Christ's resurrection, redemption is not only a remote future for a particular community, but it is a present reality which brings forgiveness of sins and fulfills God's covenant promise to bring all nations to him. The truth of the Gospel is authoritative in that it demands a response from us and enables us to act within a consistent moral framework which makes our actions intelligible. This is what political authority may aim to do, but can only partially succeed at. It is the death and resurrection of Christ which allows the Apostle Paul to write in Romans 13:1 that "there is no authority except from God", for the Gospel provides the one authoritative Word which commands action by its very nature, and is not contingent upon the accidental circumstances which underlie all political authorities.

### Conclusion

So where does this leave us in determining the proper relationship between political and divine authority in outlining a path to justice in society? It should at least be clear that the relationship is not as simple as the caricatures of religion in public life which we are treated to as a staple of American politics. The Gospel does not work with the given materials of political life, but it transforms the very framework in which justice is sought after and achieved. For in Christ's death and resurrection, all particular political arrangements are superseded by the authority of the Gospel, which places a demand upon the believer to do justice and walk in the ways of the Lord. Justice then cannot be sought as only a political good, but must be put within the larger narrative of God's

work of salvation in history, in which the redemption promised to Israel finds its completion in the boundless Kingdom of God.

Ryan Ward, Bowdoin Class of 2017  
Government and Legal Studies  
Brewer ME

*Firm as a rock, Ryan lives in unwavering commitment to the Lord.*

**There can be no separation of political and divine authority, for the former is only held in accordance with God's will, and once it departs from the good that God has ordained, the community and its rulers are held responsible for their failure.**

# I FOUND FREEDOM

Jehwoo Ahn | 16

“If this is what you truly want to do, then do it. We will no longer tell you what to do, what not to do; we are no longer responsible for your actions or their consequences. You’re free.” Despite my parents uttering the very words I thought would release me from the oppressive rule that they’ve established for so long in my life, there was no feeling of accomplishment or satisfaction. All those words merely echoed in my hollow, empty self. It would be a while until I realized that this newly achieved freedom came with its own set of shackles.

Freedom is perhaps the most valued fundamental right of humanity. It implies that each and every one of us has the power to make our own choices, to live our lives the way we want to live it, and to shape our destinies. So what is the antithesis of freedom? Many would describe it as imprisonment; the restriction of one’s free will, to be held down by something beyond the control of oneself. It’s intriguing that as soon as we define these liabilities as being undertaken by our own choice, they are no longer chains that bind us. Despite the fact that we value the ability to make our own choices, our society values features such as responsibility and relationships. We form bonds with other people through friendship or love, even though tying ourselves to other figures goes against our innate desire for freedom. We have rules that govern how we live our lives, and expectations of others that

**We form bonds with other people through friendship or love, even though tying ourselves to other figures goes against our innate desire for freedom.**

they will behave a certain way in public. In a society that simultaneously values freedom yet puts so many restrictions on our individual lives, how do we go about defining freedom, and in what context?

I thought that I had found freedom during my later years of high school. Coming from a family that valued success, high achievement, and making the best impression of oneself to others, I reacted in the typical manner of most high school teenagers in their rebellious years: revolution. We obviously lack the glory and honor of George Washington as he stood in his rowboat, boldly facing the darkness of the Delaware River as the beacon of resistance against the seemingly undefeatable British. But we like to imagine that we’re the Rosa Parks fighting against the oppressive rule of our parents, or the tank man in Tiananmen Square confronting any who stand in our way of freedom. Alas, reality is far from the grand idealizations of rebellion that we held in our minds in our younger years. We did the only thing we were capable of doing: go against what figures of authority told us to do. Alcohol, drugs, sex, skipping class, getting into fights; whereas so many around me would experiment with illicit substances or actions, I engaged in a far more mild practice: video games. It started out as playing just ten more minutes than I was allowed so I could play online with my friends. With my parents’ increasing frustration and restrictions on my gameplay, I would go out of my way to sneak online and lose myself in the online community where I felt like I could be myself. Half-days and holidays during the school year were the highlight of my otherwise ordinary weeks. Eventually, gaming behind my parents’ backs for even an hour or two wasn’t enough. I would set multiple alarms in the middle of the night while my parents were fast asleep, satisfied only when I heard the gentle whirring of the desktop and the all-too-familiar login screen before my eyes. I convinced myself that this was freedom: doing what I wanted, freeing myself from the shackles of my parents, and taking control of my life in my own hands. Yes, this was true freedom: having to look behind me whenever I thought I heard my parents’ footsteps behind me, having to delete my browsing history so my parents would never know that I was online, constantly sneaking upstairs to listen for my father’s consistent snoring which confirmed that my parents were asleep, and the paranoia and anxiety that I felt from the risk of discovery of

my illicit activities. The eventual necessity to log in everyday, my creeping addiction and obsession with gaming and my online friends, the fact that I could not bear to stay away from the computer when I was at home...I justified my actions by telling myself that this was what I wanted, and that my parents did not, could not, and would not control my life ever again.

Too often we become bound by our own sense of freedom. By feeling the need to control our lives, the autonomy in which we can act according to our own desires, we end up chaining ourselves down. We become enslaved to the need to rebel, to act out against some authoritative power to establish our own identities. I was lying to myself in my high school years; though time and time again I tried to convince myself that fighting against my parents was all for the cause of my own freedom, I became a captive of my need for video games, the very medium that was supposed to release me from my parents’ expectations.

When I got to college, I thought that my freshman year at Bowdoin was supposed to be liberating. I was no longer trapped in my home under the watchful eyes of my parents. I was convinced that I would start a new life and change myself completely. The beginning of my liberation, as I would discover, came much farther down the road, during my senior year of college when I signed up for a fall retreat thinking that two days away from campus would temporarily free me from assignments and exams. Never had I expected it to free me from so much more.

Before I stepped into the van that would take me away to the retreat at Toah Nipi, I took a long look at the campus I was leaving behind and sent my own mental text message to God, or at the time who I defined as “some higher power”; that if they do truly exist, that all I asked for was some sign during the retreat that this was the right path for me. And God decided to do much more than just send a reply. When I look back, I feel that he responded to my plea for help even before I made it; he connected me to the Christian fellowship and helped me to leave my old self behind by taking that final step into the van that would take me away to a place that would transform me. He liberated me from my self-centered definition of freedom, and helped me redefine it in the context of serving Him. Freedom is not an intrinsic right. If we define freedom as the ability to make decisions for ourselves and do what we want, we are always left wanting more. This cycle entraps us within our personal search for freedom, and chains us to our unquenchable need to define who we are. Listening to the powerful stories and experiences of others in discovering life in light of

their faith made me realize how blinded I was during my high school years. I truly felt that God was telling me these stories in reply to the pain and suffering, and most of all the loss that I felt through my hollow freedom that I had “won” during my high school years. The most memorable is a parable of a man with two sons: one day, the younger son tells his dad to give him his inheritance, after which he splurges all of it and returns home, planning to beg his father for forgiveness. The father hosts a party, after which the older son protests, saying that he gets nothing for being faithful, whereas his son gets a calf for running off and spending their father’s money. The father replies that everything he owns belongs to the elder son, but the important part is that the younger son has been lost, and is now found. What’s most poignant about this story is that as the younger son makes his walk of shame back home, his father is seen looking out into the distance, waiting. And when the father sees the

**If we define freedom as the ability to make decisions for ourselves and do what we want, we are always left wanting more.**

distant figure, he immediately recognizes his son and rushes to prepare a party. This parable resonated with me; I was that son who was so caught up in living his own life and claiming his inheritance, but later realized that defining life through these superficial measures was meaningless. Only after all these years had I even begun to truly understand my parents’ perspective as they raised me, continuously pinning their dreams on the only son that they’ve ever had. I left that retreat hoping that my parents would be waiting in the distant horizon, waiting to welcome me back with open arms.

As I continued my journey through my newfound faith with God, I came to another realization; this story of loss and return doesn’t just apply to me and my parents, but to my relationship with God. I had neglected this relationship for so long in my life by centering my life on myself. But it was the moment when I decided to take a blind leap of faith, to let go of what I felt was necessary to define my own autonomy and existence, that I truly was able to understand real freedom. Living in His footsteps is how we



# JESUS CARRIED US

Anastasia Arvin-DiBlasio | 19

We carried prayers  
about work and love and each other.  
About headaches and sports games and homework.

We carried our coffee and granola bars,  
our bike locks and backpacks and coats  
on cold days  
which we hung over the pews in the comforting dark of the chapel.

We carried our Bibles,  
NIV and ESV and study versions,  
in German and Spanish and English,  
with leather and cardboard and plastic covers,  
with words in black and gold and red.  
We tucked them lovingly between evolution textbooks  
And Communist manifestos and copies of Mein Kampf.

We carried each other,  
to and from breakfast  
and out of the dark.

We carried the whole campus some days,  
with all the demons and fear and hatred in it,  
and had to have eggs and bacon and pancakes to keep ourselves strong.

We carried our phones,  
and smiles,  
and laughter,  
and love.

And sometimes when it was too much to carry,  
Jesus carried us.



feel the most free. For the majority of my life, despite fulfilling every definition of “freedom” by destroying my relationships with God and my parents, I was lost. The crushing lack of purpose and the hollow guilt that came from my actions were proof to me that I was enslaved by my own freedom. But it was through God’s Word and through the Scriptures that I was able to free myself from the invisible chains that I had restricted myself with. It was through God and my renewal of faith that I was able to make the hardest decision of all: to live not for myself, but for God. It was then that I was able to find liberation from the hell that I had unknowingly trapped myself in. The human definition of freedom exposes the need for redefining freedom through God; we think we know and own everything; thus, our “freedom” is conceived as the ability to do whatever we want, separate from the jurisdiction of others. Just being exposed to God’s Word allowed me to understand why my life was the way it was, as well as the solution to setting it right. By submitting to another figure, many would tell you that you are giving up your freedom, and that you are enslaving yourself. And it’s true to a certain extent; by offering your purpose and your will to God, you essentially blind yourself. I took that step in declaring my Christian faith; but while others around me perceive my dedication to my faith as blinding myself to the world around me, I discovered something so much more. My faith was what truly opened my eyes.

Jehwoo Ahn, Bowdoin Class of 2016

Biology

Simsbury CT

God gifted Jeh with the ability to read scripture aloud with authority even before he understood it.

# CONVERSATIONS *in* *Love & Justice*

Katie Ippolito | 19

You sit down across from me and from the tension in your posture I can already tell you're hoping that this is going to be one of those times that we laugh and chatter and only pay attention to what's immediately in front of us.

It's tempting.

The low hum of the TV in the background and our friends laughing at the periphery of the room are just distracting enough that we can be swayed to the levity of spirits that comes with the unconscious assurance of time to spare.

**"Do not prophesy", their prophets say. "Do not prophesy about these things; disgrace will not overtake us."**

**Micah 2:6**

Uncomfortable conversations can be forestalled to some blurrier time: 3 AM (when we're more honest and more likely to forget any affronts), or any indefinite tomorrow. So we dust off our internal Rolodex of conversation starters, flipping through for something that's innocuous without being trite.

The basketball team just beat Colby

How was your test? You were studying so hard for it

Would you believe that I went to the C Store for milk and they were out and I had to walk all the way to Hannie's and it was cold

And then:

So, I heard that so-and-so was causing drama.

Honestly, what is their problem?

And I mean, consider everything that's happening on campus right now, with that party and the stuff that's all over Yik Yak. Please.

You think they'd know better.

Value claims start cluttering the air between us, critiques disguised innocently enough as gossip, opinions, and concerns-among-friends. We are toeing a fine line between tolerance and offence, but this kind of judgment-by-any-other-name has always been admissible behind the scenes. The world we live in is constructed in equal parts by what actually is and by how we experience that reality. Our backgrounds, heartbreaks, and preferences inevitably color our perspectives, changing the skyline of the world as we know it until we can come up with a series of rules that fit our experience. This thought flickers across my mind, carrying a story, a true story starring the last righteous man on earth.

**What misery is mine...The godly have been swept from the land; not one upright man remains.**

**Micah 7:1-2**

A few thousand years later, everyone is righteous. Aren't they? We live by subjective codes of morality, toasting, to each his own. Every day we walk into people and situations that we'll smile at—the expression never reaching our eyes—and engage in small talk, nodding and laughing at all the right moments, while in our heads we're perched on a seat high enough to give us nosebleed. We cringe at every verbal misstep, are dismayed at the lack of simple common sense, irritated with the fragility of egos. But we cannot be ignorant of the rules of society—there's a real price to pay for breaking those: the funny looks, the scornful newspaper articles, the anonymous Internet forums where our names can be posted to be ridiculed and reflected on a million screens. So long as we keep our judgments bound with politeness and sensitivity, so long as we do not offend, so long as we tolerate...there is almost nothing context cannot rationalize. One crime remains: to think yourself or your beliefs superior to someone else and their beliefs. Anything is permissible, unless whatever it is infringes on someone else's equal freedom to do whatever it is they think is right or good. So righteousness, to be fair, has gotten a lot easier to achieve: do whatever works for you, and if you don't bother anyone else, they won't bother you. It's just courtesy.

**Should you not know justice, you who hate good and love evil?**

**Micah 3:2**

I run through the usual rationales. Our world is a better one to live in than that of a 300, 100, even 50 years ago. Isn't it? Here is a new generation, our generation, who look at each other with so much more compassion than our parents did. Connected by global networks, in airplanes and on social media, with every kind of knowledge at our fingertips, we understand each other better. We're so much more accepting.

You remind me that every day there are kids, younger than us, who end their lives because they just can't take the pressure of this world, the ridicule they

receive from their classmates or their parents, the overwhelming sense of failure. You remind me that not so long ago, on our very own campus, people were up in arms defending their families' histories and culture from kids who thought they had just been trying to have a little fun. That before that, there was another party, another argument, another campus engulfing conversation about privilege and ignorance, and beliefs so ingrained that they can masquerade as "the way things are supposed to be".

The television blares on, no longer so soothing.

My ears pick up statistics and headlines. A riot and police brutality, a rape and the victim's testimony under fire, and I refocus on your face, your mouth still moving telling some story, but your eyes are clouded with your own heart-breaks, that you dare not compare to the suffering of the world, but that you are referring to as much as anything when you say:

Sometimes I wish they'd get what's coming to them; but I guess some things you just have to let go...Sometimes the scales remain unbalanced.

It sounds so hopeless.

**All this is because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the house of Israel ...for her wound is incurable...this is not your resting place, because it is defiled, it is ruined, beyond all remedy.**

**Micah 1:5, 2:10**

And as anger blossoms in my chest, my own heart threatening to crack, I imagine picking up a sword and going to battle for you and everyone else the old fashioned way and silencing the voices that have unbalanced the scales.

**Therefore, the Lord says: "I am planning disaster against this people, from which you cannot save yourselves".**

**Micah 2:3**

And I realize I've tried that before. At any given moment, I might think, she should not be doing that, or he's so obnoxious, or how dare they treat me like that when I've been nothing but good to them.

Still you believe that justice has yet to be dealt.

Clearly, so do I, or I wouldn't be out to fight the same old sorrows, the same old unforgiven reprobates, over and over again. I think of the perch that I accused us all of having, that internal place of honor and secret judgment throne. I notice that I am firmly seated in my own, and that my view of all the people I presume to judge is pretty blurry.

The sword falls from my hands, and, unbidden, a million memories unfold, releasing questions too uncomfortable to answer. How many people have stood

wanting to raise their own swords against me and how is not chief amongst those God, whose word I have been inclined to ignore since birth, and whose authority and love I've rejected again and again in the name of independence?

**Listen to what the Lord says: "Stand up, plead your case before the mountains"...With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God?**

**Micah 6:1,6**

With God seated in the judge's seat that I so recently vacated, there is no avoiding the fact of my insufficiency. Page after page of the Bible confronts me with broken rules and failed commitments. Imperfect, prone to mistakes, still learning: words meant not to extend grace, but to rationalize my actions.

I've even failed my own fickle moral code.

**If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.**

**Psalm 130:3-4**

**Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the Lord's wrath, until he pleads my case and establishes my right. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness.**

**Micah 7:9**

And yet amongst the stories of faithless people facing the consequences of their actions, the Bible is stitched together with words such as forgiveness and righteousness, light and love, God's perfect and unchanging character.

Throughout my personal Revelations moment, you've been waiting for me to poke through the Rolodex again and pull out some comfortingly worn words.

But for once, I ought to unshutter all the light I feel within me, to stop pretending that the circumstances and dramas of this world are bigger than my God and the epic he set in motion with his first act of creation. I can't balance the scales. I can't save you, but I know who can.

**"But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my savior; my God will hear me."**

**Micah 7:7**

My thoughts, moving faster, as usual, than my mouth, glance over the story of Micah once more. Even in his darkest days, in a speech meant to warn the people of Israel of the wrath of God that was incumbent upon them all, he can't help but speak in expectation. In hope.

There will come a day when the remnant of God's people will be drawn together under a King, when no one will be afraid. The lame, the exiles, those brought to grief will become a strong nation; peace will be within and among all people. God's law will go forth, and he will be judge.

And yet this good news is not one that I speak to you in expectation, but in gratitude for an act already committed.

**For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.**

**John 3:16-17**

Jesus Christ came to the world and lived the life I never could—that none of us ever could. Not only could people not fault him, neither could God. He was the one person in history who deserved to go to heaven, to live the life of peace and harmony promised by God to those who love him and live as he intended.

And yet, instead he faced death on a cross and abandonment by God. This is the climax in a story about how the Creator of the universe loved his creation enough to leave the judgment throne that only he deserved to sit in, and stand in their place as the one being judged. Every wrong was laid in his name and he took the full punishment, leaving us free to ask forgiveness for our failings, not banking on any redeeming quality of our own, but in humble acknowledgement of a price that has already been paid. Judgment day has already passed. We have already been given the salvation that Micah longed for.

**Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever, but delight to show mercy.**

**Micah 7:18**

You watch me, a little hesitantly, still confronted by an unbalanced scale, and a world that is fundamentally flawed. The question standing is, of course, where is the peace and the strong nation built for victims and the law upheld by all? If salvation is as past tense as I am telling you, why doesn't the world look the way God promised?

It will.

**But as for me I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin.**

**Micah 3:8**

We both know that you or I, or our college, or our generation, on our own, cannot hope to achieve the justice we really want. We have tried every possible

combination of world powers and NGOs and money and weapons and treaties. When time finally does run out, and God comes to lead his people (as he promised to Micah), the whole world will face judgment. Every wrong committed, in secret or at large, will have to be answered for.

You know that this scenario conveniently provides that hope that is missing from every other hypothetical trajectory you have considered.

I know that salvation is there for the taking for anyone who wants it.

But in the meantime, you wonder if those equal understandings leave us at an impasse—you, unconvinced, and me, resting easy in the belief of my rescue by God.

I can't blame you for thinking that way, but the unglamorous truth of Christianity is this: we don't automatically become better people because we realize we need God to save us. We remain prone to wander from God, as likely as the next guy to commit an injustice. But the beauty is in understanding this tendency, in the willingness and freedom in Christ to say to God—yeah, I messed up, but I want to learn to live the way you have intended.

And this new way of life starts with loving God above everything else, in a natural response to the love he showed on a cross two thousand years ago. As I get to know God, it is my responsibility to listen and obey. When he calls an injustice, I cannot ignore it because I feel the hurt that has been inflicted; when he asks for me to live a life contrary to the one touted by this fractured world, I must live it to be a light for anyone looking for hope.

I cannot give the final verdict on the world. Nor can you, or anyone else, though they might try. Every person deserves to be judged by the God who judged me—the one who knew everything about me, everything that I had done, every thought that I've had and who loved me anyway. But I do get the endless hope that one day that judgment will happen. I will not be found lacking, nor will anyone else who believes, thanks to the finished work of Jesus. The scales will be balanced, and God will fulfill every promise he has made. There are too many people that God loves and that I love who are being weighed down by the troubles of this world, and I have a story that might lift their heads to see what joy is already, but not yet.

I can imagine your head full of electric current, the synapses firing as you process what I've said, lighting up arguments and questions and something like hope.

I will listen. I can wait. What I know and what I believe are worth spending a lifetime sharing, and if you open your hands, I'll start with you.

**And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.**

**Micah 6:8**



Shekinah Pettway | 18

# THE GLORY OF GOD

What does your name mean to you? Or better yet, how is the meaning of your name reflected in the way that you live? My name, Shekinah, is a word with Semitic roots originating from the dwelling, settling, and inhabiting of the Lord's Divine Presence. The Shekinah encompasses deep spiritual meaning, as it is an expression of the glory and presence of God. It not only represents God's presence, but His presence manifested by intense light. Additionally, the word for Tabernacle, mishkan, the dwelling place of God's people and God's presence, is a derivative of the same root for Shekinah. The Shekinah is often referenced when it manifests in the Tabernacle.

Despite its biblical implications, the Shekinah is not found directly in the Bible, but is alluded to in several places in which God is speaking and revealing Himself to people such as Moses. Here, Moses encounters The Shekinah through a burning bush on Mount Horeb:

“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. 3 So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.” 4 When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.” 5 “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” 6 Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God” (Exodus 3:1-6).

God reveals Himself in the form of theophany, the appearance of God in a form that is visible to man. God's revelation is miraculous, allowing Moses to have a defining experience in which he is able to actually experience the glory of God. God's glory is so omnipotent that it resides on holy ground, a place where Moses was not permitted to enter. Understanding this, Moses humbles and submits himself to The Lord, stating “Here I am”. With this proclamation, Moses prepares himself to be transformed by God's

glory, allowing God to meet him where he is. Moses gets ready to hear what the Lord needs to say to him in order to lead the people of Israel into righteousness. Moses' attitude here should serve as an example to all believers. His meekness in his encounter with the Lord's presence is ideal, as he understood that in order to be obedient to God's commands he had to submit to His presence.

My name, Shekinah, serves as a natural conviction to me, as I am challenged to honor and respect a similar declaration to that of Moses, stating, “Here I am” to God's will for my life. Certainly, I have not been given the responsibility to lead the people of Israel, like Moses, but God has called me to be a leader in the realms that have arisen for me at Bowdoin College. Those include participating in the Christian Fellowship at Bowdoin, engaging in my academic pursuits, running on the Bowdoin Track and Field team, serving as a tour guide for the college, and singing in an acapella group at the college. Interestingly, my parents' decision to name me Shekinah was based on an epiphany that my mother had, in which she felt led to name me Shekinah based on

**Shekinah is my name. Its meaning is my reality, who I strive to be, and what The Lord requires of me.**

the leadership role she assumed that I would embody to my siblings, my colleagues, and my peers. My daily prayer is that I will live a life that exemplifies the meaning of my name, allowing others to see that in order to live a life that is fully committed to Him you must humbly acknowledge His presence and let Him meet you where you are. I have noticed this to be evident in my life especially in times of hardship, in which I felt that my freedom to do what I desired was limited. Yet, God has shown me that my idea of freedom is not His idea of freedom. He does His greatest work during times of hardship, when it is best to experience His presence and let Him meet you where you are.

Today, you can decide whether you will make the change that is necessary for you to encounter the presence of the Lord. Will you allow Him to meet you where you are so that He can use the gifts He has given you to bring Him glory?

Shekinah Pettway, Bowdoin Class of 2018  
 French, Pre-Med  
 Baldwin NY  
*Shekinah tells the truth as it is - straight-up and with a tinge of humor.*

# IF GOD IS FOR US SI DIOS ES POR NOSOTROS

Faustino Ajanel | 16

“If God is for us, who can be against us” (Romans 8:31). As a little kid, I would listen to my father telling me that verse when we felt that the world was against us. It fostered hope for us when we desperately needed it. When I needed comfort, I would pray to God. Yet I failed to praise God when he showed me love and blessings. Throughout my childhood, I never attended church. I grew up in the mindset that believing and praying was all that I needed to receive God's blessings.

In high school, I thought that I had the perfect life. I was one of the top students in my school and got accepted to my dream college. I was one of the top runners who helped win four consecutive cross country league championships for my school. I was in a relationship with a girl that I loved. At that point in my life, I felt that I had my life all together. Looking back, I realized that I was not truly happy. Despite the many blessings God had given me, not once did I give a prayer glorifying God for his love and grace. I failed to admit that God had a role in the blessings that I had. Just as God gives, he can take away.

My first year at Bowdoin felt like a disaster. For the first time, I felt vulnerable and alone. Throughout the first semester, I tried to prevent my long distance relationship from collapsing. I became overwhelmed with coursework, and I lacked the confidence to meet new people. I would wake up sad and pessimistic every morning. Each new day meant dealing with the same problems. The proud and confident person I was in high school became a sad and broken one. My arro-

gance and pride prevented me from asking for help. I never told my parents or siblings what I was experiencing that first semester. They thought that I was enjoying college. When we talked over the phone, I would tell them that I was enjoying my classes and meeting new people. After each phone call, I broke down in tears. Not only was I lying to my parents and siblings, I was also lying to myself. As I walked around campus, I pretended that I was happy. But in reality, I felt that my heart had begun to break apart.

When my anger from the pain turned into frustration, I started to have ideas of harming myself in order to deal with the pain. Eventually, a few people noticed how strangely I acted and persuaded me to talk to a resource on campus. Although I had someone to talk to about these things, the problems still existed. The issues did not go away and eventually pushed me to become suicidal.

I became more hopeless as the days passed, and I could not find joy in life. Eventually, my hopelessness turned into despair. I felt that my life was not going to get better. Waking up meant another day dealing with stress, arguments, and faking a smile just to make things look okay. Every night, I tried to finish homework that I struggled with. I tried to save a failing relationship. I tried to tell my mother, father, and sister that I loved being in college. But I got tired. I gave up on trying to make everything work. My feelings of despair and guilt eventually led me to turn my thoughts of suicide into action.

I started researching and experimenting with overdose. I attempted to commit suicide with painkillers.

**After each phone call, I broke down in tears. Not only was I lying to my parents and siblings, I was also lying to myself.**



As I took each pill, I did not feel guilty about my decision. I felt that my place in this world would not be missed. Yet, I stopped taking the last pill that would have ended my broken life. I cannot explain what prevented me from taking the last pill. Was it the will to live? Was it the hope that life could get better?

Over the next few weeks after attempting overdose, I decided a different approach. I wanted to end things in a quick and painless way.

At 3 o'clock in the morning, I walked outside of my dorm and headed toward Maine Street. As I walked down the street, I looked to see what I thought to be my last night under the stars. Looking up at the stars, I imagined seeing a different world where I did not feel hopeless or angry. However, I stopped thinking about the what if and began to focus on what I decided to do. I was determined to jump in front of a car. As I approached Maine Street, I saw a car passing by. I started to process the idea that I was about to end my life and began to apologize to my family, my friends, and my little sister. I was selfish, arrogant, and broken for most of my life. I made myself believe that I never needed help. I never asked for help. I had this false illusion that I had complete control of my life. When this false sense of security broke, I needed help. I needed someone to grab onto my hand before I made the leap to my death. Thankfully, I had help that night. After the first car, no other car passed through Maine Street. I walked from College Street down to the river. After standing for about an hour on the road, I gave up on committing suicide. At that time, I was ready to end my life. However, God seemed to have other plans.

This past September, I started to feel depressed once again. My uncle passed away, and I saw how my mother cried in disbelief that her younger brother was gone. In my neighborhood, a father took the lives of three beautiful children. A peer I graduated with got shot near my high school. After experiencing these tragedies, I began to ask questions about life and death. My anxiety over these questions were finally calmed once I started to rebuild my relationship with God.

As I became more curious about God and what it means to have faith, I attended Fall Conference at Toah Nipi which was a life-changing retreat. Throughout the conference, we talked about brokenness and redemption. During one of the breakout sessions, I told one of my friends about my past. About my tough childhood in which I grew up in a poor and unstable household where I could only spend time with my parents once a week. About how I felt alone and depressed during my first year at Bowdoin. About how I became so broken to the point where I thought the

only exit was on Maine Street at 3 o'clock in the morning. And at that time, I told him that I did not know who I was.

After the retreat, I felt a huge burden lifted from me. No longer do I feel discouraged, alone and empty. Instead, I feel something warm. Love. The love of God. Let me tell you about this love: "Not that I have loved God, but that he loved me first and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for my sins" (1 John 4:10). Because of my faith in his love, I have become a new person with purpose in life. With God's forgiveness and love, my heart no longer feels broken.

A verse that has resonated with me and my relationship with God is from James 1:12 that says: "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him." By trusting, believing, and loving God, I know I am victorious because the Lord is with me.

Although life in faith still has many trials, I can hear my father telling me the verse that reminds me that God is without equal: "Si Dios es por nosotros, Quién contra nosotros" (Romanos 8:31). Without faith, I was broken and lost. I felt that I had a hole in my heart that could not be filled. It was my thirst for God, my maker. Now I am grateful for God's grace for me, someone who was once lost in the world, but now is found. My journey as a Christian does not stop here. With the new life that God has given me, I hope to use the gift that the Lord has given me. I hope that my love of teaching math will one day translate into teaching the good news of salvation, love, and new life in God.

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*Faustino has responded in obedience to God's charge which commands him to be strong and courageous.*

*Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*

*John 16:32-33*

My Dear Friend,

Please understand that your pain is wounding for God. He takes no pleasure in your suffering and he did not create you for this kind of life. Something broke you deeply, and when it did, God was brokenhearted. He understands the way your own scars open and sting every time you see that same suffering in others. He knows that the many solutions you've sought out have not healed you completely.

But this is the good news: God is not only the Creator God, and God the Just, he is also the Christus Victor. God knows what is good and what is evil. God's righteousness gives him supreme authority over all things good and ill. God answers the evil in us and in the world with Jesus' cross. This is his perfect justice and mercy expressed. But this story does not end at the cross. There is more to be said about God's response to evil, because after being buried, Jesus rose from the dead.

Jesus' resurrection is the ultimate hope. It is proof above all else that because of him, all evil and suffering have no ultimate power over us. If the God who took the responsibility of every human's evil upon himself bore that immense punishment and still rose from the dead, my friend we are free indeed. Jesus' death and resurrection together mean that in him, you have the promise that the person who loves you most in the world not only has the desire, but also has the total authority to overcome the evils you face. Healing is possible!

Now, don't get me wrong I'm not saying that all you need is a little prayer to Jesus and all your problems will be solved. Jesus has already defeated darkness, but this world is still broken. While we are still living in an imperfect world, wholeness can only be found in him. He does not promise that running to him will fix all the brokenness that exists outside of you, though that too will ultimately reach its end. When faced with the tension of God's timing you must make room to become comfortable with mystery. Mystery is not the same thing as ignorance. There is not a lot of appreciation for the unknown in our world today, but truly, when looking at questions of cosmic significance, you must allow for things beyond your comprehension. I do not fully understand the specifics of how God's plan for humanity plays out from day to day, but I understand that his inexplicable rhythms do not negate his character.

Of this I am certain: I serve a God who has perfect authority over evil and perfect love for you. He loves you better than any father you have ever known and he will soothe you as a good father will. He is the Comforter, the Redeemer, and the Healer. When you bring your shattered pieces to him both the parts of you that others broke and the parts of you that you broke yourself he will heal you.

The cross and resurrection of Jesus is God's perfect response to all evil, injustice, and suffering. When you kneel before the cross and stand before the empty tomb, you will find yourself at the vantage point from which you will be able to look evil in the eyes without fear and know its place. Do not be afraid of the dark the light has overcome it. Do not be discouraged by the evil in the world around you it has already been defeated. Do not sit paralyzed by your suffering the grips of evil on this life are loosed! "Take heart; Jesus has overcome the world."

With Hope,

*Amanda*

# Justice and Humanity's Innate LOCUS IMPERIUM

Benjamin Pascut | Ph. D.

If you had a magical ring that would make you invisible, would you resist its use for personal gain? Would you not sneak in your professor's office to change your grades or take a peek at the next exam assignment? Wouldn't you help yourself to chocolate from your roommate's jar or to drinks from the bar? Before Frodo's ring in *The Lord of the Rings*, there was the ring of Gyges in Plato's *Republic*, which Glaucon used to make one important point: no person could be imagined of such incorruptible nature as to resist the use of an invisible ring, for no one is just on his or her own will, but only from constraint (Plato, *The Republic* 2.360b-360c). Gyges may be a fictional character, but he's one of us. Or better said, he's like all of us with an innate *locus imperium* – a place of empire within, an inborn nature inclined toward injustice.

*“Learning that the ring made him invisible, he immediately contrived to be one of the messengers of the king. When he arrived, he committed adultery with the king's wife and, along with her, set upon the king and killed him. And so he took over the rule” (The Republic 2.360a).*

This old fable about the oppressive vices of sex, power and wealth invites us to situate ourselves in Gyges' fictional shoes and come face to face with the reality of human depravity. It directs us to ask: If injustice finds its root in the heart of every human being, how can injustice be defeated? How can we do justice in a way that adequately addresses the inherent evil of every individual? Jesus thought of himself and his work as the agent of dealing with injustice right at its core and bringing justice to all humanity. He proclaimed the key of overcoming all injustice with the words: “Time's up! God's rule has arrived in history, repent and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

## “Time's up! God's rule has arrived in history ...”

Imagine a time of imperial domination that extends over half of the known world. Add ethnic discrimination, economic control, heavy taxation and exploitation of the poor – all under foreign rule and assisted by conniving aristocracy. Imagine a repressive empire in all its glory and luxuriant growth sustained through slavery and exploitation. Imagine the worst of times for the marginalized groups (e.g. women, children, peasants, the poor, etc.), and you'll get a clear picture of first century Jewish Palestinian society living at the edge of the Roman Empire. That's the historical setting of Jesus' justice work.

His “Time's up!” announcement turns all the sad tunes into freedom music. The waiting for justice is over. True justice is no longer a dream. It's finally here and it's because of divine intervention. “God's rule” has burst forth into human history, bringing the divine realm to bear on the human. With Jesus' emergence on the way of justice (LXX Isaiah 40:3, 14; Mark 1:2-3), the Roman imperial rule with all its power is challenged and broken. Does this mean that the oppressive order of Caesar can no longer claim full control? That's exactly what it means, but it goes beyond that. As “Time's up!” doesn't

have in view a chronological reference (chronos), but a transhistori-

cal one (kairos), Jesus' justice program has far-reaching effects. It marks the beginning of the end not only of Caesar and his colonial rule, it brings freedom not only to his contemporaries, but to all humanity. How in the world is that possible?

## “... Repent...”

Say the word justice today and fairness or equality comes to mind. “Repent” (*metanoeo*), on the other hand, often being reduced to religious talk, is dropped out of the justice vocabulary altogether. But don't let the contemporary usage associated exclusively with feelings of guilt and remorse fool you. In Classical and Hellenistic Greek literature, and in the way Jesus used it, *metanoeo* means fundamentally “to turn,” “to readjust” and has in view a change of thinking, of purpose, of allegiance and of course (e.g. Plato, Euthydemus 279c; Plutarch, Demetrius 52). Simply put, to repent is to slam on the brakes from going in the wrong direction and make a U-turn towards the right one.

A U-turn where? If every individual hides within a *locus imperium* and is a source of injustice – and the marginalized and the oppressed are no exception – justice demands that every individual turn from self to a new reality other than the self. No matter how much our pop culture tries to make us believe, genuine justice is not about promoting the self into society. Isn't that what feeds the cycle of injustice in the first place? Versed in identity theory or not, take the most brutal autocrats in history from Caesar to Castro and you'll find out plenty of egotism at work. Look at the logic of suicide bombers for which there is no clear profile

**So here's the bad news: dictators, terrorists, alongside racists and rapists, all share something in common with exam cheaters, chocolate stealers and even with the marginalized – a slavish subjection to evil.**

anymore. No invisibility ring needed in their case. They pledge their paramount allegiance to self-destruction publicly at the expense of everyone else. But we need not stop and stare at perpetrators. Let's look at a social victim like Gyges once again. Here's a poor shepherd who can't buy himself out of a marginalized and subordinate position. He's born to serve his king like a slave, perhaps all the way to his grave. He's a victim of what most people today would call a biased social system where inequality and inferiority is a common curse. But what does he do after he gains

complete liberty of action with his invisibility ring? He falls victim to a false ideology of freedom which promotes the interest of the self. He enacts the perfect crime and becomes a perpetrator himself.

So here's the bad news: dictators, terrorists, alongside racists and rapists, all share something in common with exam cheaters, chocolate stealers and even with the marginalized – a slavish

subjection to evil. This accounts for the sentiment expressed in Jesus' own words: “I came not to call those who are just [for there is none], but evil doers [for that's everyone] (Mark 2:17).”

There can be no real justice without repentance, and no repentance without a radical break with evil. A redirection, a change of course from the way of human depravity to the “way of the Lord” (Mark 1:2-3) is demanded.

## “... and Believe ...”

The second imperative is to “believe” (*piesteuo*), a verb denoting confidence to the extent of complete trust (e.g. Aristotle, Athenian Constitution 21). But believe? For many Millennials, believing sounds like a religious excuse to stay away from engaging in real justice work. But if Hume is correct in his *Treatise on Human Nature* about belief being the governing principle of all our actions, then justice without belief is a dead end. As rational beings, our choices,

commitments and actions are dependent on the subject and content of our belief. Beliefs set boundaries, they open and close possibilities. Like an engine, they can bring us forward.

Like brakes, they can slow us down or bring us to a stop. Like a steering wheel, they can



switch our course. Without beliefs there would be no right or wrong, no conflict of interest, no victims of injustice, no movements of justice, and no need for justice whatsoever.

Every justice ideology and endeavor therefore presupposes a set of beliefs about morality (what is justice) and about method (how to bring justice). To name a few, Homer didn't promote a justice program because he believed that the very need for justice is an expression of the tragic condition of humanity imposed by Zeus. Plato, like his student Aristotle, believed in a natural inequality among humans, and as a result argued that justice is accomplished when the state treats equals equally and unequals unequally. Specifically, philosophers would have to rule as kings, as "leading men who genuinely and adequately philosophize" (Plato, *The Republic* 375; Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 7.1238b).

There is no justice ideology that offers a hard-line alternative to belief. Justice simply can't be conceived without it. Which brings us to the conclusion: by calling people to believe, Jesus called them to the most supreme act of justice. But believe in what or in whom? It can't be in the self, for the self is itself a *locus imperium*. It can't be in society either, for it's made up of imperialistic, oppressive selves.

### "... the Gospel."

The object of belief is the "gospel" or the "good news," the *evangelion* (Mark 1:1, 14; 8:35; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9; cf. Homer, *Odyssey* 14.148; Euripides, *Medea* 941), a technical term coined by Roman emperors in their official proclamations about the glad tidings of their imperial rule. Caesar Augustus, for example, announced his own *evangelion* across his empire, promising the rise of a utopian society abundant with peace and progress for all. Speaking of Augustus' rule, the poet Ovid described a time of justice: "When peace has been given to the lands, he will turn his mind to domestic justice and the most just leader will bring forward laws" (*Metamorphoses* 15:833-8334). Of course, anyone in the empire with the slightest acquaintance with imperial philosophy, citizens and slaves alike, knew that the retrieval of this so-called justice is predicated upon tyranny and bloodshed. But in spite of Augustus' dreadful *evangelion*, they had to wave their right hand in consent and move on with the program.

**To suggest that Jesus' social advocacy represents the essence of his justice work is to miss his mission entirely.**

As was the case with Augustus, *evangelion* on the lips of Jesus is as much a political claim as a personal one. The "good news" is about him and his reign (Mark 1:1). He is inaugurating a new way of life with him at its center. Justice is contingent on the reality of one word: Christ (1:1). But will Christ establish his rule in a Caesar-like fashion? The near synonymity of the titles in their respective traditions begs a comparison between the two figures. Will Christ bring justice via a typical military ascension? Will he establish a utopian society abundant in fairness and human rights for all?

In light of the story to follow (1:16-16:8), it becomes obvious that Jesus stands in stark opposition to Caesar and his *evangelion*. He rules not by being served, but by serving others (10:45):

- Provides social outcasts the means to reenter society (1:40-42; 5:30-34)
  - Extends table fellowship to publicly acknowledged outlaws (2:13-17)
  - Overrides legal regulations to protect human life and well-being (2:23-28; 3:1-6)
  - Secures food for impoverished masses (6:36-44; 8:1-13)
- Crosses ethnic and gender boundaries (5:1-20; 7:26-30)
- Opposes freedom ideologies that involve armed resistance (8:31-33)
- Articulates a radical critique of oppressive orders (10:42-45)
- Provides a 'legal' order to encourage distribution of wealth (10:17-22)
- Confronts institutions of economic power and control (11:12-19)

So that's it? That's how Jesus brings justice to all? Just some venerable social deeds? Not really: he brings justice through different means. To suggest that his social advocacy represents the essence of his justice work is to miss his mission entirely. Mark's narrative is often described as a passion with a long introduction for a very good reason: Jesus' death on the cross represents the single most important event of his whole vocation. He predicted and pursued his death with sublime commitment (8:31; 9:12, 31; 10:32-34, 38-39, 45); not as a gesture of suicidal folly, but as a justice and judgment necessity:

#### Major Premise ~ Morality

Justice demands that every *locus imperium* face judgment

#### Minor Premise ~ Method

Through his death, Jesus takes upon himself the judgment deserved by all imperialist selves

#### Conclusion

Jesus' substitutionary death brings restorative justice to those who believe

Jesus' exemplary death turns imperialist selves into self-giving servants

Clearly, Jesus is a nonconformist in this regard. Unlike other justice thinkers from Socrates to Sandel, he doesn't embrace the ideals of a democratic polis and the finite promises of its social, economic and political programs. The narrative that begins with Jesus marching on the way of justice (LXX Isaiah 40:3, 14; Mark 1:2-3), doesn't climax with him securing a royal throne via a military victory over oppressive Rome. That's what his compatriots expected from a messianic liberator—to elevate their rights to new heights and put an end to the cruel imperial domination. Such human rights, which his Jewish contemporaries wanted, Jesus rejected (Mark 8:31-33; 11:1-11). Human righteousness, on the other hand, which humanity

at large needed, he offered via his death on the cross (10:45; 14:22-25; 15:21-39). The former lacks the power to liberate imperialist selves from their innate depravity. It only elevates the interests of morally culpable individuals, sometimes to the extent of turning victims into perpetrators. The latter, on the other hand, executes justice in a once and for all historical enactment by paying the death penalty for all injustice and demanding cross-bearing disposition from all imperialist selves.

Jesus is therefore for the oppressed and for freedom. He sets free all Caesars and all those who bear more than a passing similarity to Gyges. And he does more than simply set them free—he empowers them toward accountability, charity, cooperation, humility, forgiveness and love.

In closing, think Gyges. Get in his fictional shoes with the magical ring on your finger. You might not reveal the full dimension of his evil, such as luring someone to make out with you or murdering whoever stands in the way of your success. You might not even cheat on your exam or deprive your roommate of a chocolate bar. But your curiosity will overtake your determination to resist temptation and you'll end up doing something stupid; something that will reveal the deeply ingrained *locus imperium* of our race. I guess that's true of all humans. With or without the magic ring, injustice is there within. Pretending it's not there won't make it go away. Promoting programs of social justice won't make it vanish either. Repentance and believing will.

The time for justice is at hand.



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# THE COMPLEX GOD

## Finding Kingdom Truth in Mathematics

Olivia Cannon | 17

Sam Swain | 18

As math majors who follow Christ, at some point we had to ask ourselves: does mathematics exclude or reveal God? Can God speak truth to us through math?

Throughout this semester, we have considered how to look at the world and find truth embedded where there is not an initially apparent image of God. Even such a seemingly cold, unfeeling field as mathematics can give us understanding into an aspect of God's nature. For its common label as "the language of the universe," math sometimes may be considered as excluding God—but this is God's universe, and even though mathematics as a language is a human science, it provides us with some useful tools for describing the abstract, with concepts not available to us in other languages.

The Fundamental Theorem of Algebra tells us that for a polynomial with complex coefficients, all its roots are complex numbers. Complex numbers are those of the form  $a+bi$ , where  $a$  and  $b$  are real numbers, and  $i$ , the imaginary unit, is the square root of  $-1$ . The real numbers are those we usually consider, like  $22$ ,  $\pi$ ,  $1.5$ ,  $-6$ . But the real numbers are even insufficient for describing the roots of polynomials with real coefficients; we still need the complex. For example, we cannot solve  $x^2+4=0$  with real numbers; we need  $0+2i$  or  $0-2i$ .

Some implications of such an idea struck one of our fellow math majors, who penned an opinion piece in the Orient entitled, "What Math Can Teach Us about Religious Ideology." They suggest that just as the reals are incomplete next to the complex, a secular society dismissive of particular ideologies also has an incomplete understanding of itself. This was the inspiration for our own consideration of kingdom truth in relation to complex numbers.

For Christians, it is dissatisfying to say that our faith is some "imaginary" supplement to our otherwise "real" understanding. In mathematics, we do not use

the complex numbers as a supplement to the reals; the set is not a completion of the reals in that sense. The real numbers lie within the complex set, but the number we know as  $7$  is actually  $7+0i$  by its identification as complex. Every real number is redefined because it is known as part of this more complete set, all of whose elements are single numbers, though the limits of mathematical language necessitates the representation of these by their real and imaginary components. A single set gives us the whole scope of these polynomial roots.

The idea that all the roots actually exist in this other set of numbers (rather than just the "extra" ones we are trying to find) is indicative of an important kingdom truth—we all live in God's kingdom and created world whether we know it or not. Life with Jesus is not an addendum. It changes everything, down to our very foundations.

**For its common label as "the language of the universe," math sometimes may be considered as excluding God—but this is God's universe.**

The author then begins to talk about order. "Ordering" numbers is to put them in a list, from smallest to largest. We cannot do this for complex numbers because the measure of "big" or "small" is not unique—there can be multiple numbers that are the same "size." The author continues, "Without even realizing it, for a long time I took it for granted that numbers had to have order. However, by thinking about it, I could understand how a more complete conception of numbers wouldn't have an order at all."

But do the complex numbers lack order completely? We still have some sort of measure of size that can allow us to classify numbers; it is just not unique. We call it the norm, and it is equal for any two numbers equidistant from the origin—points on a circle. So our human concept of the word 'order' does not fall apart completely. The complex numbers do have structure, just with some equality.

This equality becomes even stronger when we consider the language of ideals. In rings, an ideal is a subset of a set of numbers with the property that

any element can be multiplied by any number in the bigger set and still be in the ideal. In both the real and complex numbers, there is exactly one maximal ideal—that is, exactly one ideal that contains all others, but is not the whole set. (This ideal in both cases is the set containing only the number zero.) But since the complex numbers are a field, the only other ideal is actually the whole set. No matter which element you choose to "define" this other, non-maximal, ideal—as long as it is not zero—it is the same. Ideals impose a surprising equality over the set of nonzero complex (and real) numbers. This equality, too, is fundamental in our world: no worldly thing can give us an advantage in God's eyes, or define us. We are all equally loved by Him. Equality can coexist with order and even within a structure of seeming disorder.

And, interestingly, the number zero is in the ideal generated by any other number, but its ideal is the maximal ideal. If that isn't Christlike, I don't know what is.



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*Olivia has the unique ability to inspire those around her to wonder at the beauty of the world almost as much as she does.*

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# JOY WITH A CAPITAL “J”

Anastasia Arvin-DiBlasio | 19

“Joy” is a very little word. It’s only three letters, and in our usual 12-point font, takes up less space than a human fingernail. But just think about how big a feeling it truly is. And True Joy, the kind from Christ—Joy with a capital J—is even bigger, and almost too big to fit into words.

Naturally, however, if we were just going to leave it at that, there would be no article left to read. And considering I really want to talk about how Joy can be achieved in relation to Jesus, some sort of definition is necessary. Although words fall utterly short, there are some examples of Joy that I think manage to express at least a fraction of the right idea. Joy is something so big that it spills out of you any way it can, potentially including but not limited to: jumping up and down, sitting silently in perfect peace, singing, or being utterly contented.

I remember very clearly a time when I felt Joy. I was on a run, and just heading up the hill that was the last leg of my route. It had been a great run so far, and although I was tired and sweaty, I had a huge smile on my face. I was happy already, but suddenly, Joy, true Joy, hit me in the chest so hard I could physically feel it. It was like being hit with an invisible two-by-four, except instead of hurting it exploded into a shower of gold inside me. It made my smile wider and my legs pump even faster. It wasn’t simply a runner’s high or an adrenaline rush. I knew it was a point in my life especially touched by my all-loving and all-powerful God. Joy is so much more than the accomplishment you feel when you get an A on an exam, or the pleasure you feel when spending time with a significant other. The Joy Jesus provides is so much bigger than any of those earthly emotions. It is literally out of this world.

Now that we at least have an idea of what Joy is, let’s talk about how we earthly mortals can achieve it. First and foremost, let me just say this: Jesus wants us to be Joyful. There is no three-headed Heavenly Hound guarding the gates to the Joy Distribution Center. Jesus wants nothing more than for us all to be

running around jumping for Joy, honest. That’s exactly what life would be like if the Original Sin hadn’t been committed in the Garden. (God said, “You must not eat fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden” (Genesis 3:3), and what did we do? Ate fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden, natch.) Because of that, sin, and therefore barriers to Joy, exist. Things like sadness and anger and helplessness do occur, and sometimes God even uses those emotions to bring us closer to Him. Nevertheless, we can still strive to reach Joy, and God has provided us with the means to experience it.

The thing that stands in our way is Satan and all the sin he throws at us. Christian life can be considered a funnel. At the uppermost, wide end of the funnel are all the choices and all the opportunities there are in the world. Becoming a FedEx pilot, choosing which new cell phone to buy, dog versus cat; it’s all up there. As the funnel narrows, however, so do the number of choices, until we get down to the very bottom, where the funnel is narrowest. Those are the choices of a godly life. It may seem kind of backwards to want to “swim away” from all the great opportunities at the top of the funnel, but the truth is, a lot of those tantalizing choices are just what Satan wants us to pick. They look nice and ripe and inviting (kind of like an apple), but in fact the only place they lead to is rotten and infested with worms. Despite seeming more constricting, what happens when you go through the funnel is infinitely more rewarding.

Life as a funnel is only part of the picture. It’s actually more of an hourglass, but with a much bigger base. When you pass through the funnel into the bottom part of the hourglass, you pass into Joy. And Joy is a million times bigger than the top of the earthly funnel. I want my friends and family to be so full of Joy that they’re in serious danger of exploding, metaphorically of course. But that can only happen if some of the options and possibilities at the top of the funnel are left and forgotten.

Let’s face it: some of the possibilities that God

would rather we turn away from are pretty easy. Colossians 3 even gives us a whole list, starting with “sexual immortality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness” (Colossians 3:5). This is pretty straightforward stuff that even our society has decided isn’t so great. We can even go to jail when stuff like “evil desire” turns into crimes like robbery or murder. But Jesus isn’t finished yet. We also need to abstain from “anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk” (Colossians 3:8). Slander and wrath, okay. But now we can’t indulge in “obscene talk?” We can’t even get angry? What does “obscene talk” even mean?

At first glance, it may seem like it means swearing, and, granted, God probably doesn’t want us dropping the F-bomb every other word just to make a point that could have been made just as well without it. More importantly, however, this particular word could also be closely related to “vulgarity,” which would entail lewd humor and other things of that nature, as well as being coarse or crude. What’s this about never getting angry? Whenever my dad chastises me for not controlling my temper, I am always quick to remind him that Jesus wasn’t exactly the picture of cheerful contentment as he drove the merchants from the Temple. “Wrath” is a bit different from good old-fashioned anger and frustration. It has a specific definition of vengeance, which most definitely isn’t a productive or godly emotion. While these parameters may seem to make more sense than at first, they’re still pretty demanding.

The desire to act according to God’s will may at times seem far off. It may even seem impossible to acquire in the first place. I mean, seriously, look at all those rules! Colossians proves just as helpful in this sphere as it did in the previous one. Jesus “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in Heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:5-17). All things hold together. Everything makes sense, everything is whole, everything is right, everything is as it should be when Jesus is around. The faith that this is true fuels the desire to walk in God’s way. Faith is the key, and once it has been put into the lock and twisted, God is standing there, arms open wide, to meet you and help you make the decisions that will result in a godly life. Because He thinks you’re pretty darn special.

Is there any way we could possibly hope to live up to the standards God has set before us? The answer, if you want to know the truth, is no. We

**It wasn’t simply a runner’s high or an adrenaline rush. I knew it was a point in my life especially touched by my all-loving and all-powerful God.**

can't. God knows that no matter how hard we try to swim down to the bottom of the funnel, there will be times when we can't resist temptation and bob back up to the top. There are other things that might throw us off track that aren't mentioned in Colossians. Like maybe we take a job with a great salary, but it's in an environment we just know isn't good for our spiritual growth. Or maybe we don't say hi or include the new kid as often as we know we should. And you know what? God knows we're not perfect, and that we're going to fail at some point along our journey as Christians. But He will forgive us, every single time, and He never keeps score.

In all honesty, He doesn't keep track of all the good stuff we do either. Even if we help every single little old lady across the street and play catch with our annoying little brother every time he asks, all those good deeds don't get cashed in for ladder rungs so we can climb into God's good graces. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul says that "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3). The idea isn't that we follow God's teachings in order to earn His love; we already have it, and we know because He "gave His one and only son" to die for us on the cross (John 3:16). The idea is that we love God so much that we try to emulate Him. Good deeds don't save us, but God's love does, and knowing that He loves us that much is what makes us want to follow Him and be more like Him.

Colossians (man this is one helpful book!) gives us some tips on how to do that more effectively. "Put on then, as God's chosen ones . . . compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, and . . . forgiving each other . . . and above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Colossians 3:12-14). First of all, we are given instructions as to the type of armor God has prepared for us in order to achieve our goal. Or, if we're sticking with our swimming-in-a-funnel metaphor, what type of SCUBA gear. Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and love all make it easier to turn away from options at the top of the funnel and swim towards Joy. They "decrease our buoyancy," let's say. Still, they're not the things that will save us, but things we do because we know we've already been saved. Second, but maybe not as obvious, is that we are called "God's chosen ones." Ones, plural. There are more of us out there! There are other people going through the exact same thing we are, and as Christians, we are called to help and receive help from one another. Not only do we have God and Jesus looking out for us, but we have other Christian brothers and sisters doing the same thing!

Basically, being a Christian is really, really hard. I'm not going to lie and say that once you become a Christian, everything goes your way and you walk around under your own personal little cloud of good luck and magical rainbow ponies or whatever. But being a Christian does give you the opportunity to make your way towards the Joy that comes from an all-powerful, all-loving God, and that's pretty awesome. Psalm 66 gives us an idea of what Joy feels like. "Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing the glory of His name; give to Him glorious praise!" How wicked sweet will it be, once we finally get there and spill out into the other side of the hourglass, to go to a huge celebration that lasts literally for eternity? So no matter how hard it gets, just remember what's waiting for you on the other side, and take some advice from Dori the fish: just keep swimming.

Anastasia Arvin-DeBlasio, Bowdoin Class of 2019

Undeclared

Manchester VT

Out of an overflow of the Father's love for her, "Cubby" loves and is loved by others.

# JUSTICE ON THE AMERICAN CAMPUS

In this interview, Robert B. Gregory, a jurist, and Benjamin Pascut, a theologian, explore Oliver O'Donovan's idea of the surplus of normativity given in the created order to shape and direct human ethics and justice, and the surplus of possibility which underwrites popular conceptions of human freedom with Agathos editor Ryan Ward. This conversation points to theological and juridical considerations which converge in a view of an empowered and responsible human agency that attends to human righteousness as the only adequate framework for a campus protest for human rights.

**RMW:** Rob, let me begin by asking you, what makes the study of justice important to the Christian Fellowship at Bowdoin? Why this topic and why now?

**RBG:** The imperative to study justice at Bowdoin College grew out of a conflict between secular college administrators and the Christian fellowship regarding the standards and qualifications for leadership for a campus fellowship, which for forty years had enjoyed the privileges of meeting in college-owned facilities. The standards held in obedience to the dictates of our Christian faith, we were told, were prohibited acts of disobedience to the evolving notions of justice. These evolving cultural norms preclude all judgments and exclusions based on religion, sexual identity and gender equality. In short, the clash was between conflicting concepts of justice rather than a conflict under a mutually held justice framework.

These contradicting ideas about justice directed us to a course of scripture study with students for the purpose of thinking more deeply about the framework of justice given in the Christian gospel, including subordinate questions pertaining to freedom, responsibility, human initiative, creation order and the common good. The exclusion of campus ministry from the campus venue forced us to answer the concerns raised by Alasdair MacIntyre (*Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*) two decades ago which connected questions of justice with questions of the cultural logic through which that justice is understood.

**RMW:** Ben, from your experience as a scholar, what is the relationship between the academy

and the study of justice? Is it this a study topic of particular interest to college students?

**BP:** Ryan, justice thinking has always been a part of higher education. From their roots in Plato's Academy to the first European universities, institutions of higher learning have promoted serious thinking about matters of justice. The first medieval universi-

**In short, the clash was between conflicting concepts of justice rather than a conflict under a mutually held justice framework.**

ties, such as University of Bologna (founded 1088), Oxford (1096), Paris (1150) and Cambridge (1209) developed a reputation for teaching both canon and Roman law alongside theological subjects. Imagine showing up to class at the University of Paris while Peter Abelard is testing out his

famous Dialogue between a philosopher, a Jew and a Christian. You may stutter when asked to play the role of the questioning philosopher, you may even fail to grapple with all the arguments, but you won't get out of that lecture hall without great faith in rational inquiry about virtue. This was what curriculum in the university was all about: precedence of scholarship and philosophical dialogue.

You asked whether justice is a study topic of particular interest to college students today. I'll be honest—the academy is not what it used to be. Recent developments at Bowdoin College and other academic institutions, from the formation of safe spaces to the promotion of student protests, reveal a staggering conclusion: millennial students do not fully engage in serious intellectual inquiry and debate about justice. Insulted by intellectual and cultural history and impatient with opposing ideas, they rush to hang posters, sign Facebook petitions or make anonymous comments on Yik Yak. Given this anti-intellectual turn, studying justice as a campus community needs no

further justification. Before anyone can “promote justice” (Isaiah 1:17b), it is essential to “learn to do what is right” (Isaiah 1:17a).

**RMW:** It sounds like this subject has such a long and distinguished tradition of intellectual inquiry in the academy; Rob, how did you even begin to approach this topic through your study of Scripture?

**RBG:** After completing a study of creation in 2014-2015, we moved this year to a study of the biblical framework offered for a protest against injustice. We chose the prophecy of Micah as a starting point to examine how the prophetic writers of the Old Testament charged the political, economic and juridical leaders of Israel with injustice in their treatment of the most vulnerable members of their society. Israel was chosen by God to discover the pattern of judgments, which God pronounced both against and for Israel in order to define justice against all the competing theories of justice held by other peoples. “Whose Justice? Which Rationality?” was a question already present to Micah in the 7th century B.C. when he challenged the leaders of both kingdoms of Israel for their failure to know God’s justice, since they were exclusively the nation to whom God had revealed his law: “Hear, you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel! Is it not for you to know justice – you who hate the good and love the evil” (Micah 3:1-2). We also looked at the larger narrative of justice from Genesis to Revelation to discover a framework for the protest against injustice. That framework proved to be the gospel as promised (Old Testament) and fulfilled (New Testament) in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

There are pressures within the postmodern campus community that would require that all perspectives about justice, including the theological perspectives, be seen through the consciousness, history and experience of one particular social group at the expense of all others. Our understanding of biblical theology would support the idea that one should frame one’s view of justice around the universal law given to the nation of Israel, called to both bear witness to God’s justice and to be a light to the nations: “Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a law will go out from me, and I will set my justice for a light to the peo-

ples” (Isaiah 51:4). Substituting other ethnic or social groups as the focal point of God’s witness to his justice is not the legacy of how Christians have sought to understand God’s justice and God’s rationality.

**RMW:** So if this is the shape of justice that you have found in your study of Scripture, what do you think is the main difference between the conception of justice in Christian theology and justice as perceived by students on American campuses?

**BP:** I’m privileged to speak with students whose passion for justice inspires me, but in general, students on the American campus bring me to my knees. When speaking of justice as ‘that virtue which gives to each his due,’ they make a good first impression. However, their protest triggered by worshipful sentiments toward human rights is misguided. Why? From Simonides of 5th century B.C. (Plato, *The Republic*, 1.331e), people of all time and cultures consented to the doctrine of giving to each his due. This is the universal definition of justice that most people approve of. But as Augustine made clear, such a definition loses its meaning and application when humanity doesn’t render what is first due to God (De Civit. Dei., XIX. 21). In Christian and biblical theology, true justice is first and foremost about the duty of the human race to worship its Creator God (Isaiah 1:11-17, 58:3-7; Amos 5:14-24). A reversal of dues – replacing the worship of God with the worship of man – is nothing but bad news (Romans 1). Without vertical justice (Exodus 20:2-11), the horizontal justice of self-redemption is devoid of direction and power, constantly derailing toward “vices rather than virtues” (Augustine, *De Civitate Dei.*, XIX. 25). In other words, with God thrown out of the picture on the American campus, justice has never been more false.

**RMW:** You’ve both talked about the student-led protests against injustice on college campuses which have spread across America. I’m curious: Should Christian students become involved in social justice movements with their peers? If it’s a Christian’s duty to seek and do justice, then these protests seem like a good opportunity for students to take practical steps toward this end.

**RBG:** Christian students should seek justice. The

passion for justice is a passion for some good perceived negatively – it is the desire for the absent “something” that lies at the heart of this current tumult. But in the interest of cooperating with other social justice movements on any possible points of agreement, they should be cautious. In particular, they should be cautious about offering the words of the gospel narrative as a kind of lending library, available to other messages, advancing other ideals, and believing in other truths about God, his order of creation, and the possibilities that might be had in other-than-gospel means for achieving some measure of provisional justice in the common good.

The good news that we’re charged to declare to college students is that it’s possible to orient one’s entire life around the gospel with this outline: (a) that God created all things; (b) that this God of creation appointed one nation, Israel, to bear witness to his acts in their history and to bear witness to the sum of his judgments pronounced both for and against them; (c) that the promises this Creator God made to his people all found their fulfillment in one historical person, Jesus; (d) that this Jesus was fulfilling these promises not just for Israel, but for all the nations who would stream to Israel to embrace this Jesus as creator, redeemer and savior of the world; and (e) that Jesus authorized the church to preach this gospel as the means of gathering together a new people, a new and holy nation. It is in this narrative of justice achieved in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus that students can find what O’Donovan called a surplus of normativity and surplus of possibility, discerning from them the “good works which God prepared before, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

**RMW:** Does your theoretical approach based on this grand biblical narrative turn its back on our postmodern society, which is becoming more justice oriented? Can justice live and thrive outside the Biblical narrative at all?

**RBG:** Within the biblical narrative of justice there is a built-in assumption that justice is not something to be constructed, but to be discovered: “learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the cause of the widow”(Isaiah 1:17). The postmodern approach to justice moves away from grand narratives, especially the biblical narra-

tive, and favors instead the micro-narrative of the individual or sectional groups. The enterprise of justice conceived this way is deeply suspicious of the normative framework of justice that could be discovered in the nature of things. The Biblical approach to identity sees “the people” as a pre-political creation reality grounded in the truth that “Adam” (mankind) is a relationally created being never meant to be alone. Justice arises from a reasoned and coordinated subjective agency defending the common goods under assault. The common goods that can be achieved in that coordinated agency are neither constructed nor contractual, but simply found in the pre-political order of creation, and that order of “goodness” needs greater attention to be understood. The God who authors justice seems disinclined to be lectured by post-modern man on the content of justice: “Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?” (Isaiah 40:14b).

**Within the biblical narrative of justice is a built-in assumption that justice is not something to be constructed, but to be discovered.**

**RMW:** Your approach could potentially create a deeper separation from

the secular world and the secular campus we’re hoping to reach. Does that seem to you to be a valid concern?

**RBG:** Separation is the problem we face, not the problem we are creating. Either the ways of God are perfect justice and the single truthful response to all aspects of human alienation, or they are not: “The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.” (Deuteronomy 32:4).

We certainly share with all members of a secular campus the passion for justice. But such a pursuit cannot abandon the truth that the common good to be defended in our collective agency can never be in conflict with that which God has declared to be good in creation. Not every effort in the interest of justice which shares some congruence of these ideals reasons toward justice in the same way, with the same rationality, and from the same conceptual point of origin related to this original good. Movements which are careless, thoughtless or simply wrong in their judgments about their description of the world will fail in making the appraisal of the character and attributes of God as he reveals himself as “just and justifier” (Romans 3:26).

Knowing God in his goodness must be the starting point for the pathway to knowing his justice. That is why Micah's model protest against injustice interprets the justice problem as one of misplaced affections between the good and the evil (Micah 2:1-2). The failure to know the good of creation is a failure in the worship of the Creator God, who is good and does good.

**RMW:** Ben, this question is for you. If justice lies within this gospel narrative, how can students bring justice to campus?

**BP:** When we think of injustice, we start from the absence of something, right? We think about peace, how much it's needed right now in the Middle East. We think about equality, and the lack thereof on our own campuses. We think about any form of oppression under the sun. And what do we do? Intuitively and most often with good intentions, we become human rights activists of some sort. But that's not how justice works. Let me illustrate it for you. You are in a lecture room when someone shouting 'Fire!' causes everyone to panic. The fire is real, kindled in the center of the room, the exits are blocked and soon breathing becomes nearly impossible. You may open the windows to let the smoke out, but that won't solve the problem; if anything, it may increase the extent of the fire. To stop it, you'll have to address the fire directly by putting out the flames with an extinguisher. The same goes with injustice. If the flames of all injustice in the world are produced by human depravity — which no thoughtful person can deny (e.g. Plato, *Republic*, 2.360b-360c; Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 2.1223b) — promoting human rights is the equivalent of opening windows to let the smoke out. As long as human depravity is not addressed directly with the righteousness of God in Christ, the flames will continue to rage out of control. All I'm suggesting is that in the aftermath of injustice on our campuses, students who want to stand on the side of justice must endorse human righteousness over human rights. The latter involves dealing with the effects of injustice, the former with both its cause and effects.

**RMW:** If you could imagine yourself as, let's say a Christian student who is antagonistic to the view you've just described, what objections would you have?

**BP:** Objections? I guess it can be argued, as I know many would argue today, that the moral responsibility of which I speak doesn't hold up to the example of Jesus. The centerpiece for such critique would have to be the sheer accounts of Jesus engaging in deeds of

justice. To be sure, Jesus has built an iconic legacy by addressing injustice on all fronts (Mark 1:40-42; 2:13-17, 23-28; 3:1-6; 5:1-20, 30-34; 6:36-44; 7:26-30; 8:1-13; 10:42-45; 11:15-19). But identifying the legacy of Jesus' justice with human rights is to miss its point entirely. There's a reason why Peter's declaration of Jesus as the Christ is met with a call to secrecy (Mark 8:27-33). There's a reason why it provokes a harsh response — Jesus naming Peter after his main opponent, Satan. In calling Jesus "the Christ," Peter is imagining a military hero who outruns the oppressive rule of Rome. He wants Jesus to bring religious, political and social rights to his people. What follows in the remaining of the narrative, after Jesus' passion prediction, is a corrective to this kind of popular way of justice. The enthronement of Jesus on the cross is a clear indication that the gospel is not a human rights narrative, but a

**...in the aftermath of injustice on our campuses, students who want to stand on the side of justice must endorse human righteousness over human rights. The latter involves dealing with the effects of injustice, the former with both its cause and effects.**

narrative about human righteousness. Jesus himself said "no" to his own human (Acts 8:33) and divine rights (Philippians 2:6-8), to say "yes" to bringing human righteousness to our race. If justice can be accomplished by advancing human rights, then Christ died for nothing (Galatians 2:21).

**RMW:** What's an example of your fellowship promoting justice on the college campus?

**BP:** "God is always trying to give good things to us, but our hands are too full to receive them," Augustine is known to have said famously, disclosing the problem behind our lack of productivity. He wasn't an efficiency expert, but his insight is more than anecdotal. Christian students are not called to get their hands full with programs, but to be single-minded, to render justice by proclaiming in both word and deed that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colosians 2:3). You know what's stronger than the power of words? Words that come from

hearts transformed by the living Word. This is why I'm particularly proud of the work our students are doing through the Agathos journal to think critically about God's justice and its relevance and gift of hope for their campus context. Our students are not caught between the grand narrative of God and the contemporary ideals of political correctness. They know the difference between justice and 'just us.' They know their place in the world, longing for the not yet of justice, and living in the sphere of the already. Their living words matched with loving actions are their means to bring their campus to the justice reality of the already in Christ.

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Damariscotta ME

*Mr. Gregory's practice has included trial in federal court defending victims of Rwandan genocide.*

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# NEEDS TO SPEAK MORE

June Woo | 16



44 | **W**e all know the saying, “Walk the talk.” But I think we can flip it around and say that we must talk the walk too. Actions are powerful, but so are the words that give context to those actions. For instance, giving your friend a batch of homemade chocolate chip cookies without any explanation, is quite different from giving her the cookies alongside the explanation that you noticed that she was having a rough week and made cookies with her in mind. Though this is a minor example, words have the ability to create significance.

For most of my life, I tried to show others the love of Christ through the way I lived my life, rather than through words. Those around me knew that I was a Christian, and I hoped that they would connect the dots between this fact and my actions. This is not to say that all of my actions were loving and perfect; I’ve failed more than I’ve succeeded. But, I do remember my friends asking me now and then how or why I was a certain way, and rather than pointing to the God who challenges and transforms me to become like him, I would give a vague answer of “I don’t know” or attribute it to my personality with “It’s just the way I am.”

Among Christians, it is easy to err on the side of not speaking of our faith in clear and direct terms. In fact, the famous saying, “Preach the gospel at all times. When necessary, use words,” is representative of our desire to love others without sharing the reason or source of the love that we have. This is unsurprising considering that as Christians, we have the unfortunate reputation of being seen as hypocritical. With such a reputation, it is preferable to show love

through actions rather than speak of love, fall short of it, and be considered hypocritical. However, this reputation of hypocrisy overlooks the imperfectness of humans and diminishes the perfectness of God.

While we as Christians are imperfect, we serve a perfect God. When the focus is on our actions, we lose sight of this. Our failures are not a reflection of the God that we serve, but of our own sin and the ongoing process of being transformed to become like our creator. This is not to excuse mistakes and wrongdoings, but to realize that our brokenness is the very reason why we need God.

Granted, faith without works is dead (James 2:26), but works without faith is in vain because it is impossible to please God apart from faith (Hebrews 11:6). At their best, works are a representation of the faith that transforms us and propels us to act. Yet in truth, the

Christian faith is not primarily about what we as Christians do and how we act, but it is about what God has done.

As such, proclaiming what God has done is integral to

Christianity. In the New Testament, the word “gospel” is used in two ways, as a noun and as a verb. In its noun form, evangelion, the “gospel” means the message of “good news.” It is typically paired with the verb kerysso, which means, “to preach.” When used as a verb, evangelizo, the “gospel” refers to the action of “preaching good news.” Both in its noun and verb forms, “the gospel” is inseparable from the act of preaching or proclaiming. In fact, when the apostle Paul writes to a church in Rome, he says, “[E]veryone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Ro-

**The gospel necessitates speech.**

mans 10:13). He then goes on to ask, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (Romans 10:14). The gospel necessitates speech.

What, then, is the good news of which we speak? Proclaiming the good news means to communicate or relay the justice of God. Jesus himself came to “proclaim justice to the nations” (Isaiah 42:1). When we think of “justice,” we often think of just us, as victims of injustice. But we are all perpetrators of an injustice of cosmic proportions, because we have wronged and spurned a perfect, holy, and benevolent God. Our dis-

**As bearers of this message of reconciliation, we are called to speak. It is when we are reconciled with God, that we can be reconciled with others.**

obedience to God is a sin deserving of eternal punishment, as a crime against the all-powerful and almighty God is one that deserves the most severe sentence. Yet in his generosity, God provided a way to enact righteous judgment and thereby establish justice, while simultaneously absolving us from the punishment of death. The recognition of this fact requires humility and repentance. As the prophet Micah declares, “I will bear the indignation of the LORD because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon his vindication” (7:9).

It would be unjust for a just God to simply overlook sin. But God satisfied his justice through the death of his son, Jesus Christ. Jesus became the propitiation for our sins, receiving the judgment that we deserved and dying on our behalf. It is through him that we are made righteous: “[A]ll have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23-24). God’s grace never undermines his justice. God is both the creator and the bearer of justice, and he himself is just.

Through faith in Jesus Christ, we too are made righteous and just. A culture that does not acknowledge the accountability that we have to God ignores both the root cause of injustice and the solution, as it is our disobedience to God that leads to injustice and our reconciliation to God that results in righteousness. “[I]n Christ God was reconciling the world to

himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us” (2 Corinthians 5:19-20a).

As bearers of this message of reconciliation, we are called to speak. It is when we are reconciled with God, that we can be reconciled with others. The first step in being reconciled with others is proclaiming: “We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20b). The works that follow alongside this proclamation are an effect of our own reconciliation with God. Jesus himself came “to proclaim good news to the poor... to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19). When we ourselves are reconciled to God, and when we call others to reconciliation, we are taking part in the justice of God, which naturally results in an outpour of love for our neighbors (Mark 12:31).

June Woo, Bowdoin Class of 2016  
English, Bowdoin Teacher Scholar  
Seattle WA

On her second grade report card, June’s teacher wrote,  
“Needs to speak more.”

My dear friend,

You know the evil of evil. It has hit you hard and you've tried to hit it hard back. You've fought harder than you ever have before, and though you don't seem to have given up, it has taken a visible toll on you. I truly have never seen you so angry and weighed down as I have seen you this year. How do you not cripple under the weight you're bearing? Injustice is monstrous and time and time again I know that you must feel defeated. Will it ever stop? Is this going to be your life forever?

I hope that it is freeing to hear that resolving injustice is not your job. And don't get me wrong, I don't mean that you don't have a responsibility to speak out against evil and bring good where you can. I mean rather that you do not have the ability to set everything right. Even in the context of a huge movement with thousands of college students standing behind you, you will not be able to change the hearts of people locked into a system of brokenness with the tools I see you using. But this must sound so unsatisfying and it should. You are passionate about justice down to your core. You must see wrongs righted and you will not stand for anything less. This is a good thing.

God is "just and the justifier." Do you see the full implications of what this means?! God is just: he knows what is right and wrong and sees to it that justice is brought to what is evil. God is the justifier: he does this in such a way that while never sacrificing the completion of full justice, those who are at fault (read: all humanity) are declared "not guilty." Is this the justice you are looking for? I think that's the first really challenging question you have to ask yourself: Are you willing to fight for a justice where the oppressors and wrongdoers are as much freed from evil as the oppressed and victims of injustice? If you don't, where will that leave you? And furthermore, how is this justice even possible?

Look to the cross, my dear friend. "For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith." When it comes down to it, the cross is the only and the perfect tool to face injustice. Can you change the heart of the person sitting next to you? Can you undo generations of taught and embodied racism in their minds? Can you heal their broken family life that has colored the entire way they view and move through the world? This is the power of Jesus' cross. It recognizes the seriousness of evil and the pressing need for justice. Just because life circumstances have taught someone to commit violence against others for the color of their skin, does that excuse them from the evil? God's pure righteousness says absolutely not. I think, perhaps, in agreement with your own judgment. This is what the cross answers. Jesus slain is at once the propitiation for every evil committed and the redemption for every oppressor and oppressed. All in a moment, justice is served and freedom is given.

The cross can speak against and give answer to the actual present evils in the world around you. It is the radical act of justice that is unlike any response offered from our own efforts. Please my friend, take a closer look at this praxis and size it up against the one you have been fighting your battles with. I promise that if you commit yourself to doing justice with the cross, your weariness will be lifted and your discouragement will be no more.

With Hope,

Amanda

*For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

*Romans 3:21-26*



