

QUESTIONING GOD'S WILL ON EARTH

A Scientist Looks at Concerns in the Courtship Letters of His Parents

Mark Johnson

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INTRODUCTION

Walter met Margaret at an autumn church outing when she visited her sister in Greeley, Colorado. Shortly afterward, Margaret returned to Washburn, North Dakota, to direct choral groups and teach high school English. Aside from two brief visits, their premarital exchanges took place entirely through letters.

The springtime of their courtship is covered in the first book of their letters, *Encountering God: Reflections on the Courtship Letters of My Religious Parents*. There were a few initial rough edges, but mutual visions of a heavenly father bringing them together, caring for them, and responding to their thoughts and prayers quickly evolved. Meanwhile, world affairs were deteriorating economically and militarily. Clouds gathered as war threatened, Walter was refused a needed loan, and Margaret wondered why the stock market had to “fluctuate so much.”

Their worries materialize in the wintertime of their courtship. Walter wonders about God’s will, and Margaret wonders about Walter’s. It’s an intimate and detailed look into the inner thoughts of two educated young adults as they encounter vexing issues while seeking to know God and each other better.

As a grateful son and retired scientist, I contextualize and reflect on some of the consequences of their thoughts and choices and give my take on three issues arising in the letters on which many have contended and pivoted: the complementary nature of our fundamental sources of truth, the oncoming world order, and the extraordinary events surrounding the open tomb.

A word is in order concerning this transcription of the letters. Conversation is the most natural way of sharing our thoughts. We unthinkingly color the literal meaning of what we are saying with appropriate pauses and inflexions. We may mispronounce our words, but we don't misspell them. To aid reading and to make the letters more conversational, they have been transcribed into mechanical type. The punctuation has been edited to better correspond to the pauses and inflexions of natural speech, and the spelling has been corrected—except when Walter and Margaret intentionally speed things up by writing, for example, “thot” for “thought.” Postscripts, which occasionally wind around the edges of their letters, have been appended after their signatures. A few photos of the letters have been added to help the reader gauge what is lost in this transcription.

ONE QUESTION DWELLS ON MY MIND

In Colorado, Walter read the *Greeley Tribune*. There he learned on February 7 that the English and French were countering German and Italian support for Franco's fascist takeover of Spain and had sent warships to blockade the Balearic Islands between Spain and Italy. On February 9 he learned that Roosevelt wanted billions for economic relief. In North Dakota, Margaret read the *Washburn Leader*. On February 11, she learned that Franco had declared himself dictator of Spain.

February 5 [Postmarked February 7, 3:00 p.m.]

Dear Walter,

“And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea-shore.” I Kings 4:29

God surely answered Solomon’s prayer. This section is so very interesting. It was so sad to read of Absalom’s sin against David, his father. It was marvelous the way David treated King Saul, the anointed. God took care of him. Well, He will do the same toward us. He can hear us at all times. It is strange that Martin Luther could spend four or five hours in prayer when he was so very busy. Was that statement in the book Prayer by Hallesby? I really would enjoy reading that book. I believe I could have time to read it. Those other books which you mentioned I also would like to read. I believe such reading gives added strength. . . .

We got our checks this morning. I don’t believe that I have told you what my salary is. I get one hundred dollars a month. I put thirty dollars in [a] savings account. I don’t have a checking account. Formerly I have sent quite a lot home, but they don’t want me to do so now as they want me to save for my own use later if I can possibly put some aside. I plan to send at least twenty dollars to pay for church dues and house rent. I don’t know if the folks will accept the money for house rent. In that case I plan to have them use it for the Clarissa Church building fund. Ebba, Mother, and I pledged \$100 to be paid within three years, and I want to pay at least forty dollars before May. . . .

Walter, I am glad that you are a farmer. Farmers can do so much for humanity. My father’s and mother’s folks were farmers, and here none of their children have lived on the farm, so I think that maybe I am the one that should. Really, I don’t care much for living in town. It will be

fun to see things grow. Just think if we were living in the time of pioneering; it would be entirely different. Stock might be cheap now, but think how hard it is for other businessmen to make a living. There are very few callings of today that are as honest and honorable as farming. The teaching field is certainly not safe and secure. Some teachers receive only warrants, which are difficult to get cashed and when cashed must get it at less than full value. . . .

Today you were to move to your home. I bet you are tired tonight. I hope that you will soon be able to send me another plan of the house. I hope we can get a piano as soon as possible. You know you want to learn to play, and I want to be your teacher. I have enough music books to keep you busy. I want to play too. When your sister Mabel comes, you know we will want to hear her play. Evodia and she can play duets together. Won't it be fun, though? . . .

May God bless and keep you in the grace and peace which is found in His Son. I am glad that you talk and walk in Christ. I know when He comes the second time, He will draw you up to Him wherever you may be, out in the field irrigating or in town, or in the house or up in the mountains. May He take me, too, altho I am not as near to Him as my heart longs to be. May He forgive me. . . .

May God help you in your work and in your new environment.

Margaret

February 5 [Postmarked February 7, 4:30 p.m.]

My Dear Margaret:

“The heavens declare the glory of God: And the firmament showeth his handiwork.” Psalm 19:1

It has always seemed very strange to me that anyone could walk upon this wonderful earth and not recognize this truth but, rather, deny God and His creation. I have known times, when, in order to justify my own convictions, I have tried to recognize the theory of evolution, but it just will not work. Only one, with an unlimited resource of power, could create this world and the surroundings and then keep the whole thing in order, year after year. Indeed, the heavens do declare the glory of God. . . .

Walter and Margaret were in high school when the Scopes trial of 1925 dramatically voiced conservative and fundamentalist objections to teaching evolution in school. Margaret may have taken a special interest in that trial. She had spent her first ten years in a Swedish community in Tennessee Ridge where her parents helped start a Lutheran church before they moved to Lindsborg, Kansas.

No, I have not read Babbitt by [Sinclair] Lewis, at least not all of it. I have read Main Street quite thoroughly and also scanned through Arrowsmith quite well. I do not care much for his writings, especially his viewpoints. They are not the viewpoints of a Christian; in fact, he is a rank atheist. It is said—in fact, I read it in a daily newspaper some years ago—that he strode into the middle of one of the streets, in St. Louis, Mo., and defied God to strike him dead. Of

course, God did not answer such a request, and Lewis said that it was proof that there was no God. I do not believe his works are nearly as popular as they were a few years ago. We should thank God that many of the writings of our most popular modern authors point to a much better moral outlook, for instance:

Magnificent Obsession

Green Light *by Lloyd C. Douglas*

A Lantern in Her Hand

A White Bird Flying *by Bess Streeter Aldrich*

How to Win Friends and Influence People *by Dale Carnegie*

Walter read *Main Street* “quite thoroughly” even though he strongly disagreed with the author’s view of God. Why would he read it? I read it to find out.

This 1920 novel portrays the struggle of Carol Milford, a liberal-minded woman. She grew up in a big city. After finishing college, she met and married Will Kennicott, a medical doctor living in a small midwestern town. Although Carol was not the girl of Walter’s dreams, he might easily have pictured an independent and spiritually minded woman coming to live with him on the farm.

As the book progresses, Carol’s free spirit slowly withers. Her thoughtful considerations are discounted by Will Kennicott. He tries to accommodate her interests, but he owns the house and dispenses her allowance. Her cultural drive conflicts with the then-current small-town midwestern traditions in which women dutifully catered to men, who played the leading roles

in the community. In trying to elevate the cultural interests of the town, she became a target of its gossip.

Although in one sense the views of Walter and of Sinclair Lewis are poles apart, Walter did not want to end up like Will Kennicott, with a wife whose spirit has been suffocated. He is off to a good start when, in his November 11 letter, he writes, “your letters contain messages of thot, wisdom, and rich knowledge” and, in his January 26 letter, that he feels it would be a “privilege to be [her] husband.”

During their married life, Dad treated Mom with respect. He was courteous to her in all matters. They shared the major budgetary decisions. He never termed household or child-rearing duties “women’s work.” He helped gather us around the piano to sing. He enthusiastically sang along, sometimes with a monotone approximation when unfamiliar with the melody. He encouraged and helped her in elevating the cultural interests in our church and farming communities. His reward? A high-spirited woman who always returned his love and admiration.

I am quite sleepy tonight. I cross my l's and forget to cross my t's, and my margins look even worse than usual if that be possible. I just got partly cleaned up and moved up this afternoon. Tonight I am spending my first night up in our house. Irene and Bernice helped me this afternoon. Mr. Heard moved Friday, so that leaves the old bachelor in full possession. Now I shall be able to take some measurements and send you a detailed plan of the house, but I will not be able to do so at this time. . . .

The cattle price does not look good, and it is hard for me to pray for God's will to be done and not my own desires. Though there are so many things that I want to get and need money for, I shall try to leave it all in the hands of Him who knows what is best. I am asking Him to help me in this. . . .

In his earlier October 7 letter, Walter was thankful for his "fortunate purchase" of "25 head of very good cattle." During the fall, the cattle were fattened on leavings and weeds still in the fields. Now they are being bedded down with straw and fed hay and grain. Spring is rapidly approaching, and come spring, Walter must sell his cattle before preparing the seedbeds for his sugar beets, barley, and alfalfa.

Tho several hundred miles separate us, sometimes I feel very near to you, Margaret. I feel that Jesus has one arm around you and one around me. When I see some seeking pleasure in the world and talk to some of them and hear their viewpoints, I am so happy that I have found Jesus, who is a friend so precious. And then I also thank God, for you and other friends who pray that I may always be found in Him.

I seldom dream, so I have not dreamt about you, but I often think about you and the days when you will be with me in our own home. May God make me the kind of husband I should be, kind, loving, and considerate. Margaret, if it were so that we might see each other, we could discuss and talk about many things. Here is one question that dwells on my mind a great deal. That is the one of money. If we trust entirely upon God, who has been so gracious unto us, we may never have much money, altho I am sure He will provide plenty for us. Now I am not sure

that we can bring ourselves to the point where we will leave all in the hands of God. It is something that very few people living today can do, even if they feel they want to. Now I do not say this just because I have not a great deal of money now, or because I am lazy, for I do not believe God will provide for those who are unwilling to work. "If any will not work, neither let him eat." 2 Thes. 3:10. Were money to be my goal in life and my great desire, I know that by pursuing the right course I could amass a fortune, but that does not seem right to me. Does it to you? Now I want to provide for you, to make you comfortable and happy, but I am going to take God at His word, and He has said, "But seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Walter's last sentence restates the verse, Matthew 6:33, found in Margaret's October 30 letter. His choice is preceded by a prophetic statement: "If we trust entirely upon God . . . we may never have much money, altho I am sure He will provide plenty for us." Sounds good, but the bend he senses in the river isn't going away. We hear the faint roar of the rapids ahead when he writes, "one question that dwells on my mind . . . money."

The old fire is getting pretty warm now, so I shall take a bath and then go to bed in order to be able to get up and get ready for S. S. [Sunday school] & church. I will not seal this letter, as there may be something interesting to [write] concerning the events of tomorrow.

Monday Morning: 9 a.m. [Continuation of February 5 letter]

Good morning, Margaret

How are you this morning, and is Helen strong enough to go to school this morning?

I plan to wash the woodwork and scrub the floor in the kitchen today. I plan to use only the two south rooms, the kitchen, bedroom, pantry, and clothes closet. We did not finish cleaning the kitchen Sat., so I will do that today. But I want to get this letter off to the dearest girl in all the world, to me. Instead of just writing, "good morning," I should like to have taken you in my arms and kissed you good morning. But you know that, and you are safe in the arms of Jesus.

As I was looking for suitable songs for S. S. last Thurs. eve., I came upon this song and copied a verse to send to you. I forgot to copy the no. of the song, but I am sure you know it. I like it very much.

Watch and pray, my soul,

Flesh and blood control;

When the world in tempting story,

Tells of pleasure, wealth and glory,

Watch, my soul, and pray. . . .

This kitchen has green, calsomined walls and gray woodwork. [Kalsomine is an inexpensive paint that gave rise to the saying, "Too proud to whitewash, too poor to paint."] The woodwork in this house is pretty good but needs redecorating, as does the whole house. Aside from cleaning it well and perhaps painting the kitchen floor, to make it easier to scrub and clean, I will not do anything to any of it until you come. If I sell my cattle pretty well and get a fair crop, I know we will have enough to furnish this little house pretty well. Mr. Brown will furnish the

material, paint, and varnish & paper, but I may have to do the work. It is a good farm, and I would gladly do that. . . .

Wed nite I am going to the midweek service and to the rifle shoot afterwards. I plan to finish with the rifle club this year and drop it after it is over sometime in March. You could not go with me, and there are so many things which we can go to and do together. Since I cannot do as most men do, call on their girls and take them with them, at least once a week I will have to do my courting after we are married. I begin to see the plan God has laid out for us—"At least I think I do." I always felt it should be no different after marriage than before, so now I am glad that it is arranged as it is. Then, since we have seen so little of each other, it will be even easier to plan things together. For one thing there will be no debating about going to church on Sunday morning. We'll always plan for that. Then there will be hiking trips to the mts. and hikes up there. I can think of many things to do, and though I have seen you so little, yet I know pretty well your likes and dislikes concerning many things, and I can only thank God that they are as they are. I am so glad that you like little mts., little and big flowers, birds and animals, and all nature. Some afternoons when the work is a little slack, and there are such times, we can take a short drive into the lower mts. and have a little beefsteak fry. Perhaps Rueben & Evodia will find time to go with us also.

It is such fun to write to you, darling, but I must sign off and attack this woodwork. One thing which helps is an abundance of warm soft water. It's going to be a snap to wash that beautiful hair for you. I'll get a chair of the right height, put you on it, and bend you over the

sink and go to it. But now, you'll have to imagine you're getting just a little spanking and a kiss, because I am leaving you, in the keeping of our blessed Redeemer and his merciful father.

Yours in Christ,

Walter

One can easily appreciate that the theory of evolution might not explain the “wonderful earth” that Walter sees. But Walter felt that the theory’s failure to do so to his satisfaction implied that God must have been involved. I see this as a God-yes reasoning fallacy. There is no problem with Walter’s inferring or believing God brought about his world. A person is free to infer and believe whatever he or she wishes. However, the fact that science could not explain the existence of Walter’s physical world does not imply the existence of God. Nor does a current inadequacy of a scientific explanation of one’s world exclude the future emergence of a scientifically satisfying explanation.

In my early exposure in college to the theory of evolution, I found the evidence for the theory quite compelling. At the same time, God and biblical truth were simply a part of my life. The need to reconcile my “scientific” understandings of the creation of the world with the biblical accounts of creation in Genesis naturally emerged. One day I asked Dad what he thought of the theory of evolution. His characteristically succinct reply satisfied my young need: “The problem arises when our God is too small. Should God have wanted to create the world through evolution, he certainly could have.”

The difference between this answer and the viewpoint expressed in the opening of this letter puzzled me—until I ran across Mother’s college text *English Prose of the Nineteenth*

Century edited by Hardin Craig and J. M. Thomas. It lay among a number of her books she left behind at her death.

The selections in the anthology were grouped by author. Mom had penciled in her reading assignments on the table of contents. There were groups of selections from the works of Charles Lamb, Thomas De Quincey, Walter Landor, Thomas Carlyle, William Thackeray, and John Newman. Her May assignments were from Matthew Arnold's works. The last one, "Literature and Science," was marked May 15. While reading this article, I kept thinking, "so that's where Dad got his arguments for why one should get a liberal college education before focusing on a more specialized interest."

But what really caught my attention was a group of selections following Arnold's, two of which were unobtrusively marked in ink. They were by Thomas Huxley, sometimes called Darwin's bulldog. One was his autobiography; the other was "A Liberal Education; And Where to Find It." In between was another of Huxley's articles, "On a Piece of Chalk."

The title took me back to the times Dad invariably pointed out the chalk cliffs in southern Wyoming on our occasional trips to the dry lands in northeastern Colorado. The article by this eminently gifted writer showed how the chemical, biological, and geological arguments for the existence of the chalk cliffs had been written in stone long before the story of the days leading up to the creation of man had been inscribed on parchment. The arguments were simple and straightforward, the type Dad loved. I believe that Dad, after carefully digesting the central force of Huxley's arguments for the theory of evolution, had a new appreciation for the origin of the cliffs he liked to point out. If so, he would have had to thoughtfully reconcile those

arguments with his own understanding of God. That reconciliation might be the one I heard when I later asked him what he thought of evolution.

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WALTER HORATIO PATER (1839-1894)

February 8 [Postmarked February 10, 8:30 a.m.]

Dear Margaret:

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his son cleanseth us from all sin.” I John 1:7

The last twelve words in this verse were the theme of Dr. Maier’s sermon last Sunday. It was a very good address and gave me a new and greater value and respect for that great gift; as one reads it over and over again, and meditates upon it, he cannot help but thank God, for making it possible for all men to be free from all sin.

This was the first time I had heard Dr. Maier on the Lutheran Hour. I had at one time planned to get myself a small cheap radio set, but I lack the necessary funds, and anyway, I want you to help pick one out. . . .

I may wait to have my picture taken until I am better off, financially. I think everything will work out for the best, but at the present time, I have to be pretty careful of my money. Perhaps there is a divine purpose in this. I hope I learn the lesson, to always spend carefully.

The cattle market has been much stronger today, and that is encouraging. I think the potato market is showing some strength also. . . .

Did I answer, last time, your wish concerning the yellow or white gold ring? I shall certainly remember that. I long for the time when I may send it, and Oh! How I do wish I could come and put it on that little finger.

I certainly have a hard time getting much reading done. That is, in my estimation, one of the great drawbacks on the farm. It is necessary to spend the daylight hours at your work and then the evening [hours] are all that you have left. With some necessary reading to do, such as S. S.

study and preparation and my daily Bible reading with some correspondence, I find it hard to do much reading on the side.

It is soon time to go milk. I milk Brown's cow. Then I will get all the milk I need when I move or, rather, start batching. For I sleep over here now, but I go home to eat.

I have time to say thank you, for the letter. There is one thing I seldom mention, as you so often do. That is my own unworthiness. I am truly thankful that I have found Jesus and know him. But Oh! How I long to be much closer to him. I would even like to lay my head upon that strong bosom. Margaret, I am not at all worthy of his wonderful mercy and goodness. And I am not perfect in any way. I pray much that I might be worthy of you and be the kind of husband I should be. I am so thankful we can each of us turn to God for strength, else we would have nothing.

It was in a conversation with my sister, Anna, about some ties between the Song of Solomon in the Bible and these letters that I realized how deftly Walter expressed his deep desire for Margaret. One can only wonder how the thought of "that strong bosom" arose.

Now again I say that I love you, not for what you could be or might be but just for what you are. Not counting myself worthy of your love but ever thanking our Gracious God for making that love possible. How glad I am that someday we will, "God willing," take these problems to God together.

Now I go to milk and then home to supper.

Yours in Christ,

Walter

Although Walter's feeling that there may be a "divine purpose" in his discouraging financial circumstance is not a God-yes reasoning fallacy, notions of purpose and intention are terms rigorous science has ceased to use in its explanations. Two simple anecdotes will illustrate the need for both the mechanistic-based explanations of science and the intention-based explanations of ordinary life.

First, the need for mechanistically-based explanations: An instructor opened a technical writing workshop in our pharmaceutical research division with a rhetorical question: When you throw a rock into the air, why does it fall to the ground? When nobody spoke up, I volunteered, "Because it wants to get closer to the earth." My answer suited his goal of pointing out that scientific explanations address *how* something happens, not *why*.

My proffered explanation actually agrees the behavior of all of the rocks I have thrown into the air, but *why* are they drawn to the earth? Science would agree that they are drawn to the earth—but by gravitation, not by intention. Given the initial velocity and direction of the rock, science can predict its path. Moreover, the predictive equations can be generalized to the point of predicting the path of rockets. However, we would not have such terms as *purpose* and *intention* if they did not bestow significant capabilities as well.

Now picture the following: You're driving down a road. You notice a little café for the first time and decide you and your friend might enjoy meeting there for lunch. You call your friend and set up the time and location of your luncheon date.

Whether or not the two of you meet at the designated location is an objective test of your ability to predict a critical event in your future. The next day arrives. Should your friend not show and your prediction thereby fail, you would want to know the reason why and maybe even modify your method of coordinating and predicting similar future luncheon dates.

Unlike landing a rocket on the moon, we have been taking such coordinations for granted ever since the human mind began to recognize the power of speech. Yet setting up and predicting these commonplace coordinations lie forever beyond the realistic dreams of science. There are no measurements, no brain scans, and no probing questionnaires that could have been collected prior to your phone conversation that would have enabled science to predict the occurrence of your luncheon date—nor will there ever be.

Suppose science could know the states of all of the neurons in your brain, and the states of all the molecules that make up *each* of those neurons, and all of the electronic states of all of the atoms that make up *each* of the molecules of each of those neurons. Even so, science could never complete the needed predictive calculations before the event occurred—not when the simulation of the interaction between just two molecules is so computationally time-consuming that current simulations on our most powerful computers are restricted to molecules with only a handful of non-hydrogen atoms!

The time may come when you could converse with a robot that will agree and be able to meet you for lunch and may even know your daily routines. But until you share your particular

plans with that robot, it cannot know them. It would be stuck in the same simple, computationally insurmountable predictive problem faced by science even if it could know all the factual details of your brain.

As a scientist, I don't despair. Neuroscience is unveiling aspects of the structure, functioning, and organization of the human brain that underlie a variety of mental experiences and behavioral patterns that our intuitions can only vaguely discern. I'm only suggesting that the rapidly evolving terminology of science will not replace the core aspects of our language that have been honed to convey the evolving intentions of the human heart.

February 12 [Postmarked February 12, 3:00 p.m.]

Dear Walter,

“And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my border, and that Thy hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldst keep me from evil, that it be not to my sorrow! And God granted him that which he requested.” I Chron. 4:10

This is such a wonderful verse that seems like a fountain in a dry land. It seems much of Chronicles is just [a] listing of names. I am using Mother’s Bible, which contains the diacritical markings for all the names. I enjoy pronouncing them, altho it really doesn’t mean much to me. I am sure that just the above verse has helped me enough so that I am glad that I am reading the book.

I found out that I can send a bank draft much cheaper than a money order. I am sending thirty dollars home. There are some things that I need from the cities, so that takes some of the money. A portion goes for house rent, building fund (church), and church dues. . . .

I told Miss Foster concerning that that you had of Sinclair Lewis’s defying God. She said she knew it and also could see this same viewpoint in his works. In English IV one of the boys reported on the life story of Vachel Lindsay. Did you know he committed suicide? From his childhood he had always suffered financially, and it finally caused his killing himself. I don’t believe writers have a very easy life. . . .

We have had quite cold weather. This morning we had weather that was somewhat like a blizzard. I was up to school checking some Eng. I workbooks for about half an hour. It was very cold up on the hill. When I came downtown at noon, the thermometer registered five above.

One day this week we had no train service. It has been predicted that next Monday we will again experience the same loss of mail. I decided to send this letter this afternoon. . . .

Walter, there is another boy, Raymund Goehring, whom I wish you would pray for. Last year he was a real problem. He would not study and didn't care if he failed his subjects. He is studying now, and I believe his grades for this six weeks' period will average a B. He has a good bass voice; I would like to have him in my glee club. I believe if we pray about it, that when I approach him he will join the group. Byron is doing fine singing. . . .

I would enjoy surprising you tonight by knocking at the kitchen door and bring[ing] my crocheting with me to spend the evening. I am afraid the ride back by plane would be too swift, cold, and costly, though. I can imagine what fun we would have together. You would show me all over the house, wouldn't you? . . .

Helen is melting snow for our hair. I wouldn't mind having you wash my hair, too. I hope to save fifty cents; therefore, I am washing it and fixing it myself. I hope it gets thoroughly dry before six o'clock.

It seems strange to hear of the snow's melting and completely off the ground. Soon, I presume, you will be plowing. What seed do you plant first? You don't plant potatoes for a long time, do you? . . .

Now I will have to hurry to get this letter off in time. May God be with you while we are absent from one another and even be with us when we are together.

Yours in Christ,

Margaret

Feb. 14 [Postmarked February 14, 4:30 p.m.]

Dear Margaret:

“And he went out, and followed; and he knew not that it was true which was done by the angel, but thought he saw a vision.” Acts: 12:9

In our S. S. class we studied the 12th chap. of Acts yesterday. The book of Acts is very interesting. But I was much impressed by the fact that even Peter had a hard time casting himself entirely upon God and his boundless grace. I can almost imagine that Peter pinched himself to make sure that he was awake, alive and on the outside of prison. How much like Peter we are after all: Sometimes hardly daring to ask God for some things because we can hardly believe that even He can give them to us. . . .

Although Dad especially liked reading the writings of the Apostle Paul, he seemed to identify more with Peter. Once when I was a young teenager, Dad was asked to lead the church service on a Sunday when the minister was absent. How proud I felt when he stepped into the pulpit. Speaking as one talking to someone on the street, Dad pointed out that doubt and fear were things Peter, too, had experienced before becoming a wholehearted follower of Jesus.

Here are some of the questions which arise in class. Do miracles happen today? Is prayer answered in dreams and visions? Why do we end our prayers by saying “In Jesus’s name and for His sake? What was the purpose of Christ’s coming upon the earth? Why did He have to die to save us from our sins?

Now you may not have time to try answering these questions. I merely mention some of the questions arising in the minds of these boys. If you do have some time, please give the 3rd question some thought. It is a difficult question to answer. Perhaps you can give me a better view and wording of it. . . .

I am becoming accustomed to the bachelor life by now. Of course I only sleep here. Some tell me I will not like it. Of course they do not know that I am going to have such a fine little helper. (Do you mind that "little"?) My heart is not as big as it should be, and I know that you completely fill it. So from that I come to the conclusion that you are a little girl. . . .

It was said that 100 miles south of here near Colo. Springs there were millions of young grasshoppers coming out. Of course not many will admit it, but I know that it is God helping the farmers. For we will have a cold spell after that, and it will kill what otherwise might have been the worst grasshopper epidemic in history. It had been predicted by some very prominent entomologists. There comes to my mind an old saying, maybe from the Bible, but I am not sure of it right now, but it says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" It certainly seems to me, as far as the farmer is concerned, that God is for us.

I traded my shotgun for \$20 worth of merchandise at the hardware store in Eaton. . . . I still have my rifle. I do not use even it very much anymore. . . .

That changed. As early as I can remember, Dad had a .22 target rifle with a high-powered scope, a slide-action .22, his childhood single-shot .410, and a 10-gauge lever-action shotgun. He later bought a slide-action 20-gauge shotgun and a 12-gauge double barrel for my two older

brothers. My sisters, when interested, were trained in shooting tin cans with the .22 and clay pigeons with the .410.

Duck hunting with Dad was a treat—laying out decoys before sunrise along the edge of a river or lake and then hiding back in the brush with him as he called to ducks off in the distance, “QUAAAACK, QUACK, QUACK, Quack, quack, quack, quack, quack.” When he caught the attention of some approaching ducks, the calling changed to contented chuckles, “Tuk-kah-tuk-kah, Tuk-kah-tuk-kah, Tuk-kah-tuk-kah-tuh-kah. . . .” As the circling ducks came within range, the whispered excitement, “Here they come!” was palpable. Those were moments I’ll never forget.

I also won’t forget an even more memorable moment that happened many years later. A friend was showing me where I might take my son duck hunting. I carried a 16-gauge Browning automatic and brought along a box of shells I had reloaded for hunting doves and quail in North Carolina with my father-in-law.

We eased his canoe into a clear Michigan stream meandering through the cattails. About a half hour later, we surprised a pair of wood ducks as we floated around a curve. I shot the drake and would have shot the hen had the reload ejected. While trying to free the casing, I kept my eyes on the hen. More than once I had seen a duck circle back over the very spot where some of the flock had just been shot. Sure enough, she turned and headed back toward us. After failing to pry the casing loose, I decided to enjoy the moment.

Here she came, just above the treetops, close enough for me to see her probing eyes and feel her throbbing heart as she risked her life in search of her silenced mate.

I understand the lure and camaraderie of duck hunting, but I will never again kill a duck just for the sport of it.

This is the month of birthdays and also St. Valentine's Day. I sent a little valentine box to you. I am sorry it could not be more. . . .

I still have my cattle and potatoes. The cattle are certainly doing well. Now if the price will pick up 25 cents each week for a while, I shall come out very well. I may sell some potatoes soon. I need a little money. I have expected a check from the govt. for the soil conservation program I carried out this summer.

Mr. Brown, my landlord, has certainly been on a long spree, about 2 months. He is trying to quit now, but it is very hard because when the effect of the alcohol leaves him, his nerves are all shot to pieces. If he does not quit pretty soon it will kill him. Yesterday, right after dinner, Mable wanted to come up and see our house. While we were walking around looking at the cattle, Mr. Brown asked me to come in. I did, and he was shaking like a leaf and wanted me to stay with him as his wife and daughter were away to dinner. I took Mable home and then came back. He was some better later in the evening and this morning. Margaret, Mr. Brown is a rank atheist and has lived a hard life, so it is hard to talk with him. Will you pray and ask God to call him? Ask Him to help me in order that I might show him [Mr. Brown] the way. He is very stubborn; otherwise, I think he secretly acknowledges a supreme being, but in order to justify his own actions, he will not admit it.

Now I must close. I cleaned up in the house some this morning, and I am going to walk home because I have a horse, which has crossed the fence. I will take a bridle along and ride him back after dinner. . . .

Now may God make His face shine upon you and keep [you] always, in Christ.

Walter

Of the four questions Walter, my dad, puts to Margaret early in this letter, I am more interested in the first: Do miracles happen today? Dad seemed to think there were more miracles in biblical times than today because of our pervasive lack of faith. But Dad had faith. I dramatically experienced that faith the summer that Mary, his oldest child, was preparing to go to college.

Dad and I were standing a half mile north of the house on the bank of the head ditch of our bean field. We had finished directing the irrigation water down roughly thirty bean rows and were surveying our work. Irrigation tubes were laid out along the ditch, each funneling an allocated stream of water down the furrows separating the rows. The water sparkled and glistened through the green leaves under the bright Colorado sun.

Dad began talking about a bean crop yielding possibly forty-plus bushels to the acre. The bumper crop would yield enough to send Mary to Bethany, the private Lutheran college Mom had attended. I liked the thought. We didn't have much in the way of material possessions. What we had was seldom new. Yet it was understood that Dad's oldest child was going to the college of her choice. Dad had missed the opportunity of a college education; his oldest daughter would not.

A week later, a churning thunderhead darkened the sky. White curtains of hail reaching all the way to the ground were headed our way. We rushed inside to pray. Shortly after, the hail began pounding on the roof. We prayed harder; it hailed harder. After the storm passed and the prayers ended, the outcome was clear. There wasn't going to be much of a bean crop. The flowers and leaves were stripped from the plants in the lower part of the bean field next to the house.

But a hailstorm can be spotty. It can cut out a quarter-mile strip or widen into a two-mile swath. Dad and I climbed in the pickup and drove to the top of the bean field to see the extent of the damage. We got out and walked to the bank of the head ditch where we had stood the week before—totally wiped out, only naked stems.

Dad did not cry, curse, or even complain. Like so many farmers, he had taken out bank loans to cover the costs of raising the crop. Those had to be repaid. They were not mentioned. Instead, he turned from this financial loss to a more insistent concern somewhere along the spiritual path he had chosen to take as he pointed out the importance of Mary's college education and what it was worth.

All that remains of my experience of this conversation is his refrain, "Somehow God will provide," and my young stomach tightening around a silent promise, *We'll see*.

A few years later, Mary was completing her degree after transferring to a nursing school, and my two older brothers and I were studying at Colorado State University. A comment of my botany professor particularly intrigued me when he related why he had only two children. He wanted to assure that he would have the needed funds to send them to college—and they

were attending in-state colleges. As I thought of our family with limited financial resources and eight children, something within me chuckled, *Where there's a will, there's a way.*

More years passed. My three younger sisters graduated from private colleges—Lois from Saint Olaf, Ruth from Bethany, and Anna from Kalamazoo College. I still did not have Dad's understanding and Mother's eye for seeing God's hand in this. I saw Dad taking a winter job at the sugar beet factory. I saw Mom going back to college to renew her teaching certificate and then taking a job teaching grade-school children. I saw each of us working to pay our college costs. I saw loans, scholarships, and for two of us, fellowships being granted. On receiving my doctorate, I had no problem in saying, "I earned my way through college."

A few years later, the blinders finally lifted from my mind's eye. I saw that my going to college was premised on there being an affordable college; that my getting loans, scholarships, and fellowships was premised on there being granting agencies; and that my finding good-paying, part-time jobs was premised on there being jobs. I had taken such things for granted, much like food, clothing, health, sunlight, clean water, and fresh air.

Although my college degree required an effort on my part, the opportunity rested on a social structure for which I can only be grateful. These thoughts slowly directed my mental focus to the source that gave rise to, and on which ultimately rested, the necessary social structure of mutual trust and environmental concern. Dad was referring to that source when he said, "Somehow, God will provide." And my willingness to work my way through college? Another gift opened up for me through the prayers and encouragement of my parents.

February 14 [Postmarked February 16, 3:00 p.m.]

My dear Walter,

"I know also, my God, that Thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness." I

Chronicles 29:17

This evening it is Valentine's Day. I wanted to write a few words to my valentine because he has already promised to be mine. . . .

Tuesday evening . . .

This evening I received a box of candy from you. It tastes very good. I wish you could share it with me. You should have taken out some pieces for yourself. This evening when I passed the candy to Helen, she asked if I had received it from a former student. I, of course, told her who it was from. She got the idea because last Saturday, Vivian Rising, a student of the Minnesota University who was a pupil of mine at Clarissa, sent me a heart-shaped box of chocolates, and another girl sent me a letter and a valentine. You know it just makes me so happy when my former pupils remember me. You, however, can guess which candy I enjoy the most. Thank you very much. . . .

Mrs. Swanson's daughter, Laura, . . . asked me to sing an appropriate missionary hymn or solo. I just couldn't seem to find anyone suitable except "The Ninety and Nine," which went way up to g and stayed on that tone for quite a few measures. I didn't want to sing it because that would sound strained and put on for me to sing for church, altho for someone who could have sung it easily it would have been very impressive. About an hour and a half before the program, I got two Methodist hymnals from Allagene Jefferis, and then I prayed again especially for a

suitable song, and I found "Sowing the Seed." When I came to church, here the words of the devotionals were concerning the sower who went forth to sow. Laura's entire talk was about the text. I was so thankful that God was so gracious to answer my prayer. All that Laura had told me concerning her talk was that it was on missions. May I always seek divine guidance in singing. . . .

I am glad that the cattle market has been somewhat stronger. That is a term that I have never used in that connection before. I presume it is a correct usage because you used it. I am glad that you feel encouraged about the prices. Money isn't everything. I am sure that you could amass quite a fortune, as you said, if that were your goal of life. It isn't worth it. Sometimes the thought of just heaping up gold like Silas Marner did just makes me feel sick. I am glad that you see the folly of money not rightly and justly earned, saved, and spent. Your efforts are needed in more important fields. Should God wish you to have a substantial income, He will supply it. I do pray that I might be [a] thrifty helper to you, but if I get too extravagant or too stingy, you just tell me how to change and to improve.

Walter, I appreciate that you wrote that you love me for what I am, but again I am afraid you don't know me well enough. May God do much refining of my personality these few months that will pass so that your statement can be applied to me. My mother and brothers and sisters love me, but that is natural. I thank you for the expressions of love to me in your letters as well as in the valentine which you sent. May I be of joy to you from the very first time we met as long as God wishes. May I never cause you to stumble, and if I do, may God quickly pick you up and punish me.

With sincere Christian love,

Margaret

Wednesday morning.

Dear Walter, I found such a wonderful strengthening verse this morning that I want you to enjoy and receive nourishment from it with me. It is [2 Chronicles 16:9]: "For the eyes of Jehovah run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him." . . .

Weren't you afraid to stay with Mr. Brown? I plan to remember him in my prayers. Walter, I am thankful that you do not drink, and I am more thankful that God will always help to refrain you from tasting it. We should do more to prohibit the use of alcoholic liquors. . . .

To think that you sold your shotgun. I hope you won't miss it too much. I am sure that the articles you bought will help you.

Now may God bless you and give you all that He wishes to do. I am glad that you are able to do your work well. I shall try to answer those S. S. questions next time. I wish that you were here so that we could talk together.

Margaret

Feb. 16 [Postmarked February 17, 4:30 p.m.]

Dear Margaret:

"But as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah." Josh. 24:14

I came upon this verse this evening, as I was finishing the book of Joshua. I have seen it on plaques in various homes many times. It had always been my desire and prayer to be able to sincerely say this of my home, were it ever God's will that I have a home of my own. When I stop sometimes and think upon the fact that I have been privileged to meet you and that you love me enough to be willing to help me create and share such a home with you, I know that the age of miracles and answer to prayers is not at all past.

I am certainly thankful that God so directed my path that I might meet you. I do believe that two people should be physically attracted to each other and that mating is important, but I also believe that most important of all is that both parties be Christians and in Christ, our redeemer and Saviour. Then He will help them in all their other problems. Do you not think so? I am so glad that words can hardly express my joy that you like the mts. (little & big), the plains, flowers and plants, traveling, children, the church, music, and even washing dishes. You know, it is very important that we like to work. It is God's command and His will. I am glad that you like to wash dishes, crochet, knit, sew, and other housework. I am also glad that you want children. Do you know that I believe motherhood to be the greatest career a woman can enter upon, else why did God fit them for that, first of all? I also believe that the father should share the responsibility of parenthood and not just the privilege. It is a wonderful privilege and great art to be a true & good parent. Don't you think so? I know that too many men take the task of childbearing and

motherhood too lightly. For that reason I will continue to ask God to be with me as well as you and to make me kind and considerate and thoughtful.

Perhaps I should explain here why I have written or, rather, used the expression "our home," which you wondered about. If it is wrong, I will hope for forgiveness, but I am so afraid that I will do as many men do. [They] say: "I own this." "This is mine." "I am going to do this or that," forgetting that they have a partner who has very likely worked as hard as they have to achieve these things; yea, even their daily plans should be discussed and planned and prayed about together. Margaret, will you plan to do this with me and help me with it? I want to say "We and our" and not "I and mine."

Margaret, I am praying for Raymund Goehring, . . . and all the other requests which you sent and for you always, in order that you may be used to lead many to God.

I have a sort of system. I start around here, with my near and dear ones, then to Cheyenne around and back to Denver. Then I go out into Kansas, include all our synod and other true ministers of the gospels, then into Minnesota, to those who are near and dear to you and then last of all to you. I guess I do this so I may concentrate better, "My last stop so I do not have to remember any more," while I am praying for you. . . .

My little lady, I guess it is just as well you cannot come tonight and visit and crochet. Not because I would not like it, but because I am afraid I would never let you leave. . . .

I would certainly like to see those pillowcases, which you are working upon. Oh! Oh! I was just up to put some coal on the fire, and as I looked into that cold bedroom, a suggestion came to me. You had better learn quilting also because we get some mighty cold weather here too. . . .

The first crop which I plant is barley and alfalfa, then corn and beans, then cabbage and potatoes. Barley & alfalfa, 1st of April, corn & beans, 15th of June. I am busy all the time, with cattle feeding, hay & straw hauling, potato sorting, and soon fieldwork. But I feel very well. . . .

I am sending you the promised plan for the house. Together with the pictures, you may get an idea of the plan.

I still have the cattle. They are doing fine, and the price is some better. I have not much cash, but I expect a soil conservation check from the govt within a few days. That will help a great deal.

I have not taken a picture yet, for lack of money. But if that check amounts to anything I will do so immediately after.

Now may God's grace and peace be yours always.

Yours in Christ,

Walter

February 20 [Postmarked February 22, 3:00 p.m.]

Dear Walter,

“Yea, forty years didst Thou sustain them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not.” Nehemiah 9:21 . . .

It was a miracle how God protected, saved, and preserved the Israelites while they journeyed in the wilderness. . . .

Thanks for sending the plan of our home. I haven’t studied it very carefully as yet, but I hope to during this week. So you don’t think you’d let me leave if I would come to spend an evening with you? I like the verse which you quoted, “but as for me and my house we will serve Jehovah.” My father used to quote that very often. Walter, I am so glad that you want a Christian home. May it ever be our aim to have such a home, and may He accomplish it. . . .

I am glad for the cold spell that you have had. Probably the grasshoppers are frozen to death. We have had quite cold weather also. One morning while I was walking up the hill with Ruth Mitleider, a freshman girl, she told me that I had a frozen spot on my nose. She told me to just hold snow on the spot. I did so, and in a short time the whiteness had disappeared. That morning the thermometer registered 26° below. When you froze your face, maybe there was no snow handy. . . .

Walter, today in English II class we discussed Milton’s sonnet “On His Blindness.” He was but forty-four years of age when his sight was taken from him. I believe he was a sincere Christian. I wish there were more like him. He is ranked next to Shakespeare as a poet. What couldn’t many of the poets do for spreading the gospel if they but had the true Light.

This evening just before supper I again hiked down to the river. A portion of the river is open so that one can see and hear the ripples of the water; the other part is a solid piece of ice. The reason that the water flows is that the power plant uses the water and lets hot water flow into the river all the time. . . .

Walter, I have never sewed a quilt in all my life. I began one when I was about ten years old, but I never finished it. . . .

Soon I hope to receive a large picture of you for my dresser. It doesn't have to be large, but I hope it is clear and natural. . . . The time, if God wills, will come when we can have our pictures taken together.

Now may God bless you as He has blessed those who trusted Him in the Old Testament, and may you lead others to Him.

Yours in Christian love,

Margaret

I enjoy reading the clippings you send. I haven't finished reading Dale Carnegie's book yet. I plan to finish it by next Wednesday of next wk.

I heard the "Wedding March" from the opera Lohengrin by Wagner. It rather thrilled me. Thus far we haven't made many plans for the great event, but we'll need to start in pretty soon, don't you think, my big man?

The following figure illustrates the difficulty in editing and transcribing the letters into a mechanical and easily readable typeface.

Walter, I have never sewed a quilt in all my life. I began one when I was about ten years old but I never finished it. I still have the remains of it so maybe this summer I can finish it. I know this much that it takes much time and energy to quilt one so I believe I had better not attempt making one until I am through with school. This coming Saturday I plan to finish my pillow cases and put them in my trunk. It is fun to sew for our home. I can just imagine that when you pass the furniture stores you would like to be able to buy all that we will need. Won't it be fun to buy and arrange the furniture?

Soon I hope to receive a large picture of you for my dresser. It doesn't have to be large but I hope it is clear and natural. I haven't taken a picture for a long time it seems at least two years ago. The time, if God wills, will come when we can have our pictures taken together.

Now may God bless you as He has blessed those who trusted Him in the Old Testament and may you lead others to Him.

Yours in Christian love,
 Margaret

I heard the wedding march from the opera La Boheme by Puccini. It rather thrilled me. How far we haven't made many plans for the great event but will need to obtain party favors, food, and drink, my big dream!

I enjoy reading the clippings you send. I haven't finished reading Dale Carnegie's book yet. I plan to finish it by next Wednesday of next wk.

Margaret's response to Walter's comments on the grasshopper infestation is surprising. She mentions God's involvement in so many aspects of her life. In her January 11 letter in *Encountering God*, she notes God's promise to help farmers. Walter captures the seeming essence of that promise when he writes, "as far as the farmer is concerned . . . God is for us" and then notes how God is going to send a cold spell that will kill the grasshoppers jumping about. Margaret recognized that the recent cold spell probably killed the grasshoppers, yet she forgets to thank God even though she recognized God's hand in it? I doubt it. More likely, she didn't see God's hand in it because she already had a rationally satisfying mechanism by which it came about.

Nothing wrong with that. Individuals are free to explain things to themselves however they wish. The fortunate ones find understandings that bring joy and meaning to their worlds. However, having a satisfying material mechanism by which something comes about does not logically rule out God's involvement. How strange it would be if God could not act through material means. What would it even mean for God to act if not so much as an atom or wave of materiality was involved?

When I shared with Mom some of my "scientific" understandings, she would sometimes say, "If you lose faith in God because you went to college, then I wish you had never gone." One might well ask, How is it that college, an institution dedicated to discovering truth and a better understanding of our world, could possibly cause one to lose faith in any of the fundamental sources of truth? The next chapter, easily skipped by those wanting to get on with the letters, explains why that need not be the case once the grounding of religious truth is clearly distinguished from that of scientific, artistic, and philosophical truth.

A Glimpse Back

Ferretting out what is key to your joy can be a rewarding task. Successful searches often begin with a question. Here are some self-exploratory questions tied to the foregoing letters of Walter and Margaret. There are no “right” answers. There are only your answers, for you are the world’s authority on how you see things—and on what you look for and what you find in how others see things.

February 5. Margaret notes that she is glad Walter is a farmer because “Farmers can do so much for humanity.” In what helpful ways do you look upon your vocation? What are some ways a spirit of serving can add meaning to your work?

February 5. Walter writes of a “wonderful earth” kept in order “year after year.” In what way is his view of the world similar or dissimilar to your view?

With the cattle prices still down, Walter found it “hard . . . to pray for God’s will to be done and not [his] own desires.” What understandings help when you are being denied something you earnestly desire?

“Tho several hundred miles separate” Walter and Margaret, he shares a figurative understanding by which he “sometimes feels very near” her. What understandings bring you a feeling of closeness when you can’t be near a loved one?

February 8. Walter says he loves Margaret not for what she could be but just for what she is. What joys might that understanding bring Walter? Bring Margaret?

February 12. How do you see the many ways Walter, Margaret, and Raymund Goehring might benefit by her thoughts about getting Raymund to join the glee club?

February 14. Many people in Colorado noticed “millions of young grasshoppers.” Some entomologists saw a coming epidemic. Walter saw “God helping out the farmers.” In what ways do you feel spiritual interpretations of natural events add joy and meaning to his life? To your life?

February 14. Margaret gives a spiritual interpretation of how it came about that her selected song fit the text of Laura’s talk. In what ways might that particular interpretation have added something special to the joy surrounding her performance?

Many books have been written on ways of amassing a fortune, yet Margaret draws Walter’s attention to *Silas Marner*, written in 1861 by George Eliot (the pen name for Mary Anne Evans). What spirit of life and source of truth guided her choice?

February 16. Walter covers many things he likes about Margaret and what he thinks is important in a marriage. Which of those things do you feel will prove most rewarding to him, and which do you feel most appealed to Margaret?

When talking about their anticipated home, Walter wants to say, “We and our and not I and mine.” What spirit of life and source of truth guided that desire?

February 20. Although Walter enjoyed pointing out exactly how God was helping the farmers escape the grasshopper epidemic, Margaret was not impressed. In what ways do natural and nonmiraculous explanations of how things come about enhance or undermine your sense of God?

Victor Cousin is credited with the saying: We need religion for religion’s sake, morality for morality’s sake, art for art’s sake. What complementarities among these might Margaret have seen in light of her comments on Milton’s “On His Blindness” and Wagner’s “Wedding March”?

Freeing Unifying Religious Truths from Their Partisan Entanglements

In his letter on February 5, Walter commits a common God-yes logical fallacy in writing that God must exist because a prevailing scientific theory (evolution) cannot explain what is needed to “create this world . . . and then keep the whole thing in order.” A couple of weeks later in her letter on February 20, Margaret commits a common God-no logical fallacy when she is neither surprised nor thankful that God evidently used the cold front that Walter had expected would stem a predicted grasshopper epidemic. Instead she dispassionately observes, “Probably the grasshoppers were frozen to death.”

Both fallacies loomed before me years later when I asked Dad what he thought of evolution. Both were averted when he responded, “Should God have wanted to create the world through evolution, he certainly could have.” My sense of God and my interest in evolution were thereby broadened.

That doesn't always happen. Several years later, I joined my brother, James; his wife, Ruth; and their three young daughters for the two-day trip back to Denver from Phoenix. I was looking forward to getting to know my nieces on one level and touching base with James and

Ruth on another. My nieces invited me to sit with them in the back of the van. After we had solved a riddle or two, Amy, the oldest, abruptly changed the subject by asking, “How can you believe in evolution and the Bible at the same time?”

Fortunately, James had just stopped to fill the van with gas. I got out and mentioned the question to Ruth, who was homeschooling her children. She felt that Amy would be confronting believers in the theory of evolution, and she would rather have that person be someone who at least believed in God. With Ruth’s OK, I climbed back into the van, looking forward to learning how Amy saw her world. Thus began a delightful two-day conversation in which we shared our disparate views on a number of issues raised by the Creation Institute. Nothing was resolved. Amy would later marry and go on to homeschool her children. I expect she committed a God-no logical fallacy each time she thought that the theory of evolution, if it were true, contradicted the creative power of God and the truth of the Bible.

In the book *Evolution: Scripture and Nature Say YES!*,ⁱ Denis Lamoureux relates a tortuous struggle stemming from his God-no logical fallacy. He writes, “My first biology course in the first term of college involved evolution. . . . The basic message was quite obvious. . . . Since evolution is true, then the Bible must be false and Christianity a lie. . . . I had no idea there was an intellectually respectable middle position between atheistic evolution and six day creation.”ⁱⁱ He lost his faith, left the church, and went on to become a dentist, “believing that happiness was to be found in a self-serving lifestyle.”

Eventually, he became “fed up with living a selfish and filthy lifestyle . . . and wanted God in his life.” When he ran across Duane Gish’s book *Evolution: The Fossils Say No!*,ⁱⁱⁱ he felt the Lord

calling him “to become a creation scientist in order to attack evolutionists.” He decided to equip himself for the battle by getting PhDs in both theology and biology. Toward the end of one of his courses, a professor he deeply respected asked, “Denis, if you gave up your belief in six day creation, would you also give up your faith in Jesus?”

Denis writes, “Wow! That was one question I was not expecting. . . . I stepped away from this science and Christianity class still believing in six day creation. But for the first time, I began asking myself . . . is it possible for a Christian to reject the assumption that God has revealed basic scientific facts in the Bible?”

Stephen Jay Gould, in *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*,^{iv} notes that the potential conflicts between science and religion reflect basic misunderstandings concerning the nature of these two sources of truth. He writes, “Science tries to document the factual character of the natural world, and to develop theories that coordinate and explain the facts. Religion . . . operates in the equally important . . . realm of human purposes, meanings, and values.” In “enunciating the Principle of NOMA, or Non-Overlapping Magisteria,” he wants us to see science and religion as dealing with “two distinct subjects, each covering a central facet of human existence,” and that each magisterium is “a domain of authority . . . where one form of teaching holds the appropriate tools for meaningful discourse and resolution.”^v

Gould’s claim is appealing in that we certainly need peacemakers. However, whether the claim stands depends on how science and religion function as sources of truth. When he writes, “This magisterium [religion] of ethical discussion and search for meaning includes several disciplines traditionally grouped under the humanities—much of philosophy, and part of

literature and history,” he raises doubts regarding the unique significance of religion. Moreover, he adds a caveat to his characterization of religion by viewing “as fundamentally religious all moral discourse on principles that might activate the ideal of universal fellowship among people,” a view he attributes to D. H. Huxley.^{vi}

However, Gould’s implication that religion’s inherent interests are not intimately linked with material fact undercuts the sincerity of historical religious positions regarding the roundness of the earth, the earth’s movement about the sun, the material origins of life, and the spans of creative time. More seriously, his suggestion also overlooks a religious counselor’s essential interest in personal material facts when comforting and guiding someone struggling with the loss of a job, cancer, or the death of a child.

More fundamentally, something is amiss with the suggested complementarity of science and religion. If fact has a complement, it is not “purpose, meaning, or value” but, rather, feeling or fantasy. Although neither feeling nor fantasy is mechanistically linked to the external world in a scientifically explicable manner, they can be coordinated by artists in creations that can hold us spellbound, set us dancing, make us laugh, and bring tears to our eyes. Even when consisting entirely of imagined fact, artistic creations can dramatically change the world in which we live. Legend has it that Abraham Lincoln, on being introduced to the author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, asked, “Is this the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war?”

Art is a magisterium in which truth comes across not in demonstrable facts but in a wide array of experienced feelings. In the case of instrumental music, there is often little if any agreement on the material facts that a listener brings to a performance and that shape his or

her interpretive experience. On hearing Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata," one listener may be watching the motions of the pianist or concentrating on the chord progressions, another may be recalling an evening with a lover or picturing a moon rising over a quiet lake, and another may simply be lost in the sounds.

To suggest art is another independent magisterium is one thing. To distinguish its focus, the nature of its truths, its methods and tools, and its evaluative criteria from those of science and religion is quite another. Assuming for the moment that such distinctions exist, a brief reflection on how we arrived at art as an independent domain of truth reveals a fourth and equally productive truth domain.

The notion of complementarity was fundamental. If there is a left, then there must be a right; if a male, then a female; if a member, then a nonmember—simple illustrations of pure reasoning applied to notions of handedness, sex, and inclusion. Pure reasoning has given us the austere disciplines of logic and mathematics, with their exact definitions, formal axioms, and incontrovertible deductions. Philosophers take over when cold, logical reasoning is applied to the terms and assumptions governing our broadest categories of social endeavors. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States are two widely accepted and consequential embodiments of philosophical assumptions and arguments.

We have only to turn to the mental complement of philosophical reasoning to get to the heart of the magisterium of religion where material fact and personal feeling are inextricably linked.

So what changes when the facts and feelings associated with an event cannot be separated? Everything. It is one thing to have heard or read about mothers who have carried and given birth to a baby; it is entirely different when it is your own. It will change how you talk about birthing a child. Should you be a scientist studying childbirth, birthing your own will reprioritize your facts. Should you be a writer conveying birth experiences, birthing your own will enrich the feelings in your narratives. Should you be a philosopher interested in family and marital relationships, birthing your own will influence and substantiate your choice and weighing of terms, assumptions, and claims.

The list of life events has no end. Someone being abused by a parent or a spouse is one thing; it is entirely different when you are directly involved. Someone experiencing a failure or a success is one thing; it is entirely different when you do. Someone losing or finding meaning in life is one thing; it is entirely different when you have.

These telling experiences are grafted into our identities. They fill our memories, color our thoughts, and seed our conversations. They shape how we feel about ourselves, how we see our world, and how our world sees us. We share our experiences through endless gestures, words, and actions, both consciously and unconsciously. The better ways should be taught in our schools. To see why the better and established ways will come from the magisterium of religion, we must clarify each magisterium's means of finding and establishing truth so that we can better discriminate the nature of the truths flowing from the different domains.

* * *

We note first some eminent names from each magisterium: Plato, Aristotle, Bacon, Descartes, Hume, Kant, and Russell, among others, in philosophy; Homer, Shakespeare, Leonardo da Vinci, Beethoven, Austen, Whitman, and Rodin, among others, in the arts. Galileo, Harvey, Kepler, Newton, Mendel, Darwin, Pasteur, and Einstein, among others, in science; Moses, Lao Tzu, Confucius, Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammed, among others, in religion. We may more naturally call founding leaders in the last group “spiritual leaders,” but that in no way implies that the founding leaders in the other three disciplines were not spiritually centered, committed, and expressive.

For the most part, the leaders in the first three groups were trained and tutored in the fields in which their contributions were later recognized. That is not the case for those in the fourth group. Moses was a shepherd. Lao Tzu may have kept the archives in the royal court during the Zhou dynasty, although his life is largely surrounded in mystery. Confucius was a government official. Buddha was a prince who left the throne in search of freedom from suffering. Jesus was a carpenter’s son; Mohammed, a merchant.

The essential differences in these four realms of truth emerge when contrasting some of the typifying contributions of a few of the early leaders, the features of our world that interested them, the forms of their expressions, their methods of discovery, their criteria for judging validity and accomplishment, and the disciplines and institutions that eventually arose as a consequence of their efforts.

Turning first to philosophy, we have the following conversation in one of Plato's dialogues. Socrates is discussing his upcoming trial on a capital charge of impiety with Euthyphro, a self-proclaimed theologian.

Soc. Remember that I did not ask you to give me two or three examples of piety, but to explain the general idea which makes all pious things to be pious.

Euth. I remember. . . . Piety, then, is that which is dear to the gods, and impiety is that which is not dear to them.

Soc. Very good, Euthyphro; you have now given me the sort of answer which I wanted. But whether what you say is true or not I cannot as yet tell, although I make no doubt that you will prove the truth of your words.^{vii}

In the guise of Socrates, his teacher, Plato (ca. 400 BC) guides our understanding of philosophical truth. Clarification and claims regarding general concepts are central—in this case, piety. Examples, factual or contrived, illustrating the concepts and claims can be helpful, but they remain anecdotal and always replaceable. Emotional considerations are also set aside. Socrates has been accused of being impious. He will be convicted and sentenced to death. Yet, rather than seeking sympathizers opposing the charge against him, he is trying to understand exactly what we mean when we say some action or endeavor is or is not pious.

The early Greek philosophers were interested in virtually every broad issue related to how we examine our world. The following categorization in the *Great Books of the Western World* of the writings of Aristotle (384–322 BC), a student of Plato, illustrates that breadth: “Logic” (including “Categories,” “On Interpretation,” “Prior Analytics,” and “Posterior Analytics”), “Physical Treatises” (“Physics,” “On the Heavens,” and “Meteorology”), “Metaphysics,” “On the Soul,” “Biological Treatises,” “Nicomachean Ethics,” “Politics,” “The Athenian Constitution,” “Rhetoric,” and “On Poetics.”

Aspects of Aristotle’s interest in verbal clarification come through in the first sentence of his discourse on interpretation: “First we must define the terms ‘noun’ and ‘verb,’ then the terms ‘denial’ and ‘affirmation,’ then ‘proposition’ and ‘sentence.’”^{viii}

Descartes, one of the fathers of modern philosophy, initially struggled with what he could indubitably know to be true. His answer, shared in an expression in his *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason and Seeking for Truth in the Sciences*, reveals an essential source and method of establishing philosophical truth:

Since all the same thoughts and conceptions which we have while awake may also come to us in sleep, without any of them being at that time true, I resolved to assume that everything that ever entered into my mind was no more true than the illusions of my dreams. But immediately afterwards I noticed that whilst I thus wished to think all things false, it was absolutely essential that the “I” who thought this should be somewhat, and remarking that this truth “*I think, therefore I am*” was so certain and so

assured that all the most extravagant suppositions brought forward by the sceptics were incapable of shaking it, I came to the conclusion that I could receive it without scruple as the first principle of the Philosophy for which I was seeking.^{ix}

Note the interest in grounding premises and principles, the centrality of thought, reasoning as a method of ascertaining truth, consistency as a requirement of truth, and contradiction as a valid argument in dispelling false premises and claims.

The essential nature of truth in this realm is starkly revealed in the disciplines of mathematics and formal logic. Although mathematical truths have been endlessly suggested and illustrated through experience, the underlying definitions, assumptions, and proofs are solely constructs of the conscious mind. When introduced to algebra and geometry, we soon appreciate the severe constraints of rigorous reasoning.

Philosophy relaxes somewhat the definitional and reasoning rigor of mathematics in its attempt to formalize the concepts and ideas that underlie ordinary discourse and to develop rules by which we organize ourselves and our understandings. In *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) argued for kingly rule based purely on society's protective self-interest. In *Treatises on Government*, John Locke (1632–1704) argued for the separation of the judiciary, executive, and legislative offices. Such works have given rise to the field of political science. Adam Smith's (1723–1790) *The Wealth of Nations* and Karl Marx's (1818–1883) *Das Kapital* contain assumptions and arguments from which our schools of economics arose. Saint Augustine's (354–430) *The City of God* and Saint Thomas Aquinas's (ca. 1225–1274) *Summa*

Theologica are forerunners of many of the understandings in Christian theology that have been reasoned from narratives of experiences and understandings recorded in the Bible.

The treatises of Aristotle on physics and biology convey the deep interest early philosophers had in the question: What is materially going on in our world? For centuries, Aristotle's answers were definitive. That began to change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. General axioms, unsubstantiated claims, and reasoning alone were blocking the progression of physical truth. In a couple of fascinating passages from *Advancement in Learning* and *Novum Organum*, Francis Bacon (1561–1626) captured the need for and nature of the change:

For as water will not ascend higher than the level of the first springhead from whence it descendeth, so knowledge derived from Aristotle, and exempted from liberty of examination, will not rise again higher than the knowledge of Aristotle.^x

There are and can exist but two ways of investigating and discovering truth. The one hurries on rapidly from the senses and particulars to the most general axioms, and from them, as principles and their supposed indisputable truth, derives and discovers the intermediate axioms. This is the way now in use. The other constructs its axioms from the senses and particulars, by ascending continually and gradually, till it finally arrives at the most general axioms, which is the true but unattempted way.^{xi}

The first passage heralds the departure of science from authoritative claims regarding authoritative truth. The second heralds the oncoming grounding of science in sensible and measurable facts. From such intuitions, a new realm of truth emerged. It was anchored not in assumptions and mental constructs but in physical facts.

* * *

The publication of Newton's (1642–1727) three laws of motion in *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* gave, for some, a positive answer to the challenging question in Job 38:33 (NIV): *Do you know the laws of the heavens?* Included in those laws were the motions of the planets. Shortly before Newton was born, Kepler (1571–1630) had mathematically described their elliptical orbits using Tycho Brahe's (1546–1601) accurate measurements of their changing positions relative to the sun. From his three laws of motion, Newton derived Kepler's mathematical descriptions. Alexander Pope (1688–1744) poeticized a feeling of the time, "Nature and nature's laws lay hid in night: God said, Let Newton be! And all was light."^{xii}

Newton's discoveries were one of many events leading up to the Enlightenment of the 1700s that epitomized an emerging interest in, and the significance of, a body of understanding based solely on those assertions that could be confirmed or rejected by measurement and observation. Galileo's (1564–1642) popularization of and improvements on

the telescope brought the heavenly bodies close enough to see that they were different than we thought; later improvements put the stars farther from us than we had ever imagined. Leeuwenhoek's (1632–1723) work on magnifiers opened a new world of microscopic creatures (bacteria) inhabiting our food and bodily fluids; later improvements revealed another world of even smaller creatures (viruses) inhabiting the food and cellular fluids of bacteria. But it was James Hutton (1726–1797), a retired medical doctor, farmer, and natural philosopher, who dramatically extended our sense of time:

If . . . we employ our skill in research, not in forming vain conjectures; and if *data* are to be found, on which Science may form just conclusions, we should not long remain in ignorance with respect to the natural history of this earth, a subject on which hitherto opinion only, and not evidence, has decided.

Upon the supposition that the operations of nature are equable and steady, we find . . . means for concluding a certain portion of time to have necessarily elapsed.

We find the marks of marine animals in the most solid parts of the earth, consequently, those solid parts [fossils] have been formed after the ocean was inhabited by those animals, . . . therefore we . . . have some means for computing the time through which those species of animals have continued to live.

But when fire bursts forth from the bottom of the sea, and when the land is heaved up and down, so as to demolish cities in an instant, and split asunder rocks and solid mountains, there is nobody but must see in this a power, which may be sufficient to accomplish every view of nature in erecting land.

To sum up the argument, we are certain, that all the coasts of the present continents are wasted by the sea, and constantly wearing away upon the whole; but this operation is so extremely slow. . . . But, in order to produce the present continents, the destruction of a former vegetable world was necessary; consequently, the production of our present continents must have required a time which is indefinite. In like manner, if the former continents were of the same nature as the present, it must have required another space of time, which also is indefinite, before they had come to their perfection as a vegetable world. . . . The result, therefore, of our present enquiry is, that we find no vestige of a beginning, no prospect of an end.^{xiii}

The first paragraph emphasizes the role material observations play in his theory. The second discloses Hutton's operative supposition that would become the principle of uniformity in geology.^{xiv} The third addresses science's core interest in mechanistic understandings by providing the explanatory reasoning underlying his emerging sense of geological epochs

whereby (1) marine organisms die in the ocean, (2) their shells are mineralized into fossils, and (3) the fossils are eventually lifted up to form new mountain ranges. The fourth provides material evidence for the powerful forces needed to reposition once deeply buried marine fossils atop our current plains and mountains. The last paragraph conveys Hutton's reaction on encountering the geological unconformity of rock formations at Siccar Point in Scotland where gently dipping layers of the Old Red Sandstone formation lay atop layers of a steeply dipping Silurian greywacke (a darker, clayey sandstone) formed in a much earlier epoch.^{xv}

Roughly two and a half centuries after Hutton grasped the time scales implied by his mechanistic explanations of the unconformity at Siccar Point, I hiked there and placed my fingertips on the sandstone and my palm on the greywacke while trying to imagine the times and forces by which mountain ranges and oceans would have had to have been formed and then swept away for that unconformity to come about.

Hutton's work clearly illustrates how the validity of a scientific assertion or general hypothesis is ultimately judged by the concordance of its various reasoned implications with observable facts. However, in *An Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*, Claude Bernard (1813–1878) notes that even "If the hypothesis is not verified and must be abandoned, the facts which it will have helped us to discover will remain as undeniable results in our investigation."^{xvi} Promising scientific theories concur with the concomitant facts across diverse sets of observations arising from reasoned implications. The basic assertion stands and is treated as "scientifically true" until new observations discount the overall concordance or undermine its relevance to further investigations. The truly revolutionary ones become the

scientific paradigms that largely constrain how scientists see and explain the material behavior of our world.^{xvii}

That said, it remains a simple fact that the original expressions of scientists, when preserved, get buried in research notebooks and manuscripts or are archived in research libraries largely for patent or historical interest. For example, Hutton's original work "Theory of the Earth; an Investigation of the Laws Observable in the Composition, Dissolution, and Restoration of Land upon the Globe" resides in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, 1788, volume I, part II. Dedicated specialists in the relevant disciplines read, study, and cite these original expressions. The basic understandings and most definitive data are eventually summarized and explicated in our scientific textbooks and class lectures. Even so, the cerebral expressions, the unfamiliar terms, and the data tabulations soon glaze a lay reader's eyes unless linked with human feelings and familiar concerns.

We turn now to another source of truth where original expressions are valued, many are cherished, and a few eminently prized. Here the focus of truth turns from methods of objectively sensing, measuring, and explicating the physical facts of our world to methods of creating, conveying, and sharing the vast realm of feelings about our world. But first it helps to have a clear sense of what science can and cannot tell us about our brain.

* * *

The human brain is an intricate and dynamic organization of roughly eighty-five billion highly interconnected nerve cells and an equivalent number of supporting glia cells. To get a sense for the size of that number, a person with a yearly income of \$85,000 would need not a hundred or a thousand years but a thousand times a thousand years to earn \$85 billion.

A nerve cell can be less than a tenth of an inch to over a yard long. Each comprises a dendritic tree of antennae covered with thousands of synapses through which it sends and receives molecular signals. Some can send up to a thousand signals per second, with some signals moving at speeds that can traverse the length of the body in a fifth of a second.^{xviii} Yet, most of us go about our day without giving this astoundingly complex dynamic a moment's thought.

Tools such as electroencephalography (EEG), magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), and positron emission tomography (PET) are giving us illuminating glimpses of how the brain functions and the different contexts in which its various groups of interlinked neurons "light up." But these advances have yet to invalidate Joseph Henry Woodger's (1894–1981) claim, "You can learn more about a man's mind by talking to him for ten minutes than by looking at sections of his brain for ten years."^{xix} An updated version regarding what science can tell us about another person's thoughts has been cogently summarized by Bear, Connors, and Paradiso: "While analysis of an EEG cannot tell us *what* [emphasis mine] a person is thinking, it can help us know *if* a person is thinking."^{xx}

So what might we like to know more about with regard to what goes on in our brains for which the tools and terminology of science may always fall far short? The list is endless: our

feelings and reactions to both real and imagined events; our hopes and motivations; our imaginations and our dreams; our musical rhythms, tunes, and harmonies, to name a few.

The rudiments for sharing such things formed before we left the womb and largely developed before our teens. Most of us can make up and hum a catchy tune. Composers translate their tunes along with enriching chord progressions into musical compositions that orchestras then play. Most of us can draw interesting images. Visual artists create paintings exhibited in museums. Most of us can dance. Ballerinas captivate an audience as they grace the stage. Most of us can share passable anecdotes. Novelists craft books that hold their readers spellbound.

Our artists have always been with us. Homer (ca. 800 BC) unveiled in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* the many types of feelings, imaginations, and events that excited the early Greeks. Sophocles (496–406 BC) memorialized in his play *Oedipus the King* the tangled feelings that can arise toward one's parents now known as the Oedipus complex. In his painting *Mona Lisa*, Michelangelo (1475–1564) captured the mystery that can be conveyed in a human face. With but a few words, "To be or not to be, that is the question," Shakespeare (1565–1616) weighed in *Hamlet* the depth of an existential concern to which someone can be driven. On hearing Beethoven's (1770–1827) "Moonlight Sonata," the listener is transported into a tonally moving moonlit night. In Jane Austen's (1775–1817) *Pride and Prejudice*, the reader is taken into a young woman's developing mind as it works through her desires for life while encountering the cultural constraints of her time.

Through their coordination of our feelings and imaginations, artists enhance and shape how we experience and share our inner worlds. Take a simple case, Auguste Rodin's (1840–1917) sculpture *The Thinker*: no introductions, no explanations, no words are given, yet *The Thinker's* solidity and musculature arrest and hold our attention. He is seated, motionless, his muscles defined but relaxed. While one arm forms a pedestal for his head, he blankly stares over his knuckles, on which his jaw is jammed, oblivious to our presence. Our eyes move about his features as this image of the weight and loneliness of deep thought is sculpted into our own minds as we ponder what is occupying *The Thinker's* thoughts.

The Thinker vividly conveys the experience of being lost in thought. Later we may have at one time assumed a similar posture when thinking or wanting others to think we were.

Like so many works of art, Rodin's sculpture conveys the profound role wordless gestures play in interactions among humans, animals, and even plants. It satisfies a fundamental criterion of good art: it arrests and holds our attention. When my wife says a painting "makes her eyes dance," I know that work captured her imagination. It may or may not capture mine, for, as we all know, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder."

The diversity of tools, the media, the gestures, the metaphors so characteristic of the magisterium of art comes across in the following excerpt from Nat Hentoff's profile of Bob Dylan in the October 24, 1964, issue of *The New Yorker*. The excerpt reveals the synergistic appeal of his words, his sounds, and his behavior.

The second—and more influential—demiurge of the folk music microcosm is Bob Dylan, who is twenty-three. Dylan’s impact has been the greater because he is a writer of songs as well as a performer. Such compositions of his as “Blowin’ in the Wind,” “Masters of War,” “Don’t Think Twice, It’s All Right,” and “Only a Pawn in Their Game” have become part of the repertoire of many performers, including Miss Baez, who has explained, “Bobby is expressing what I—and many other young people—feel, what we want to say. . . . Bobby’s songs are powerful as poetry and powerful as music. And, oh, my God, how that boy can sing!” Another reason for Dylan’s impact is the singular force of his personality. Wiry, tense, and boyish, Dylan looks and acts like a fusion of Huck Finn and a young Woody Guthrie. Both onstage and off, he appears to be just barely able to contain his prodigious energy.

Although the social force of Bob Dylan’s songs, like many of the folk songs of the sixties, was sourced in whole gestalts of material facts, specificities are difficult to pin down. That’s the power of metaphor. Consider the first two lines of *Blowin’ in the Wind*:

How many roads must a man walk down

Before you call him a man

Your mind is free to choose the “man.” It could be yourself, another man, even another woman. It is also free to choose the road. It could be a road you’ve walked, maybe a time in which you struggled, or somewhere you linked hands and marched with others. Moreover, the “How many” is only suggestive—a couple of times, many times, a life of times, generations of lifetimes? Your memory and imagination are free to wander until settling into a compelling resolve.

The source of artistic truth and its metaphoric link to materiality come across in two brief excerpts from Flannery O’Connor’s work. The first comes from her short story “Good Country People.”^{xxi}

The boy’s astonished eyes looked blankly through the ends of her hair. “Okay,” he almost whined, “but do you love me or don’tcher?”

“Yes,” she said and added, “in a sense. But I must tell you something. There mustn’t be anything dishonest between us.” She lifted his head and looked him in the eye. “I am thirty years old,” she said. “I have a number of degrees.”

The boy’s look was irritated but dogged. “I don’t care,” he said. “I don’t care a thing about what all you done. I just want to know if you love me or don’tcher?” and he caught her to him and wildly planted her face with kisses until she said, “Yes, yes.”

“Okay then,” he said, letting her go. “Prove it.”

She smiled, looking dreamily out on the shifty landscape. She had seduced him without even making up her mind to try. “How?” she asked, feeling that he should be delayed a little.

He leaned over and put his lips to her ear. “Show me where your wooden leg joins on,” he whispered.

This second excerpt, taken from her essay “Writing Short Stories,”^{xxii} conveys the source of the truth for her gripping masterpiece.

Early in the story, we’re presented with the fact that the Ph.D. is spiritually as well as physically crippled. She believes in nothing but her own belief in nothing, and we perceive that there is a wooden part of her soul that corresponds to her wooden leg. Now of course this is never stated. The fiction writer states as little as possible. . . .

If you want to say that the wooden leg is a symbol, you can say that. But it is a wooden leg first, and as a wooden leg it is absolutely necessary to the story. It has its place on the literal level of the story, but it operates in depth as well as on the surface. . . .

Now a little might be said about the way in which this happens. I wouldn’t want you to think . . . [that] I sat down and said, “I’m going to write a story about a Ph.D. with a wooden leg, using the wooden leg as a symbol for another affliction.” I doubt myself if

many writers know what they are going to do when they start out. When I started writing this story, I didn't know there was going to be a Ph.D. with a wooden leg in it. I merely found myself one morning writing a description of two women that I knew something about, and before I realized it, I had equipped one of them with a daughter with a wooden leg. As the story progressed, I brought in the Bible salesman, but I had no idea what I was going to do with him. . . . But when I found out . . . what was going to happen, I realized that it was inevitable. This is a story that produces a shock for the reader, and I think one reason for this is that it produced a shock for the writer.

Although Flannery O'Connor started writing about "two women that she knew something about," she quickly descended and maybe got lost in her imagination when "a daughter with a wooden leg" and "the Bible salesman" not only joined the story seemingly of their own accord but began interacting in a surprising manner. In saying "Before I realized it, I had equipped," O'Connor suggests that both a conscious and unconscious dynamic was at play as the story unfolded.

O'Connor notes that although the wooden leg resides at the literal level of the story, it also operates well below the surface of the story. These artistic devices that delve beyond the literal facts when communicating human experience are unavoidable. Even O'Connor's essay is filled with metaphors. "Level of the story," "operates," "below," and "the surface" are all metaphors. A story does not have levels physically separated by height. Neither does it have physical surfaces. Although the "wooden leg" pictured in your mind may operate in

the mind in a mechanistically defined manner, you can easily imagine what it means to have one. The images in metaphors, as products of the mind, are not subject to the laws of physics. That freedom underlies their strength for vivifying the depth and complexity of human experience.

Just as scientists can explore truths concerning material fact without explicitly taking existing human feelings into account, artists can explore truths concerning human feeling without explicitly taking existing material facts into account. This critical distinction comes across in this excerpt from “How to Tell a True War Story”^{xxiii} by Tim O’Brien, a veteran of the Vietnam War.

You can tell a true war story by the questions you ask. Somebody tells a story, let’s say, and afterward you ask, “Is it true?” and if the answer matters, you’ve got your answer.

For example, we’ve all heard this one. Four guys go down a trail. A grenade sails out.

One guy jumps on it and takes the blast and saves his three buddies.

Is it true?

The answer matters.

You’d feel cheated if it never happened. Without the grounding reality, it’s just a trite bit of puffery, pure Hollywood, untrue in the way all such stories are untrue. Yet even if it did happen—and maybe it did, anything’s possible—even then you know it can’t be true, because a true war story does not depend upon that kind of truth.

Happeningness is irrelevant. A thing may happen and be a total lie; another thing may not happen and be truer than truth. For example: Four guys go down a trail. A grenade sails out. One guy jumps on it and takes the blast, but it's a killer grenade, and everybody dies anyway. Before they die, though, one of the dead guys says, "The fuck you do that for?" and the jumper says, "Story of my life, man," and the other guy starts to smile, but he's dead.

That's a true story that never happened. . . .

In the end, of course, a true war story is never about war. It's about the special way that dawn spreads out on a river when you know you must cross the river and march into the mountains and do things you are afraid to do. It's about love and memory. It's about sorrow. It's about sisters who never write back and people who never listen.

* * *

We turn now to truths where what happens is relevant. Here is one from my life.

I had spent another Friday afternoon studying in the library before finally heading across campus to the Rainbow Cafe where I could get an inexpensive but basic meal. After crossing the main campus drag where fellow students in cars were yelling and waving at their friends as they headed into a weekend of fun, I took my usual seat at the counter, ordered a hot

roast beef sandwich, and slowly ate my meal, occasionally talking to the cashier, a friendly lady who gave me the last piece in her pie cabinet on her way to flipping the sign on the door from open to closed. I thanked her, forked it in, said goodbye, and headed home to contemplate the lonely wilderness I had come to call my life.

Home was an inexpensive upstairs bedroom rented from Mrs. Kolath, an older lady who spent her entire evenings downstairs watching TV. I flopped down on the bed, stared at the ceiling for a while, then got up and pawed through my small record collection. Nothing stood out except a record my brother, Paul, had given me a couple of years earlier. I put the record on the turntable, hit play, flopped back down on the bed, and returned to what it was about myself that kept me from having fun like everyone else. A cymbal started tapping out a fast-marching beat. It was soon joined by the other members of a Dixieland band. *Joined* is hardly the word. A trumpet, trombone, and sax suddenly started playing all at once and in every which way but quiet. They were playing “Muskrat Ramble,” and like everyone else, they were having a ball.

I was about to get up and put the record back in its cover when they somehow sensed my mood and started playing a blues arrangement of “Ballin’ the Jack.”^{xxiv} In muted tones, the trombone began exuding slow, mournful notes that spoke to me, “Wait a second. This guy’s in trouble, and it ain’t right.” The melody expressed how I was feeling while the background instruments sympathetically affirmed the moan. I began thinking, *These musicians know how I feel—dejected, alone, pointless.* A few moments later, the trumpet nudged the trombone aside and began crying out one of the saddest soliloquies I had ever

heard. *These musicians understand.* As the trumpet faded away, the sax took up the strain and reiterated my mood in mellower yet equally understanding notes.

As it turned out, they had brought along a piano and a bass that started up a new tune just for me, "Synthetic Blues," with chords and rhythms on the same track. My mind began following the improvised chords as they rolled off the keyboard, and shortly I was humming along with them. *I am among friends.* By the time the song ended, my mood had lifted.

With "Billboard," their parting piece, they returned to the lively Dixieland beat by which they had entered. *I am with them now.* As we marched along, I was chuckling and thinking, *Maybe I'll wade through another chapter or two in the lives of The Brothers Karamazov.*

I don't know why I put on that Dixieland record. I was not into Dixieland music and totally unacquainted with Dixieland blues. That musical genre never was and never became my "thing." Yet, in my later college years when I was dejected and anticipating a lonely weekend, by playing that particular sequence of musical arrangements, those friends would again take notice much as I mentioned and would soon lift my spirits.

But what if I lied? What if it was all made up to gain your attention or to prove a point or to simply mislead you? Philosophers cannot prove we should tell the truth without there arising debatable issues regarding their underlying assumptions and assertions. Scientists disown those who knowingly falsify their data, but they have no scientifically established explanations for justifying that action. Artists celebrate works of fiction as long as they are marketed as such. It

is in the magisterium of religion that we encounter the injunction, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16 RSV).

* * *

Our religious pathfinders are known, some largely through legend, for the lives they lived and the understandings they shared. What we know about their lives and teachings constitutes our most cherished and enduring expressions of life and its reward.

Moses gave us the Ten Commandments to guide our relationship with the creator of the universe and with each other. We received the key elements of the life and teachings of Confucius in his Analects or “aphorisms.” Siddhartha Gautama, known to us as the Buddha, “the awakened one,” gave us his Four Noble Truths and his Eightfold Path. The teachings of Lao Tzu come to us in the *Tao Te Ching* (“the way” + “great book”). The life and teachings of Jesus are recorded in the Four Gospels. (*Gospel* derives from an Old English translation of the Latin word *evangelium*, meaning “good story”). The five pillars of Islam (an Arabic word with connotations of submission and peace) arose out of Mohammed’s recitations collected in the Quran.

The teachings and lives of these and other pathfinders have captivated different groups of us for centuries: Moses for 3,000 years among Jews, Christians, and Muslims; Siddhartha Gautama, Confucius, and Lao Tzu among Buddhists, Confucianists, and Taoists for 2,500 years;

Jesus among Christians and Muslims for 2,000 years; Mohammed among Muslims for 1,500 years.

We know very little about how Lao Tzu came upon his understandings. We know more about Confucius from his Analects. Here is a relevant sampling:

Book 1, Chapter 1. The Master said, "He who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place and all the stars turn towards it."

Book II, Chap. IV. The Master said, "At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning. At thirty, I stood firm. At forty, I had no doubts. At fifty, I knew the decrees of Heaven. At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of truth. At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, without transgressing what was right."

Book II, Chap. XI. The Master said, "If a man keeps cherishing his old knowledge, so as to be acquiring new, he may be a teacher of others."

Book VII, Chap. I. The Master said, "A transmitter and not a maker, believing in and loving the ancients, I venture to compare myself with our old P'ang."

Book VII, Chap. XVI. The Master said, "If some years were added to my life, I would give fifty to the study of the Yî [I Ching], and then I might come to be without great faults."^{xxv}

The first chapter of the second book reads, “The Master said, ‘He who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place and all the stars turn towards it.’” Although I expect some recognized that “north polar star” in Confucius at an early age, unlike many of our pathfinders, he does not point to a time when he was gripped by an overwhelming revelation of who he was and what he was to be about. Contrast that with Siddhartha Gautama’s description of the revelation that overwhelmed him the night that ended his ascetic search for enlightenment.

I thought: “Suppose I practice entirely cutting off food.” Then deities came to me and said: “Good sir, . . . If you do so, we shall infuse heavenly food into the pores of your skin.” . . . So I dismissed the deities, saying: “There is no need.” . . . So I took very little food, a handful each time . . . Because of eating so little my limbs became like jointed segments of bamboo stems. . . .

I thought: “This is the utmost . . . but by this racking practice . . . I have not obtained . . . any distinction in knowledge or vision worthy of the noble ones. Could there be another path to enlightenment?”

I recalled that . . . while I [as a young prince] was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, quite secluded from sensual pleasures . . . I entered upon the first jhana, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion.

I considered: “It is not easy to attain that pleasure with a body so excessively emaciated. Suppose I eat some solid food—some boiled rice and porridge.” . . . When I had . . . regained my strength, then quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered upon and abided in the first jhana.^{xxvi}

During the first watch of that same night, Siddhartha “entered upon and abided in” three higher jhanas (states of mindfulness) after which he “recollected his manifold past lives.” In the second watch of that night, his “divine eye” saw “beings passing away and reappearing . . . according to their actions.” Here he describes what happened during the third watch of that night:

When my mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady and attained to imperturbability, . . . I direct knew . . . “This is suffering.” . . . “This is the origin of suffering.” . . . “This is the cessation of suffering.” . . . “This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.”^{xxvii}

While Siddhartha was consciously meditating that propitious night, his description suggests that his mind cascaded down a sequence of local mental equilibria before finally settling into a sea of understandings summarized in his Four Noble Truths.

Mohammed (Quran, 96:1–7, 97:1–5) describes an equally gripping experience for the source of his understandings that commenced roughly a thousand years later:

Read in the name of thy Lord who creates—

Creates man from a clot,

Read and thy Lord is most Generous,

Who taught by the pen,

Taught man what he knew not.

Nay, man is surely inordinate,

Because he looks upon himself as self-sufficient.

Surely We revealed it on the Night of Majesty—

And what will make thee comprehend what the Night of Majesty is?

The Night of Majesty is better than a thousand months.

The angels and the Spirit descend in it by the permission of the Lord—for every affair—

Peace! It is till the rising of the morning.^{xxviii}

Although Mohammed purportedly could neither read nor write, on that Night of Majesty, his mind, too, settled into a new and lasting understanding of a source of power and peace for which he used the term *Lord*.

The same term was used in Exodus 3:1–6 for the source of understandings in an equally dramatic revelation given to Moses—but roughly fifteen hundred years earlier:

Moses . . . drove the flock into the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed. Moses said, “I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn’t the bush burn up?” When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush: “Moses, Moses!” He answered, “Here I am.” And He said, “Do not come closer. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground. I am” He said, “the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

The Judeo-Christian scriptures are filled with revelatory experiences that changed the lives of their recipients. Here are four more:

Isaiah: In the year that King Uzziah died, I beheld the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne; and the skirts of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs stood in attendance of Him. . . . One of the seraphs flew to me, with a live coal . . . He touched it to my lips and declared, “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt shall depart and your sin be purged away.” Then I heard the voice of my Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me.” (Isaiah 6:1–8)

Jeremiah: The word of the Lord came to me: “Before I created you in the womb, I selected you; before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet concerning the nations.” I replied, “Ah, Lord God! I don’t know how to speak, for I am still a boy.” . . . The Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me, “Herewith I put my words into your mouth. See, I appoint you this day over nations and over kingdoms: To uproot and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” (Jeremiah 1:4–10)

Jesus: In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. (Mark 1:9–13)

Paul: Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” (Acts 9:3–6)

How are we to understand these revelations? They are neither philosophical assumptions nor reasoned arguments. Rather, they are figurative descriptions of personal experiences.

Whether materially factual or metaphorical, the descriptions present moments when our pathfinders were touched by an awesome power and understanding that preceded and overwhelmed their prior conscious thoughts. Their descriptions suggest the touch was unexpected and intensely personal. It changed who they were, what they were about, and the world they saw. Out of these revelations flowed our enduring scriptures, scriptures that have spawned and sustained diverse religious identities that have cut across and superseded national, cultural, racial, even political identities.

Our religions grew up around the desire for and exhilaration of that touch—gestalts of songs and dances, rituals and celebrations, symbols and sanctuaries, postures and practices, prayers and meditations, doctrines and recitations, teachings and exhortations. Testimonies of changed lives confirm the effectiveness of the resulting religious gestalts—resurrected drug addicts and alcoholics, lives newly filled with meaning and purpose, joys discovered in the midst of material suffering, relationships miraculously changed, newfound peace even when facing death.

These gestalts—once birthed—grow and evolve, bud and divide. Sometimes they wither and die; they seldom, if ever, merge. Although they are the living means of their practicing communities for propagating the needed and unifying understandings, their embodiment can be foreign to outsiders, alien to those filled with fear and insecurity, and mortally threatening to those blinded by hate.

The differences in our religious gestalts are all too apparent. Yet, those religious gestalts that have endured grew up around some surprisingly basic and common understandings flowing out of a universal spirit of self-worth that overwhelmed our pathfinders and lit up the world they saw.

But how are we to understand what our pathfinders experienced and beheld? For example, how are we to materially clarify the words, “*Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh*” in Exodus 3:14, variously translated as “I Am That I Am,” “I Am Who I Am,” and “I Will Be Who I Will Be”^{xxix}—the answer Moses received when questioning that which called to him from that flaming bush? Or, how are we to materially clarify the opening of the *Tao Te Ching*: “The Tao that can be told of is not the

Absolute Tao; the Names that can be given are not the Absolute Names. The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth; the Named is the Mother of All Things”^{xxx}

For that we need teachers. Consider how, centuries ago, a few of our teachers fixed into the minds of their listeners a simple but gripping narrative describing the moment a fleeing people found themselves trapped between the army of their enslavers and a seemingly impassable sea. First the narrative from Exodus 14:10–14:

As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites caught sight of the Egyptians advancing upon them. Greatly frightened, the Israelites cried out to the Lord. And they said to Moses, “Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us be, and we will serve the Egyptians, for it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness?’” But Moses said to the people, “Have no fear! Stand by, and witness the deliverance which the Lord will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again. The Lord will battle for you; you hold your peace!”

The story is easy to remember, but how does it remain relevant? That was the issue for some rabbis looking at the text some centuries after the story was scrolled. Here is what they said:

There were four groups among the Israelites at the sea.

One said, "Let us throw ourselves into the sea."

One said, "Let us return to Egypt."

One said, "Let us make war against them."

One said, "Let us yell at them."

To the group that said "Let us throw ourselves into the sea," it was said, *Stand by, and witness the deliverance which the Lord will work for you today.*

To the group that said "Let us return to Egypt," it was said, *For the Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again.*

To the group that said "Let us make war against them," it was said, *The Lord will battle for you.*

To the group that said "Let us yell at them," it was said, *You hold your peace.*^{xxx1}

By using more general metaphors easily transferred to any time and culture, those rabbis gave life and meaning to that ancient event and its narrative by addressing some timeless concerns in their listeners' minds. Each concern was answered with a memorable phrase from the revered text.

Although we may not have the visionary experience of life that our pathfinders were privileged to behold, we can still join in what they saw taking place. And even if we don't

identify with any or all of the religious gestalts that grew up around their teachings, we can learn from their understandings.

Consider their understanding of *universal self-worth*. From China circa 500 BCE, we read:

Confucius said, "From the man bringing his bundle of dried fish for my teaching upwards, I have never refused instruction to anyone." (Analects VII:7)

From the Middle East circa 50 CE, we read:

And they were bringing children to him, that he might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it he was indignant, and said to them, "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God."
(Mark 10:13–14)

Returning to China circa 500 CE, we read:

I paid homage to the Patriarch and was asked where I came from . . . I replied that I was a commoner from Sun-chow in Kwang-tung . . . and then said, "I ask for nothing but Buddhahood."

The Patriarch replied: “So you are a native of Kwang-tung, are you? You evidently belong to the aborigines; how can you expect to become a Buddha?”

I replied: “Although there are Northern men and Southern men . . . North and South make no difference in their Buddha-nature. An aborigine is different from your Eminence physically, but there is no difference in our Buddha-nature.” (Autobiography of Hui-Neng in the Sutra Spoken by the Sixth Patriarch)^{xxxii}

Or consider the *joy* that can be found when joining in their vision:

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

(Matthew 13:45–46)

He who lives a hundred years not perceiving the deathless state, a life of one day is better if a man perceives the deathless state. (Dhammapada VIII:15)^{xxxiii}

Or look at their views on the *spirit of play* that characterizes those at home with their vision and its joy:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit into you: I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh; and I will put My spirit into you. Thus I will cause you to follow My laws and faithfully to observe My rules. (Ezekiel 36:26–27)

In embracing the One with your soul, can you never forsake the Tao? In controlling your vital force to achieve gentleness, can you become like a new-born child? (*Tao Te Ching* X)

Yoga is the cessation of the turnings of thought. When thought ceases, the spirit stands in its true identity as observer to the world. (Yoga Sutra 1:2–3)^{xxxiv}

Let us live happily then, hating none in the midst of men who hate. Let us dwell free from hate among men who hate. (Dhammapada XV:1)

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:2–10)

And look at their criteria on *recognizing leaders* who will not lead us astray in seeking the needed spirit of play:

Jesus said, “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11)

Confucius said, “There was Shun. He indeed was greatly wise! Shun loved to question others, and to study their words, though they might be shallow. He concealed what was bad in them, and displayed the good. He took hold of their two extremes, determined the Mean, and employed it in his government of the people. It was by this that he was Shun [the sage-emperor]. (Doctrine of the Mean, Chap. VI)

And look at the importance they place on the *consequences of our thoughts, words, and deeds*, both individually and corporately, as we go about this play:

The Master said, “Yû, have you heard the six words to which are attached six becloudings?” Yû replied, “I have not.” “Sit down and I will tell you. There is the love of being benevolent without the love learning—the beclouding here leads to foolish simplicity. There is the love of knowing without the love of learning—the beclouding here leads to dissipation of mind. . . . The love of being sincere without the love of learning . . . leads to an injurious disregard of consequences. . . . The love of straight-

forwardness without the love of learning . . . leads to rudeness. . . . The love of boldness without the love of learning . . . leads to insubordination. . . . The love of firmness without the love of learning . . . leads to extravagant conduct.” (Analects XVII:8)

God, speaking through Moses, said, “If you follow My laws and faithfully observe My commandments, I will grant your rains in their season so that the earth shall yield its produce and the trees of the field their fruit. . . . You shall eat your fill of bread and dwell securely in your land. . . . You shall lie down untroubled by anyone. . . . But if you do not obey Me and do not observe all these commandments, . . . I will set My face against you . . . your foes shall dominate you. You shall flee though none pursues. . . . Your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit.” (Leviticus 26:3–20)

Our pathfinders knew that we would be encountering endless choices whose consequences would draw us either toward or away from the spirit of their joy. Although they came from vastly different cultures and times, they are surprisingly consistent when directing our attention to the nature of the choice. They point us toward spirits that flow from an encompassing holistic spirit that we can trust to bring us into a vibrant harmony with one another and away from spirits that flow from a countering egotistic spirit focused principally on personal gratification. The context of our choice often gives rise to general pairings our pathfinders frequently addressed.

Unity versus Division:

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. . . . But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:32–36)

Tsze-chang asked what constituted intelligence. The Master said, “He with whom neither slander that gradually soaks into the mind, nor statements that startle like a wound in the flesh, are successful, may be called intelligent indeed . . . may be called far-seeing.” (Analects XII:6)

Self-Insistence versus Selfishness:

Fame or one’s own self, which does one love more? One’s own self or material goods, which has more worth? Loss [of self] or possession [of goods], which is the greater evil? . . . The contented man meets no disgrace; Who knows when to stop runs into no danger—He can long endure. (*Tao Te Ching* XLIV)

It will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on a journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. (Matthew 25:14–18)

And whoever strives hard, strives for himself. Surely Allāh is Self-sufficient, above [need of] [His] creatures. And those who believe and do good, We shall certainly do away with their afflictions and reward them for the best of what they did. (Quran 29:6–7)

Truthfulness versus Deception:

The Master said, “I do not know how a man without truthfulness is to get on. How can a large carriage be made to go without the cross-bar for yoking the oxen, or a small carriage without the arrangement for yoking the horses?” (Analects II:22)

He who testifies faithfully tells the truth, but a false witness, deceit. There is blunt talk like sword-thrusts, but the speech of the wise is healing. Truthful speech abides forever, a lying tongue for but a moment. (Proverbs 12:17–19)

Humility versus Superiority:

The Sage puts himself last, and finds himself in the foremost place; regards his body as accidental, and his body is thereby preserved. Is it not because he does not live for Self that his Self achieves perfection? (*Tao Te Ching* VII)

Pride goes before ruin, arrogance, before failure. Better to be humble and among the lowly than to share spoils with the proud. He who is adept in a matter will attain success; happy is he who trusts in the Lord. (Proverbs 16:18–20)

Self-Responsibility versus Faultfinding:

Not the unworthy actions of others, not their [sinful] deeds of commission or omission, but one's own deeds of commission and omission should one regard. (Dhammapada IV:7)

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? (Matthew 7:3)

Generosity versus Greed:

The Master said, "The superior man thinks of virtue; the small man thinks of comfort. The superior man thinks of the sanctions of law; the small man thinks of favors which he may receive." The Master said, "He who acts with a constant view to his own advantage will be much murmured against." (Analects IV:11–12)

Come, look at this world, resembling a painted royal chariot. The foolish are sunk in it; for the wise there is no attachment for it. (Dhammapada XIII:5)

Send your bread forth upon the waters; for after many days you will find it. Distribute portions to seven or even to eight, for you cannot know what misfortune may occur on earth. (Ecclesiastes 11:1–2)

If you give in charity openly it is well, and if you hide it and give it to the poor it is better for you. (Quran 2:271)

Service versus Dominance:

Let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves. (Luke 22:26–27)

Victory brings hatred; the conquered dwells in sorrow. He who has given up [thoughts of both] victory and defeat, he is calm and lives happily. (Dhammapada XV:5)

Immortality versus Mortality:

The evil doer grieves in this world, and he grieves in the next; he grieves in both. He grieves, he is afflicted, seeing the evil of his own actions. The righteous man rejoices in this world and rejoices in the next; he rejoices in both. He rejoices and becomes delighted, seeing the purity of his own actions. (Dhammapada I:15–16)

Jesus answered, “Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of Spirit is spirit. (John 3:5–6)

The life of this world is only sport and play. It is surely the home of the Hereafter that will be life extended and new, if only they knew! (Quran 29:63)

In what sense might these understandings of our pathfinders be true? When it comes to philosophical understandings, we gravitate to those that can be argued from initial concepts and assertions that appeal to us. Similarly, when it comes to religious understandings, we gravitate toward the spirits of those who appeal to us. The choice reflects how we see ourselves and others. If we are drawn to those seeking a fuller life for others via inclusive associations, we gravitate to the encompassing spirits of our pathfinders. If we are drawn to those getting what they can for themselves via exclusive associations, we drift away to possibly attractive but ultimately divisive spirits. The nature of our peace and joy and the truths and consequences of our lives flow from the spirits that attract and guide us.

Our pathfinders tell us that, for better or for worse, an eventual reckoning comes to all. While we live, we can always choose to enter the lasting joy into which the inclusive doors open. By the time our options cease, tragedy awaits those who find themselves forever locked away from the many welcoming spirits their self-interest has imprisoned, ignored, or locked out. John Newton captured how dramatic our sense of that truth and its consequences is when

he wrote, “Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound that sav’d a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind; but now I see.”

* * *

One world—four distinct types of truths and understandings. The magisteria of science and art are poles apart with respect to the elements they coordinate and their means for doing so, yet in their material creativity, they complement and enliven each other. The magisteria of philosophy and religion are also poles apart, yet in their communal teachings, they, too, complement and enrich each other. Scientists, artists, philosophers, and religious leaders dedicate much of their lives to the truths at the poles of these two complementary axes of truth. Most of us meander about the political crosshairs where we forge our world views of who we are and what we are about.

As parents, we are responsible for guiding the choices and lives of our children prior to the age where the community holds them personally accountable for their actions. Naturally, both parents and children seek assistance and support in this guidance. Although that help is variously instituted, the equivalent of a high school education is required for science, art, and philosophy because of the universality of the personal need for knowledge, the inevitability of communal judgment of our actions, and the individualistic and often limited nature of parental training. That educational requirement is equally valid when it comes to our most basic religious understandings.

Our students need a grasp of how the spirits that guide their thoughts are fundamental to how they will come to see and experience life. They need to know the spirits that underlie

fulfilling and lasting relationships. They need to see that they are valued and have a meaningful and lasting part to play. Tragedy brews every time we fail and a student graduates feeling worthless or seeing a hopeless road ahead, even a life of crime or a suicidal end. Of course, self-worth, honesty, and fair play can and often are conveyed in our schools and athletic programs, but seldom is that the central focus. But when students are struggling with their sense of self-worth, their relationships with their peers, and their hopes for a meaningful role to play, they need classes where they can anticipate an encounter with helpful understandings and empathetic discussions.

With that in mind, I'd like to venture some thoughts on how our most fundamental and unifying religious truths can be taught to high school students without violating the establishment clause of the First Amendment or undermining their appreciation of science, art, and philosophy. Effectively doing so will further their sense of self-worth, their desire for a cooperative spirit in their personal interactions, and their search for rewarding professional pursuits.

The basic idea is to enhance their consciousness of the spirits at play in the many choices they will be making as they go about their lives. They don't need to be taught how to distinguish the spirits. The basics were learned by the time they entered preschool. Rather, they need telling examples of the immediate and the less obvious long-term consequences of words and actions that flow out of the spirits they choose to follow.

Take one of our most fundamental of choices: whether to be guided by a spirit of unity or a spirit of division. The possible long-term divisive consequences of even a single word is well

illustrated in Countee Cullen's poem "Incident." By having students read and discuss this artistic testimonial of a lived event, they become aware of the concern raised by both Confucius and Jesus without referring either to the Confucian expression "statements that startle like a wound in the flesh" or to its counterpart in Matthew 5:22, "Whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire." The contrast between the two spirits is equally apparent when distinguishing healthy competition (in which students hone many of the skills needed for later life) from destructive fighting. In between lie all shades of gray that students can productively discuss and later apply to adult life in communities and nations.

Most students are keenly aware of the negative consequences that can take place even among friends when selfishness reigns. Many may not have seriously discussed the importance of self-insistence. Yet from that spirit flows our instinct to live, our innate feeling of self-worth, and our desire and essential need to develop and express our individual talents. The importance of rules may be well known, but few have contemplated how the spirit of play emerges from notions of unity and self-insistence or how the spirits of division and selfishness get entwined with those seeking to "game the system." Nor may a self-insistent student seeking overall unity know what to do when encountering individuals or groups guided by a selfish and divisive spirit. A discussion of Rosa Park's simple insistence on her inherent freedom to take an open seat in the front of the bus rather than being relegated to the back would be revealing and inspiring.

Although students may wonder whether they are being self-insistent or selfish, they are almost always fully aware of their truth or deception. Their choice reflects their personal assessment of the pros and cons of the envisioned consequences. They could greatly benefit by

sharing some of their assessments of those consequences in the contexts of taking tests, building short-term and long-term relationships, playing games, reporting events, and making promises to others—and to themselves.

Every student is engaged in numerous group endeavors: families, classes, sports, musical groups, cheerleading teams, and drama clubs, to name a few. All have an acute sense of the relative success of the group endeavors with which they identify. All have a sense of their performance relative to the performances of the other participants. The possibilities are endless for discussing the choices between two pairs of contrasting spirits that inevitably come into play. They may enjoy discussing how an air of humility versus an air of superiority on the part of one individual can change the nature of the banter that follows a successful group event. However, they may benefit more by comparing how an air of faultfinding versus an air of self-improvement can change the banter following a disappointing group endeavor. Two scenarios could prove interesting: one in which each person focuses on someone else's mistakes, and the other in which each person focuses on where they could have done better.

Our students will naturally anticipate their participation in the game of life as adults when they will have greater responsibility over resources and opportunities. Various pairs of conflicting spirits may come into play as they increasingly come in contact with others. They are likely to be aware of some adults enjoying and being guided by a spirit of generosity while others seem captivated by a spirit of greed. A discussion of how their notion of fairness arises and how it reflects their sense of who they are and those with whom they identify would be revealing. They may enjoy comparing how these two spirits work in largely capitalistic versus largely socialistic economies. They will also be well aware of the distinction between the spirit

of service and the spirit of dominance. In an open and spirited discussion, they may be surprised how their inclination to choose one or the other in various contexts also reflects their sense of who they are and those with whom they identify.

Our students need safe and nonjudgmental formats to sort out the lasting from the transient pros and cons of the many choices they will make while pursuing their desires. So much depends on how they identify with the consequences of their words and actions. They may not see that the choice of seeking an immediate pleasure rather than a lasting joy largely flows from following a spirit of mortality. A discussion of the statement "Give me liberty or give death!" attributed to Patrick Henry may clarify the subtlety of the issues. A probing discussion of what each student could not forget about a best friend or person no longer physically present could greatly aid them in sorting out their own priorities.

Our students need a grasp of how the spirits that guide their thoughts are fundamental to how they will come to see and experience life. They need to explore the spirits that underlie fulfilling and lasting relationships. They need to see that they are valued and have a meaningful and lasting part to play. These understandings would be emphasized in a class in which unifying religious understandings are taught and discussed. We would all benefit.

ⁱ D. O. Lamoureux, *Evolution: Scripture and Nature Say YES!* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, 17.

ⁱⁱⁱ In one of life's many ironies, Duane and I are among the coauthors of the paper: W. J. Wechter, M. A. Johnson, C. M. Hall, D. T. Warner, A. E. Berger, A. H. Wenzel, D. T. Gish, and G. Neil, "Aracytidine Acylates; Use of Drug Design Predictors in SAR Correlation," *Journal of Medicinal Chemistry*, 18, 339-344.

^{iv} S. J. Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999).

^v *Ibid.*, 4-5.

^{vi} *Ibid.*, 56, 62.

^{vii} I. E. Edman, ed., "Euthyphro," in *The Works of Plato* (New York: Random House, 1928), 41.

^{viii} R. M. Hutchins, ed., "On Interpretation," in *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 8 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 25.

^{ix} R. M. Hutchins, ed., "Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason and Seeking for Truth in the Sciences," in *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 31 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 51.

^x R. M. Hutchins, ed., "Of the Proficiency and Advancement in Learning: Divine and Humane," in *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 30 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 14.

^{xi} R. M. Hutchins, ed., "Novum Organum: Aphorisms Concerning the Interpretation of Nature and the Kingdom of Man," in *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 30 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 180.

^{xii} J. Bartlett, *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, 16th ed. (Boston: Little Brown & Co.), 303.

^{xiii} J. Hutton, *Theory of the Earth* (Sioux Falls: NuVision Publications, 2007 [1788]), 14, 16, 17, 53, 73-75.

^{xiv} "Hutton, James," in *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., 32 vols. (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2010, final print version, continued online, as *Encyclopedia Britannica*, at <https://www.britannica.com/>).

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- ^{xx} Bear, Connors, and Paradiso, *Neuroscience: Exploring the Brain*, 653.
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- ^{xxii} *Ibid.*, 356, 357.
- ^{xxiii} *Ibid.*, 462, 463.
- ^{xxiv} P. W. Russell, B. W. Clayton, and B. Freeman, *Dixieland* (New York City: Coronet Records, CX-163, n.d., 33 1/3 rpm).
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- ^{xxvii} *Ibid.*, 106.
- ^{xxviii} *The Holy Qur'ān*, trans. Maulana Muhammad Ali, 7th ed. (Columbus: Ahmadiyyah Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore, 1991). This is the source of my quotations from the Quran.
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^{xxx}i R. Hammer, *The Classic Midrash: Tannaitic Commentaries on the Bible* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 85.

^{xxx}ii D. Howard, ed., *A Buddhist Bible* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 498.

^{xxx}iii S. Radhakrishnan and C. A. Moore, eds., *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 292–325. This is the source of my quotations from the *Dhammapada*.

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