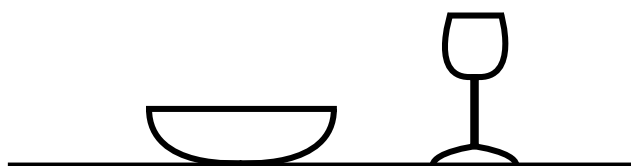


THE COMMON TABLE



ISSUE 5



THE COMMON TABLE

COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY STUDENT MAGAZINE

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Spring 2022 / *Welcome*

"All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations."

Psalms 22:27-28

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

A technological glitch turned the verse of the day into an hourly reminder: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?" (Romans 8:35). After seeing those words glowing on my watch eight or nine times, it started to feel like a harbinger of doom.

One week later, Russia invaded Ukraine.

The world reels and tries to reckon with the fact that humanity isn't as great as we'd like to think. We haven't moved past the kind of brutal destruction we grew up reading about in history books. Equally graphic images adorn our daily news, alerting us to the gross injustice and immense suffering which devastates the lives of millions.

As Christians, we have a lot to offer in this moment. Our belief in a God who created a good world and the human rebellion that has so marred creation's beauty helps us to grieve sin and its disastrous effects. Our faith in a God of justice assures us that His anger exceeds our own and encourages us to seek and advocate for what is right. Our trust in a God who is sovereign helps us to cry out to Him on behalf of those in

need, knowing He responds to our prayers in ways we can't imagine.

Our God acts to redeem and restore. As Daniel Dávalos reminds us in his Easter reflection, God makes good on His word. In the resurrection of Christ, we see the sure promise of the end to come, when everything opposed to God will be destroyed and His good kingdom will be fully restored and consummated at last.

Though none of the content in this issue addresses the situation in Ukraine directly, there are several pieces meditating on suffering, justice, and the work of Christ. Beloved members of the Covenant community and the impact of their faithful service are honored here. As you read the words of students meditating on how their faith changes the way they interact with the world, may your own faith be strengthened and your heart be moved to prayer and action. May God help us and direct us as we seek to represent Him well, displaying His love and carrying out His work in a hurting world.

We invite you to write to the editor-in-chief of The Common Table at covstudentmagazine@gmail.com with your thoughts and reflections in response to the contributions contained in this issue.

Mary Schieferstein, MDiv '23

Mary Schieferstein

Editor-in-Chief

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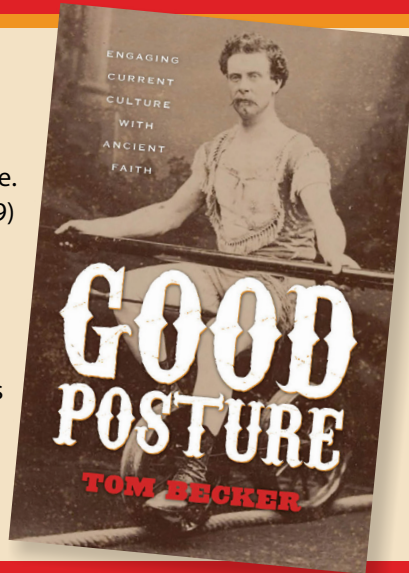
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CIVILITY
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Find out how one CTS alum put these bridge-building postures into practice. Tom Becker (MDiv '99) is the founder and director of The Row House, Inc., and this book tells the story of the eclectic events he's hosted since 2010 . . . all aimed at the common good.



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The Study Table

WHO NEEDS A SPIRITUAL LIFE?

Paul Frederick

DURING MY FIRST year at Covenant, I was thoroughly disabused of any notion of a sacred-secular divide running through God's world. All of creation, all of human society, all of human experience is subject to God's rule, and though none of it has escaped the fallout of human rebellion, so also none of it will escape the grace of God. Grace restores nature, and so Christianity is not concerned only with people's "spiritual lives," but with the whole of their person in the whole of their lives.

And no one has helped me understand this more than Herman Bavinck. Bavinck (1854-1921) was a Dutch pastor and theologian who, alongside his contemporary Abraham Kuyper, labored to help Christians understand how their faith relates to the world around them: to their work and family, their politics and philosophy, their art and science. For Bavinck, Christianity should not be restricted to a subset of human life, nor should Christians concern themselves only with "spiritual" things. "Christ did not come just to restore the religio-ethical life of man and to leave all the rest of life undisturbed, as if the rest of life had not been corrupted by sin and had no need of restoration."¹ By no means: grace restores nature, every bit of it.

This is glorious truth! On the one hand, this cosmic vision of Christianity is deeply relieving. It means that we can please God not only in our religious duties, not only

at church or in vocational ministry, but in all things, from insect collecting to electrical engineering, from knitting to napping. On the other hand, this vision is inspiring and exciting. It calls us outward into deep engagement with the world, into the search for knowledge, the pursuit of justice, and the creation of beauty.

But for all this, there is an important caution, one that Bavinck himself warned about. He wrote regarding this zeal, "Nowadays we are out to convert the whole world, to conquer all areas of life for Christ. But we often neglect to ask whether we ourselves are truly converted and whether we belong to Christ in life and in death."² There is an excessive focus on our public self, our productive self, which can distract from our own position before God. Without any less zealous opposition towards the over-spiritualizing tendency of much contemporary Christianity, we must also beware the opposite error: the error of forgetting about the spiritual life altogether.

Even to mention "the spiritual life," as if it could ever be separated from the rest of life, might cause some readers to stiffen. But again I take my cues from Bavinck. I will quote the following paragraph in full, and in the remainder of this essay we'll work through the main points he puts forth.

"Religious life does have its own content and independent value. It remains the center, the heart from which all the Christian's thoughts and acts proceed, by which

¹ Herman Bavinck, "Herman Bavinck's 'Common Grace,'" trans. R. C. Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (1989): 61.

² Herman Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, trans. Harry der Nederlanden (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1980), 94.

they are animated and given the warmth of life. There, in fellowship with God, he is strengthened for his labors and girds himself for the battle. But that mysterious life of fellowship with God is not the whole of life. The prayer chamber is the inner room, but not the whole house in which he lives and functions. Spiritual life does not exclude family and social life, business and politics, art and science. It is distinct from these; it is also of much greater value, but it does not stand irreconcilably opposed to it. Rather it is the power that enables us to faithfully fulfill our earthly calling, stamping all of life as a service to God.”³

Bavinck here describes the “religious life,” which he also refers to as “that mysterious life of fellowship with God,” or, as we’ve been calling it, the “spiritual life.” And though his main purpose seems to be to defend against an exclusive emphasis on the spiritual life, it is nevertheless striking to note just how positively he speaks of it. Here Bavinck makes (at least) three important observations about the spiritual life: its necessity, its centrality, and its power.

1. The spiritual life is necessary

I repeat: the danger to over-spiritualize is real. But according to Bavinck, we cannot therefore give up on discussing the spiritual life. For far from being a Gnostic delusion, the spiritual life “does have its own content” and, indeed, an “independent value.” Here Bavinck maintains that the spiritual life is real, distinct, and necessary. It cannot be separated from or pitted against the rest of life; but neither can it be reduced away into nothing.

The temptation towards reductionism is pervasive. So often we absolutize one thing and then trivialize the others. We reduce human well-being to the cognitive dimension, and we denigrate the body. We reduce societal flourishing to economic progress, and we denigrate beauty. We reduce the church’s task to evangelism, and we denigrate discipleship. There is indeed a great risk in reducing the Christian life to prayer and contemplation, such that justice, wholeness, and all-of-life obedience are trivialized. But there remains also the risk of reducing the Christian life to outward activity (even good and necessary activity!), to the neglect of the spiritual life, the neglect of one’s own “fellowship with God.”

To be a human being means so much more than being a thinking thing, or even a contemplating soul. God’s

³ *Ibid*, 95-6.

⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:346.

concern in redemption is not merely with our intellect, or with our emotions, or with our external obedience. Rather, it is “to redeem human beings in their totality of body and soul with all their capacities and powers.”⁴ The renewal of the Holy Spirit encompasses every dimension of our humanity, of our image-bearing. But this includes that dimension of our humanity by which we know and love God—that is, our spiritual life.

2. The spiritual life is central

But Bavinck does not leave it at that. Rather than merely juxtaposing the spiritual life to, say, the vocational life, or the intellectual life, Bavinck places it firmly at “the center” of the Christian person. Indeed, it is “the heart” which gives vitality and warmth to the body, “the inner room” which gives structure to the house. We cannot forget: this is the theologian who trumpets loudly the victory of God’s grace over every corner of God’s creation. And yet for him, the life of fellowship with God is not merely necessary, but central.

For me, this is perhaps the most challenging claim Bavinck makes. As we’ll see in a moment, this centrality is not competitive; the spiritual life must never be understood over against the rest of life. Yet Bavinck has the nerve to write that the spiritual life has a certain degree of primacy across the whole of Christian living. It transcends every other dimension of life, and transcends them by far. On what basis can Bavinck make such a bold claim?

I admit that I’m really only guessing here. But it makes sense to me that our fellowship with God should be the center of our lives, since God himself is the center of the universe.

“Grace restores nature, every bit of it.”

Through the (often simple and mundane) duties and practices of the spiritual life, we learn to reorient ourselves towards our Creator and Redeemer. In joyful adoration of our God, in solemn lament before him, in earnest petition to him, we learn that the Triune God is the deepest reality in the cosmos and the most solid bedrock of our lives, the one from whom and through whom and to whom are all things. The fundamental principle of the Christian life is not some arbitrary law-code; it is the living and eternal God who has definitively revealed himself in Jesus Christ.

3. The spiritual life is powerful

Finally, we get to the thrust of this brief passage. This is where it all comes together. If the spiritual life is under-

“And yet for
[Bavinck], the life of
fellowship with God is
not merely necessary,
but central.”

stood as distinct from and more valuable than everything else in the world, how can Christians sustain passionate involvement in the world? How can we exalt the spiritual life without denigrating the rest of life? Doesn't such teaching tend to stifle, rather than encourage, a deep hunger for justice and peace in the world, a longing to see God's kingdom come on earth as in heaven?

Bavinck thinks not. For him, the spiritual life “does not stand irreconcilably opposed to” all the other dimensions of life. It's not a zero-sum game; investing in the spiritual does not require neglecting the rest. On the contrary, the relationship is mutual and cooperative. According to Bavinck, it's our spiritual life by which our every thought and deed is animated. It's through prayer that we find strength and readiness to serve God in every sphere. Our spiritual life, while remaining distinct, is nevertheless “the power that enables us to faithfully fulfill our earthly calling, stamping all of life as a service to God.” Our external, public obedience always and necessarily flows out from an inner, spiritual vitality.

The call here is twofold. On the one hand, we must not neglect our spiritual lives. We cannot expect to embody God's kingdom if we don't know God—and not only intellectually, but in the felt experience of our own hearts. We will never change the world if we don't begin in prayer. Each of us must look first of all at our

own spiritual lives, but we're also called to look after the spiritual health of those God has placed in our lives. This isn't cheesy, this isn't cheap, this isn't pietistic; taking mutual spiritual responsibility for one another is central to Christian growth in community.

On the other hand, we must not separate our spiritual lives from the rest of our lives. True spirituality does not pull us perpetually inward, away from the world and the complex decisions we face there. Rather, spiritual life empowers us to be faithful witnesses to God in every area of life. If we have a conception of spirituality that doesn't matter for our recreation, our spending habits, our political opinions, or our nine-to-five job, we're missing out. The God who relates to us personally and inwardly is also the Creator and Redeemer of the entire cosmos, and his purposes for us are far larger than we could ever imagine.

I am no Bavinck scholar, and I can't promise to have represented all his ideas on this subject perfectly. Instead, I encourage all to go to the source and to read Bavinck for themselves, whom I always find insightful and refreshing. But even then, a well-formed doctrine of the spiritual life is no replacement for our own fellowship with God, by which alone we can follow Jesus faithfully and be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. —E

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE CHURCH

David Augustine



LAST SEMESTER, DR. DOUGLAS Wiens, professor of Earth and Planetary Sciences at Washington University, came to speak here at Covenant Seminary on the topic of climate change and the church, co-hosted by the Francis Schaeffer Institute and *The Common Table*. As someone who has had an interest in climate change since I watched *An Inconvenient Truth* when I was in about 6th grade, I was excited to hear what he had to say on this topic.

Three questions immediately arise when entering this topic: 1) how do we know humans have anything to do with climate change? 2) If so, how influential are they? And 3) why should we care?

Dr. Wiens showed a number of pieces of evidence which linked human activity to climate change. For example, scientists have observed that a particular isotope (or unique form) of carbon that is put into the atmosphere by the burning of fossil fuels has risen dramatically, dwarfing the carbon in the atmosphere that comes from other processes. This observation, linked to what is known about how carbon dioxide (the most common form of carbon in the atmosphere) traps heat, known as the greenhouse effect, is clear evidence of humans being the primary driver of climate change.

As to how and why Christians should care about climate change, a fair summary of Wiens's position is "Care with urgency, but do not fear." He showed a map of how climate change is predicted to alter the ability

for a region to grow crops.¹ As with many things, those areas with generally greater wealth (largely the global North and West) will likely see agricultural increase. However, those in the global South such as South America, Africa, and Southeast Asia will likely see a decrease in crop productivity. We should care not only because it may negatively affect us, but even more because it will hurt those who (generally speaking) already have fewer means. The need to care is urgent because the process of climate change is already occurring, and Dr. Wiens showed how the process creates a feedback loop where the occurrence of some climate change makes future climate change occur faster.

At the same time, he reminded us a number of times that we should not fall into fatalism. Predictions of an uninhabitable earth are neither Biblical nor scientific. God preserves what He has lovingly created and we can trust that He will ensure some amount of survivability on the earth. Also, while there are many catastrophic consequences of climate change, they will not make the earth uninhabitable, although certainly more difficult to inhabit.

Thank you to Dr. Wiens for taking the time to come and speak to us, and on behalf of *The Common Table* I would like to thank Mark Ryan and the Francis Schaeffer Institute for helping us host him. If you are interested in learning more about this topic, Dr. Wiens teaches a course through The Carver Project (carverstl.org) which is a ministry that seeks to develop faculty, disciple students, and engage the community and church. —✝

¹ <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/figures/projected-impact-of-climate-change>.

ON CHOICE FROM A COLLECTIVE LENS

Karen Kallberg

HAD THE PRIVILEGE of answering the following question for the seminary's first diversity student panel discussion in March:

At times, have you felt hindered or blocked from sharing your perspective in class? What goes through your mind which causes you to feel this way? While in class, have you ever had a time, or are there times when you felt your voice was ignored or missed?

First, I want to acknowledge how unusual it is to be invited to speak frankly about something like this in a public setting. My professors and classmates have given me incredible latitude to explore class material from my cultural framework. The following incident is one of the rare occasions when that didn't happen. Even so, my professor apologized to me in the middle of class and has given me permission to share this story. That itself is also extraordinarily gracious.

Second, there was a time when I would not have even raised my hand in class, much less spoken publicly about an experience so charged with emotion and shame. As a child, I was teased for looking different and for speaking another language, so I learned quickly that survival meant working hard and not drawing attention to myself. Again, I am grateful for the professors and friends who have encouraged me to grow in this area.

In the following story, I invite you into my inner world to consider how it feels to be a minority here at Covenant:

Earlier this semester, my professor put up this slide in class:

"We are our choices." (Jean Paul Sartre)

When he opened the floor for discussion, my classmates chimed in while I processed the slide from my two cultural lenses. First, individualistically, when I hear the word choices, I think "Should I go to SLU or Wash U?" or "Should I study theology or counseling?" By all appearances, these choices seem equally weighted. But when I put on my collective lens, the choices are skewed. I put up my hand and began to say, "In my culture, I don't feel like we have a choice..." but the professor interrupted and said, "That's not true. Everyone has a choice." As he continued to make his point, I froze. *Shame*. My chest got tight and hot tears filled my eyes as my 6-year-old self remembered how it felt when other children reminded me that I was different.

My professor was not wrong; however, this is how that quote felt from a collective lens. I thought of my mom who grew up in the Taiwanese educational system where every student must take entrance examinations for both high school and university. That meant that children were sorted according to their intelligence very early in life. When taking the entrance exam for university, students name their top choices for school and field of study. My 17-year-old mother wanted to study psychology, but my grandmother did not approve and forced her to choose something else. My mother had a plan: she selected electrical engineering



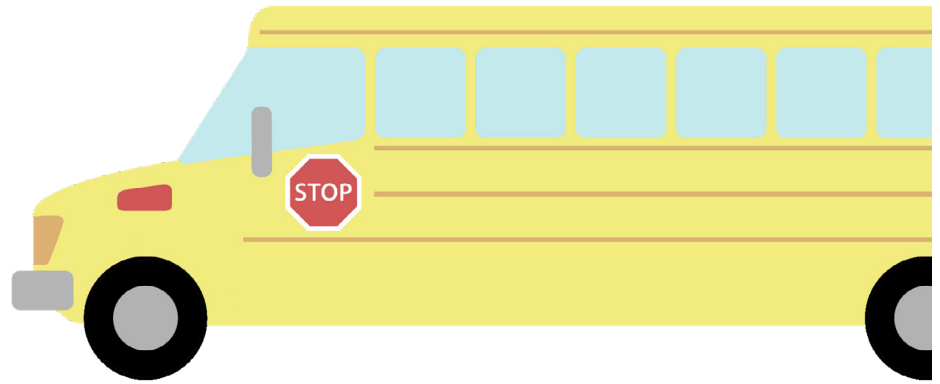
Photo of Panelists

at the top university as her first choice and psychology as her second choice, assuming she would never get accepted into the male-dominated field of electrical engineering. Unfortunately for her, she did. My grandmother received the bragging rights she so desired. My mother, however, ended up studying in a field that she hated for seven years. Did she have a choice?

Now if that is all there is to collectivism, it would feel stifling indeed. On the flip side, however, I would argue that we are not *just* our choices, we are also the choices of others. It is not lost on me that I am studying the very field that my mother was denied. Initially, when I met some resistance about abandoning my responsibilities as a mother, my mother threw her weight behind me to make sure I could pursue the dream that she was not allowed to pursue. As a daughter of immigrants, I am keenly aware that I am the recipient of the sacrifices my parents have made to give me the opportunities that were not available to them. The fabric of my culture is woven with the threads of sacrifice.

Shame creates a sense of isolation. What carried me through this situation were the friends who noticed my tears, texted me to express their solidarity and support, and gave me time and space to do the processing I could not do in class. Along with those friends are the others who showed up at the meeting to listen, to ask questions, to express appreciation for the risk I and my fellow panelists took in being vulnerable. These are all gifts, and to that I say, "I am not just my choices, I am also the choices of others." —

“The fabric of my culture is woven with the threads of sacrifice.”



AN ISRAELITE EDUCATION FOR THE CHURCH

AUSTIN HESS

WHEN IT COMES to education, many questions run through people's minds. "Do I send my child to a private Christian school? Do I homeschool them? Can I send them to a public school? How will my choices for my child affect their future? How will this affect my child's future as an individual and in their career?" As a child approaches the end of their time in high school, they ask these questions: "Where will I go to school? Will I go to school at all? Should I get a STE(A)M or liberal arts degree?" These questions are all important in the life of a Christian because, as I will argue from Deut. 6:4-9, education is more than obtaining a degree or meeting a list of curriculum criteria; education for

Christians is about forming the whole person to love God and neighbor all the time.

The first word in verse 5 is **בָּהַא**. Simply, this verb means "to love."¹ Love is used in Deuteronomy on a horizontal plane (i.e., person to person) and it is also used vertically (i.e., person to God).² In short, in 6:5, Moses is calling the people of Israel to love the only God who is their God.

Moses lists the objects Israel should use to love him. The first object is **לֵבָב**. This term is translated "heart."³ In this passage, **לֵבָב** is referring to one's "mind, affections and will"—their entire being.⁴ This call repeats itself with the following nouns in this verse. The next thing Israel is to love the Lord their God with is their "soul." In this verse, it is more than likely that **נַפְשׁוֹ** is

¹ Francis Brown, Samuel Driver, and Charles Briggs, *The Enhanced BDB Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1977), 12; Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1994), 18.

² Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *BDB*, 12; Koehler et al., *HALOT*, 18.

³ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *BDB*, 516.

⁴ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *BDB*, 523. It is important to note that while English equivocates the heart with emotion, Hebrew does not bifurcate in that way: the heart is the seat of emotions and reason. Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: OT*, 177.

referring to the mind.⁵ The final thing in this list is that Israel is commanded to love the Lord their God with all their “might.” The editors of *BDB* provide a simple translation of “force, might” without comment.⁶ The editors of *HALOT* provide more clarity with “strength, power.”⁷ However, they do not provide any more examples from the rest of Deuteronomy. Therefore, it is easy to conclude that “might” is a sufficient translation that, like the prior nouns, intends to communicate that Israel is to love the Lord their God with their entire being—it requires their energy and effort.

The next significant word is **שָׁנַן**. It is used uniquely in this situation since it is in the context of teaching.⁸ In essence, the community’s way of life is to be devoted to the continual instruction of a clan’s own children and the children of others.

While the community is to continually teach their children, they are also to “bind” the Lord’s precepts on their foreheads and hands (**רָשָׁה**). The editors of *BDB* argue that this instance is figurative, and cite 11:18 as support.⁹ The people are not literally binding these words onto their head, but they are keeping “all of [the] religious and moral precepts” in their heads and accessible at their hands.¹⁰ The community, through their repetition of instruction (and when the children grow up) are to have the law of Yahweh on their mind and ready, like carrying a box of words on their foreheads or as a sign on their hands.

The final word to note in this passage is **בִּתְּכֶם**. Again, like the previous verse, Moses did not command Israel to literally write the Torah on their houses.¹¹ Life happened at the gates of the city for the people—it is where they congregated.¹² The community is to be so saturated with Yahweh’s words that whenever sojourners come into Israel, they will know their beliefs and ethics at the gates.

After analyzing the text, it is important to situate it in its historical context. Egypt subjected Israel to its reign for 430 years. As a result of this lengthy exile, Egypt’s life and culture slowly influenced them through their regular interactions for about fifteen generations. Surely Israel took counter-cultural measures throughout their time—this is evident in the boldness of the midwives in Exod.

1:15-22. However, this span of time is long enough that some of the core convictions would be softened among Israel. In short, Israel’s social imagery started to reflect Egyptian values. They needed to be reeducated, especially as they entered their new land.

The previous generation abandoned God through their continual disobedience. Their disobedience is why they could not enter the promised land. Therefore, in order for this new generation, as well as subsequent generations, to succeed in this new land, they needed to learn obedience. Their education was rooted in knowing their God: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” This knowledge means that as they enter new lands to conquer them, they are not to follow other gods, for Yahweh is their God—he is the one who redeemed them from Egypt. Moses’ commands are, in a sense, warning this new generation—the inheritors—to take seriously their devotion to God. Anything outside of this norm usurps God from his rightful place in their communal life. The result of having God’s Word saturating the community is that their whole being—their whole country—would be completely consumed by their love for God (32:46, Ps. 37:31), resulting in righteousness (Isa. 51:7). God is in a covenant relationship with his people and one day, it will be untainted by sin.

In Matt. 22:37-38, Mark 12:29-30, and Luke 10:27 Jesus directly quotes the Shema, and he offers the same command as Moses preached in Deuteronomy. Just as Israel loved the Lord their God with their entire being, so Jesus’ audience and the church was to do the same. However, Jesus expands the scope of this law and connects the vertical love (i.e., person to God) with the horizontal love (i.e., person to person): their neighbor. Indeed, the Israelite people did sin against each other by not remaining loyal to God, and consequently no one in the exodus generation received their inheritance. However, the focus of Moses was Israel’s infractions against God—who is the ultimate object of their love. As mentioned before, Israel spent generation after generation in subjection to Egypt. Understandably, their worldview would slowly morph and change. In curriculum design, there are three types of curricula when a lesson is taught: the explicit, the hidden, and the null.

⁵ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *BDB*, 659. Interestingly enough, *HALOT* does not list 6:5 as an example in any of their proposed definitions and categories.

⁶ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *BDB*, 547.

⁷ Koehler et al., *HALOT*, 538.

⁸ Robson, *Deut 1-11 (BHNB)*, 216.

⁹ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *BDB*, 905.

¹⁰ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *BDB*, 905.

¹¹ Chances are that the Israeli people were not literate. Tigay, *Deut (JPS)*, 79.

¹² Tigay, *Deut (JPS)*, 79.

The explicit curriculum is what *is* taught, the hidden curriculum is what is taught *through* implication, and the null curriculum is what is taught through what is *not* taught.¹³ The explicit curriculum in the Shema is that God is one and they should be totally devoted to him. The hidden curriculum is that Israel should love their neighbors, too. However, Israel did not catch the implication (even though there are mountains of laws regulating their relationships with each other). Therefore, what Israel learned was to love God, and treat their neighbors as second-class. Jesus breaks into their worldview and makes the hidden curriculum explicit—they are to love their neighbors, too.

The first major focus of application is the person. The entire person is to love God. This involves the intellect, the spiritual, and the ethical. For example, 6:4 proclaims that God is one. Intellectually, Israel was to assent to this idea by studying his Word when written or preached. Spiritually, this meant that their spirit was to be directed toward him and they were to inhabit practices that sanctified their souls. Ethically, Israel was not to pursue other gods and their teachings; they were to only obey God's laws. Therefore, for Israel, education was a whole person endeavor. When doctrinal truth was taught, it impacted everything they knew, who they were, and what they were to do. For today, when parents consider educational programs for their children, they should consider whether the models employed consider the whole person. Does it nurture their intellectual, spiritual, and physical well-being? Does it nurture these aspects from a Christian perspective? For if the child is not continually being formed by Christians in a Christian worldview, then they are being formed by the world and its various views on life. Additionally, when a church evaluates its Sunday school curriculum, it should consider how it is forming the whole person and not just the intellectual or the spiritual. This may mean that an hour-long Sunday school class should not be a mere lecture (though

these are important for many reasons and seasons!). For example, rather than talking about spiritual practices like prayer, perhaps the Sunday school hour should be devoted to praying after brief instruction.

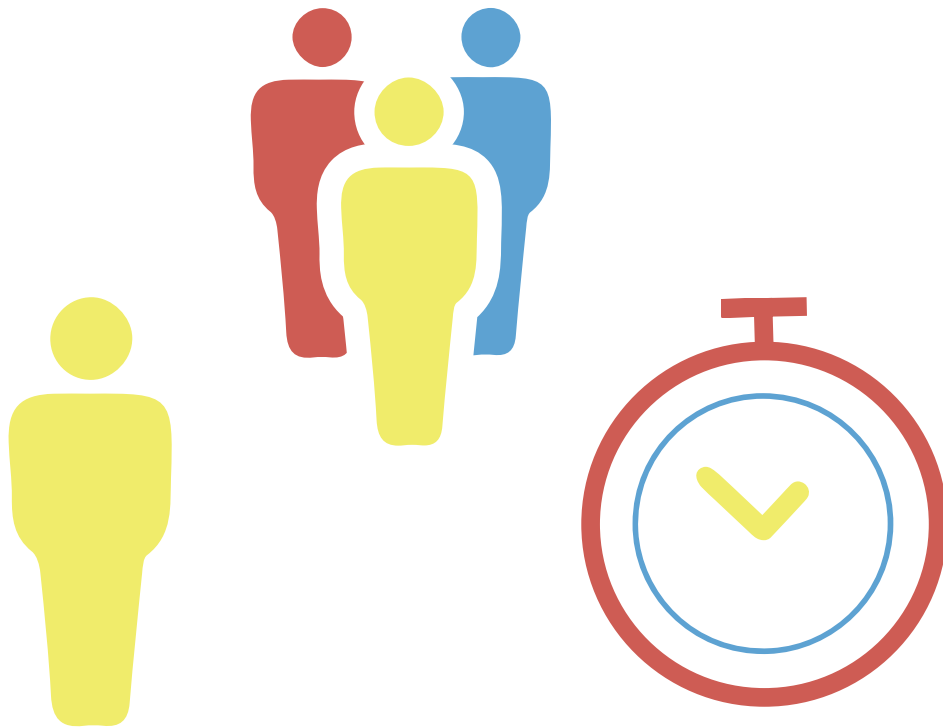
The second major focus of application is on the community. Moses recognized them as participating members in their community that needed instruction. The parents of Israel were to have a special focus on their children and how they were raised. As they participated in life—as they dwelt in their house, traveled, went to bed, woke up—their entire focus was on training the children to know God by talking about him and his law. While their parents provided a significant factor to their development, it was not merely relegated to the family; the whole community was responsible for the education of new generations. By virtue of continually discussing

the things of God, they would start to teach each other in their daily conversations. When a child is baptized on Sunday morning, a mark is placed on them which signifies that they are a part of the covenantal community. The members who witness this event make vows that they will help the parents raise their child and that the church will come around them and help raise them, too. Even before they can fully comprehend the mystery of the faith, the church is to keep them in worship so that they, too, can be formed into the likeness of Christ.

The final major application focus is time. As noted, time can cultivate or destroy people. However, while external factors may contribute to this, people can actively create culture to push back against these effects. This cultivation will also take time. However, as indicated in the passage, the main key to instilling one's worldview is through repeated oral and written instruction. For the church today, these practices are still good (e.g., memorizing Scripture, reciting catechisms, and preaching or teaching God's Word). However, the primary way this educational culture is created for the church today is during Sunday morning worship. Every week, God's people disrupt

“For if the child is not continually being formed by Christians in a Christian worldview, then they are being formed by the world and its various views on life.”

¹³ Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning*, 2014, 79.



their schedules by attending churches across the globe in order to worship. During these services, hearts are transformed through the liturgy. All these items push back against the effects of the world and renew God's people by repeating a narrative of redemption week in and week out. While the liturgy is powerful, much like ancient Israel, God's people need more time in the presence of others and him. Therefore, three hours on Sunday morning—though formative and important—will swiftly be undone by the world during the other six 24-hour days. If the church is to take seriously their doctrine of God and the effects of the world, then more intentionality needs to be given throughout the week—in their houses, in their travels—to continue cultivating

God's people to reflect him and his values.

In this article, I have translated and exegeted Deut. 6:4-9 with an eye towards the church's educational ministry. I do not intend to bind anyone's conscience to their educational decisions or what ministries churches should have (or not have). However, I do offer a way forward for church leaders and parishioners to begin cultivating an Israelite educational system—one based on faith in God that is regularly rehearsed—to instill the knowledge and love of God so that God's people can serve those around them. May God, who is the source of all truth and life, assist his church to love him with their entire being generation after generation so that she can be a light to her community. ✞

EASTER: GOD'S ANSWER TO INJUSTICE

Daniel Dávalos

SERIOUS PEOPLE, PEOPLE unwilling to look at the world through rose-colored VR headsets, are not surprised when they encounter injustice. The hyperconnectivity of the digital age has given us a window into worlds we might otherwise not see: worlds of generational and institutional sin; worlds in which the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer. We need only look.

For every instance of injustice, for every breach of the unspoken contract stipulating that good means meet good ends and bad means meet bad ends, there is a small, still voice telling us, “This should not be so.” At our best, this voice becomes a yearning, and this yearning becomes action. We attend our rallies and tweet our tweets and donate our hard-earned dollars. But all too soon our finitude frustrates our infinite desire for wrongs to be righted.

“Justice!” we cry out, “Justice!”

The word has become something of a catch-all for our various utopias, a shorthand for a multitude of redemption narratives as numerous and diverse as Abraham’s children. Ask two people and they’ll paint two different pictures of justice—one, a jury of one’s peers and fair trial; the other, affordable public housing. Ask a third and she might say these examples are both fruits of *injustice*.

If we are serious about justice (and we are serious people), then we must situate our vision of justice in its proper place in God’s story, which tells us our desire for justice is a testament to our createdness, and more

specifically, our having been created by One who despises injustice. The voice telling us “this should not be so” is a blinking beacon pointing us back to our created state. For Abraham Kuyper, this state is characterized by “an organic bond”¹ between people, which owes its existence to “the creation of the entire human race from one blood.”² Humanity is a great tapestry meant to bear witness to the Creator after whose image we are made. The proper ordering of this organic interconnectedness, Kuyper holds, is the stuff of justice—the creational logic of human communities.

Thus every injustice is an affront to our Creator, and as such, has cosmic significance. Hence Dr. King’s words, penned in that musky Birmingham jail, are vindicated: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”


In a very basic sense, a desire for justice is a desire to be properly human in relation to other humans. But everywhere, it seems, this desire is hindered by the cruel Way Things Are. After all, we live on the other side of Genesis 3. Like so many poisonous spores, for every injustice we labor to fix, five more injustices sprout in secret. For this post-Genesis 3 reality is not *out there*—we carry it with us: 7.9 billion image bearers, glorious ruins all, in 7.9 billion corners of creation, carrying some version of 7.9 billion post-Genesis 3 realities, with 7.9 billion capacities to wreak injustice.

It’s not a fair fight. Plenty of contemporary activists echo Dr. King’s dictum, that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” Insofar as they

¹ Abraham Kuyper, *Pro Rege* vol. 3, trans. Albert Gootjes (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), 13.

² *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 263.

I Must Try Harder I Must Try Harder
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conceive of their work as ultimate, they're wrong. There is no inevitability that promises an undoing to all the ruin and devastation. There is no obvious "right side of history" to which we can appeal as a guiding light to our striving. That is, they and we are wrong as long as we convince ourselves that we are able to achieve redemption by means of our work of justice.

This is the burden of those who can't unsee, and who can't undo. When we come face-to-face with our limitations, how will we respond? Will we attempt to white-knuckle ourselves past our created finitude? The twitter mobs would have you believe the ultimate answer to injustice is to *simply try harder*—but only if you do it precisely on their terms. Recall that there are more visions of justice than there are stars in the sky, and each vision has an army of angry tweeters ready to keyboard-thumb its enemies into oblivion.

No, the ultimate answer to injustice is not to try harder. The ultimate answer to injustice is Easter.

Consider this. The image of God, the very radiance of God's glory, accused, beaten, and executed by pale imitations professing to know better. The King of the World, who was spat on and mocked by his subjects. The Word of creation despised by his creatures. In a world bereft of justice, there shone on that cross, like a beacon for all to see, the ultimate injustice. "Let he who is without sin be crucified," mocked the cursed ground.

And yet, as these things go with God, there also shone the ultimate promise of justice. We know that what follows the crucifixion is not defeat, but Resurrection. The

Apostle Paul so clearly articulates,

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. (1 Corinthians 15:20-24, ESV)

Our righteous works of justice—our rallies, boycotts, and petitions—are holy reflections of our Creator, but let us not rob the work of redemption from Christ. We thirst for justice, and Easter situates that thirst. Our small strivings are microcosmic analogies for the Great Striving, theomorphic echoes of The Way Things Should Be. We work in our small ways, with worn-out tools, to bring justice to bear in the corners of creation God has given us to steward, and in so doing, we bear witness to a coming justice.

Justice is not a redemption story, but it echoes *the* redemption story. The promise of Easter is not some nebulous appeal to a common humanity. It is not simply an anesthetized example of self-sacrifice meant to move us to imitation (though it is not less than that, either). It is a promise and a fulfillment—the story of a God who makes good on his word. As the great Christmas hymn proclaims, "Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother / And in His name, all oppression shall cease..." —✚

NARRATIVES OF THE BLACK TABOO: SUICIDE EXCERPT

Raven Alade

This is an excerpt of a much larger piece.

Introduction & Disclaimer

Narratives of the Black Taboo: Suicide (hereafter *NBTS*) is a booklet about deconstructing stigmas regarding overall wellness among Black individuals. While this is an excerpt, the larger piece features narratives of courageous and willing Black people who wanted to share their stories concerning their desire to attempt suicide. People who lost loved ones to suicide are also covered. Connections to slavery, resources, and church stigma are also included in *NBTS*.

The information provided in *NBTS* may be relatable and triggering. Please stop or pause your reading if necessary. I hope and pray that *NBTS* will empower, heal, bless, and deliver those who are hurting. Your life is valuable, and there is purpose attached to every breath you take. There is a light at the end of this tunnel of darkness if you have faith and believe.

Brief Literature Review and Process of Project

Suicide or intentional death of oneself is the tenth leading cause of death in the United States, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.¹ The origin of the word evolves from the modern Lat-

in form of the term “*suicidium*,” which comes from *sui* meaning “of oneself” + *cidium*, “a killing.”² In 2018, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention noted the age-adjusted rate for suicide was 14.2 per 100,000 people.³ While suicides go underreported, in 2018, statistics revealed 48,344 deaths by suicide compared to the 47,173 people who died by suicide in 2017.⁴ The Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) reported African Americans being slightly above 6% regarding U.S. suicide rates in 2018.⁵ Black people were the third-highest ethnic group to experience serious thoughts of suicide, and the second largest group to attempt suicide in 2018. Studies revealed Black high school youth experiencing higher rates in categories such as attempting suicide and suicide attempts requiring treatment compared to other ethnicities in 2017.⁶ While the Black population only makes up 13.4% of the United States, suicide rates seem to be escalating.⁷ Moreover, examining distinct differences among African American suicide experiences compared to other racial groups is essential as it relates to promoting wellness, deconstructing stigmas, and suicide prevention.

Historically and culturally, the role of the church has

¹ “Preventing Suicide [Violence Prevention] Injury Center|CDC,” last modified April 16, 2019, accessed April 27, 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/fastfact.html>.

² “Suicide | Origin and Meaning of Suicide by Online Etymology Dictionary,” accessed April 27, 2019, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/suicide>.

³ “Suicide Statistics,” *American Foundation for Suicide Prevention*, last modified November 15, 2019, accessed March 30, 2022, <https://afsp.org/suicide-statistics/>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ “Black Populations | Suicide Prevention Resource Center,” accessed March 28, 2020, <http://www.sprc.org/black>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: United States,” accessed February 20, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045218>.



Photo by Jake Gee

been central to African American life.⁸ The formation of the Black Church was rooted in being a safe space for Black people to progress politically and financially.⁹ Also, the Black Church has been a place for collective identity, community organizing, and educational enhancement.¹⁰ While the Black Church is known as a protective factor for Black people, it has also influenced the community's thoughts concerning suicide.¹¹ Common phrases such as, "suicide is a White thing" and "what goes on in this house, stays in this house" have been affirmed throughout history among African Americans.¹² Kevin Early and Ronald Akers performed a study on thirty Black pastors and found that several

of them believed suicide was a "White thing" because it was contrary to Black culture.¹³ One interview stated, "Black people believe in a heaven and hell. We've been taught, as black people, if you kill yourself, you automatically go to hell."¹⁴ Black Churches have been known to be unsupportive towards members who have lost loved ones by suicide due to the possibility of unwanted attention.¹⁵ Also, Norma L. Day-Vines notes that the church's condemnation regarding suicide, assertions concerning the strength of Black people, and cultural principles that discourage counseling services might all contribute to possible pathways to suicide.¹⁶

Although myths about suicide being a "White thing"

⁸ Linda M. Chatters et al., "Church-Based Social Support and Suicidality Among African Americans and Black Caribbeans," *Archives of Suicide Research* 15, no. 4 (October 2011): 337–353; Andrew Billingsley, *Mighty like a River: The Black Church and Social Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁹ Karesha L. Gayles, "The Influence of Church Affiliation on the Perceptions of Suicide in the African American Community" (Psy.D., The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, 2016), accessed April 7, 2019, <http://search.proquest.com/psycinfo/docview/1750083434/abstract/BFEA7D6C02C24490PQ/2>.

¹⁰ Chatters et al., "Church-Based Social Support and Suicidality Among African Americans and Black Caribbeans"; Jewelle Taylor Gibbs, "African-American Suicide: A Cultural Paradox," *Suicide & Life - Threatening Behavior; Washington* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 68–79.

¹¹ Gibbs, "African-American Suicide"; Chatters et al., "Church-Based Social Support and Suicidality Among African Americans and Black Caribbeans."

¹² Valerie Michelle Jones, "What Goes on in My House Stays in My House: A Critical Race Narrative Inquiry Critiquing How Identity and Cultural Ideologies Contribute to the Decision to Seek Professional Help for Psychological Problems among African Americans" (Ed.D., The University of Memphis, 2014), accessed February 20, 2020, <http://search.proquest.com/psycinfo/docview/1728304982/abstract/6D40377DD7344430PQ/1>; "Religion and Suicide in the African-American Community," accessed February 15, 2020, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=d701a910-ba84-49c4-ad2a-1848b4a26bc3%40pdc-v-sessmgr03&vid=0&format=EB>.

¹³ Kevin E. Early and Ronald L. Akers, "'It's a White Thing': An Exploration of Beliefs about Suicide in the African-American Community," *Deviant Behavior* 14, no. 4 (October 1993): 277–296.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Donna Holland Barnes, "The Aftermath of Suicide among African Americans," *Journal of Black Psychology* 32, no. 3 (August 2006): 335–348.

¹⁶ Norma L. Day-Vines, "The Escalating Incidence of Suicide Among African Americans: Implications for Counselors," *Journal of Counseling & Development* 85, no. 3 (July 2007): 370–377.

have developed over time, Black individuals have died by suicide since the inception of slavery.¹⁷ Whether it was during their capture in Africa, throughout the Middle Passage, or upon arrival, some Africans preferred suicide.¹⁸ Most common forms of suicide were hanging and drowning.¹⁹ Starvation, cutting one's throat, and jumping overboard were all common during the Middle Passage.²⁰ Before boarding, suicidal behavior was noticeable among newly arriving enslaved people, as myths associated with whites killing and cooking Africans were widespread throughout the continent.²¹ These stories led individuals to kill themselves in Africa rather than experience being eaten in America.²² Terri Snyder, author of *The Power to Die*, states, "For some Africans, a cannibal referred to any individual who embraced greed and avarice, an emblem that the captive slaves might have easily extended to their captors."²³ African tribes such as Yoruba and Ashanti thought suicide was praiseworthy; however, others condemned the practice.²⁴ Some Africans believed their souls would travel back to Africa following death; therefore, choosing death was a preferable alternative to bondage for many people.²⁵

Tactics such as "seasoning" contributed to slave suicide and showcased immoral care towards Black bodies. "Seasoning" was a process established across many plantations which involved enslaved individuals becoming acclimated to plantation life.²⁶ During this period, enslaved people who were "unseasoned" or did not want to endure the transition killed themselves.²⁷ Plantation owners viewed slave suicide as an indicator of failure on their part, as overseers were wary of the lack of control due to "a loss in profits."²⁸

Furthermore, suicide is not a taboo nor an occurrence that bypasses Black people. Suicide has occurred for several generations throughout history. *NBTS* will present connections between suicidality among Black

individuals and enslaved people. Misconceptions concerning suicide will be examined by investigating slavery as it informs ongoing struggles regarding suicide among contemporary Black folks. We will also deepen our understanding as we explore Black Christian's experiences with suicide.

Personal Testimony

Several factors influenced this booklet, and one, in particular, is my own experience with wanting to end my life. I was born prematurely, fighting for my life for approximately six weeks. My mother called me her "miracle baby" because doctors questioned if I would live. Thankfully, I survived. As I grew older, birth defects arose, and one of them was an eye condition called strabismus. Strabismus is a deficiency that causes misaligned eyes due to a weak muscle.

Dealing with strabismus caused many issues as I navigated through school. While I received corrective lenses at an early age, they significantly enlarged my eyes, which prompted constant jokes from peers and a lowering in my self-esteem. As time passed on, I needed braces in sixth grade and decided not to wear glasses because I felt embarrassed about needing both. Not wearing glasses not only made everything in sight blurry, but also enhanced my eye condition. During this year, I was called harmful names by peers and even a teacher. For instance, one day, my sixth-grade class and I lined up to take a restroom break, and, as usual, we walked down our school's thick purple line. (The purple line was not a coincidence. Purple happens to be my favorite color and one of the colors for Suicide Prevention Awareness. Now I know that my passion, power, and purpose were birthed out of pain.) As we walked, my teacher randomly made a joke regarding my eye condition. All of my classmates burst into laughter, and you know what? I did too. All I knew was to laugh while I simultaneously endured

¹⁷ Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Viking, 2007); David Lester, *Suicide in African Americans* (Commack, N.Y.: Nova Science Publishers, 1998).

¹⁸ Lester, *Suicide in African Americans*.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Rediker, *The Slave Ship*.

²¹ Lester, *Suicide in African Americans*.

²² Ibid.

²³ Terri L. Snyder, *The Power to Die: Slavery and Suicide in British North America* (Chicago ; The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Thomas Hallock, "Space, Time, and Purpose in Early American Texts: Starting from Igbo Landing," *Early American Literature* 54, no. 1 (2019): 21–36.

²⁶ Snyder, *The Power to Die*.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

trauma. This was the start of a long-standing battle with depression.

Years went on, and at the age of fifteen, feelings of suicide began as I attended high school and encountered more harmful individuals. I struggled with identity, self-worth, felt unloved, and did not understand the reason for my existence. I cried every night asking God questions like, "Why would you create me?" "Why are my eyes misaligned?" "Why am I here?" I felt as if it was a dark cloud over my head that would not move unless I moved it. As my negative thoughts developed, I went into the family's medicine cabinet, grabbed a handful of some Tylenol or Ibuprofen pills, and swallowed them. As I reflect, this memory is still cloudy, but all I remember is grabbing the pills and going to sleep. When I awoke, I was a little surprised, but I thought, "I guess I'm supposed to be here."

The feeling of depression did not necessarily change, but the thought of suicide wasn't as pressurizing. As I reflect, I believe the experience was an example of God's protection and covering over my life.

Over time, I healed from desiring suicide because I gained assurance and hope in my Christian belief system. My perspective on life changed as my faith grew. I found identity and love in knowing Jesus Christ. I stopped caring so much about being accepted by others or questioning the way I was created. I learned that I was not a mistake, and if people could not value who I was, then that was a problem they would have to solve on their own. This belief is the only reason I stayed alive. While I mentioned my belief system above, I do wish I had more support within my Christian community. Although attending church was a buffer against suicide during a vulnerable time as I felt peace during Sunday mornings, this peace did not sustain me throughout each week. No one discussed how to navigate the world when harmful thoughts arose for kids, adults, or the elderly. Any conversation regarding suicide or mental wellness was unheard of in my church or any other community I was a part of. I desired more from my environment, especially in the context of a place

in which people believed in God. My advice for anyone contemplating suicide may seem cliché, but it is to know that your thoughts can be fought. You don't have to lose a fight with your mind! With support, medication when necessary, and the miraculous power of a living God, healing is possible. Seeking help is essential because if suicidal thoughts return at an opportune time (like the enemy, Luke 4:13), they can be challenged by using tools, resources, and help from the Lord above.

“Whether it was during their capture in Africa, throughout the Middle Passage, or upon arrival, some Africans preferred suicide.”

Narratives of The Black Taboo: Suicide (NBTS)

NBTS was created to address the stigma of suicide as it relates not only to our society but distinctively among various Black communities. *NBTS* is a form of storytelling as it invites readers into the lives of courageous, vulnerable, and willing participants who want to encourage others who experience similar realities. Also, *NBTS* aims to destigmatize generational myths that are widespread throughout the Black community, especially in the context of the church.

In 2019, I attended a conference in Memphis, TN called: *Suicide and the Black Church*. A main theme from this conference emphasized the need for people to share their stories about overcoming suicide as it will encourage and give hope to others. *NBTS* wants readers to feel empowered and learn about the many Black individuals who happen to love Jesus and struggled with wanting to or attempting to end their life. Unfortunately, some narratives shared in *NBTS* are from people who have lost their loved ones by suicide but were still willing to share.

NBTS does not only examine African Americans. For instance, some participants and I have contributing identities, including, but not limited to Nigerian and Native American descent. The project's name is *Narratives of the Black Taboo: Suicide* because we want to embrace the diversity of each participant. Being Black is not a monolithic identity. Black people make up numerous beautiful shades and experience different realities. We should not be viewed, confined, nor described from a single point of view.

This booklet invites you to take the mask off and understand that suicide is not a taboo; in fact, it is a lethal force that overpowers many to no end. Let's be authentic, share our pain, and heal. →

WESTERN AFFLUENCE AND REFUGEES

Brendan DeJong

THOSE BORN IN North America have already won the lottery. By being born in the U.S. or Canada, they receive undeserved wealth, power, and privilege inaccessible to billions of others around the world. This short essay will summarize the immigration policies of Canada and the US and argue that these wealthy nations ought to receive and provide for as many refugees as they can.

The State of Affairs

Though typically considered immigration-positive nations, Canada and the U.S. are both highly selective about the immigrants they admit. In 2019, Canada admitted about 340,000 new immigrants, about 1% of its population, while the States admitted 575,000, about 0.2% of its population. The U.S.'s immigration policy is biased toward family members: 71% of the total of 675,000 visas are reserved for members of families already living in the US, and only 8% is charitable. This means it is very difficult to immigrate to the US if you do not have any family there already.¹

In contrast, the majority of Canada's immigrants are admitted through the economic stream (58%), while family sponsorships comprise 27%, and refugees 15%. The economic stream is also biased toward high-skilled workers. This means unless you have family in Canada or are highly skilled or educated (which accounts for 85% of immigration), you have a difficult time immigrating.²

Between Canada and the US, then, about 100,000 refugees are received per year out of a total of 1,000,000 immigrants. This stands in stark contrast to the 26,300,000 refugees displaced around the world.³

Contemporary Debate

Traditionally, these immigration policies are defended by the principle of state autonomy and self-determination. A nation, being its own entity, is entitled to the right to exclude those who would seek entry. This principle is often challenged by ethicists who argue that individuals, wherever they are in the world, have the right to freedom of movement, which trumps the nation's right to self-determination and is more consistent with the political liberalism upon which Western nations are founded.⁴ The biblical paradigm of Israel, however, represents a different challenge. Israel is called by God to care for the foreigner who lives among them. Further, foreigners are welcomed into the Israelite community, share in their benefits, and are even considered equal to native-born Israelites. According to this paradigm, Western nations, because of their disproportionate wealth, ought to receive more refugees in addition to the immigrants they do admit.

The Biblical Evidence

First, in the OT, there are many laws given to Israel which assume that foreigners would live in their land, either by choice or because their tribe was conquered. Therefore, the laws typically center on proper treatment and integration of foreigners into Israelite

¹ These statistics are taken from <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/how-united-states-immigration-system-works>.

² These statistics are taken from <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-canadas-immigration-policy>.

³ <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>.

⁴ For further reading, see Christopher Heath Wellman and Phillip Cole, *Debating the Ethics of Immigration*, (Oxford University Press, 2011).

society, rather than any question of their inclusion or exclusion.

Second, a rationale is consistently given for why Israelites ought to promote the foreigner's welfare: the people of Israel were also foreigners and slaves in Egypt, and this history is the impetus for care for outsiders. The phrase "for you were foreigners in Egypt" as a rationale occurs multiple times in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy (Ex. 22:21; 23:9; Lev. 19:33-34; Deut. 10:19; 24:14, 17). God wants his people to remember their history and wants their history to inform how they treat others.

Third, in Israel, foreigners were given the same status as widows and the fatherless. The phrase "alien, fatherless, and widow" appears at least eight times in the OT (Deut. 14:29; 16:11-14; 24:19-21; 27:19; Ps. 146:9; Jer. 7:2-7; 22:3; Zech. 7:9-10), referring to especially needy people in the ancient world—those without family. God's care for them is reflected in numerous passages: there are repeated injunctions to promote their welfare, not to oppress them (Ex. 22:21; 23:9; Lev. 19:10; 23:22; Deut. 24:14, 17), and there are curses for withholding justice from them (Deut. 27:19). Further, in Zechariah, Israel's lack of care for the foreigner is cited as the reason for God's abandonment of them (Zech. 7:9-10). There are also various laws which promote the welfare of foreigners: Israelites are to leave grain at the edges of their fields, so that foreigners (like Ruth) may glean from them (Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22). Israelite tithes are deposited to cities so that foreigners may use them (Deut. 26:12-13).

Fourth, if they believe, accept the Lord, and wish to enter the covenant community, foreigners are fully welcomed. They are included in the covenant (Deut. 29:10-11), allowed to participate in the Passover (Ex. 12:48-49; Num. 9:14), treated as native-born Israelites (Ex. 20:10; Lev. 17:8, 12-15; 18:26; 20:2; 22:18; 24:16; Deut. 1:16; 5:14), and receive an inheritance with them (Ezek. 47:22-23). There are few minor distinctions made between foreigners and Israelites,⁵ but in all significant ways, foreigners are recognized as full members of the covenant community.

Finally, the welcome of foreigners is conditioned upon naturalization. Foreigners are welcomed and instructed in the Israelite faith and required to follow their customs (Ex. 12:48-49).

New Testament Considerations

An immediate objection to this line of thinking might be:

⁵ Lev. 25:47-48; Deut. 14:21; 28:43. Israelite slaves enjoy a small privilege that foreign slaves do not; foreigners are not prohibited from eating dead meat.

just because this was required for Israel, why should it be normative for Western countries today, which are typically post-Christian? Doesn't this merely establish that Christians ought to be charitable, rather than demonstrate anything about national policy?

First, the NT teaches that civil authorities receive their power from God (Rom. 13:1; John 19:11). Second, though non-Israelite nations do not profess to follow God, their sin still displeases him, and he desires their repentance (Jonah 1:2; 3:10). Therefore, God is still pleased when states follow his ways, even if they do so because of secular presuppositions, rather than religious ones.

Second, we do not have to choose between being charitable individuals and supporting national policy which benefits refugees. They are both good, and receiving refugees on a national scale is more effective at helping populations in need than individual charity.

Application

Just as Israel was instructed to consider their history as foreigners as the basis for their treatment of foreigners, we also ought to consider our undeserved affluence, received through the fortune of our birth, and the ethical obligations it carries.

The main principle we can draw from this analysis is that nations ought to provide for those who do not have the means to provide for themselves. This principle has two aspects. First, states ought to welcome refugees first. Second, they ought to welcome as many refugees as possible. This does not prohibit nations from welcoming highly skilled immigrants or family members; it argues that states should welcome those who are not obviously useful or deserving. Furthermore, the distance of refugees does not reduce the ethical obligation to help them. Distant refugees are still neighbors whom we are commanded to love. Globalization and technology have made it possible for affluent nations to aid people around the world, and this ability brings new obligations. Finally, a naturalization process may accompany this—incoming refugees will be expected to adopt national values, which, I admit, may or may not correspond to Christian values. Imperfect naturalization, however, does not negate the benefits provided to refugees through immigration. In conclusion, the reception and care of refugees into affluent societies is a primary way nations can show love to their global neighbors who do not have the means to care for themselves. —□—

The Art Table



Photo by Jake Gee

The Sunset

Brandon Crane

Some days, I look into the sunset
That warm, glowing, source of life.

Some days I can think of no other response but to hug it.
But I can't.

For that great source of energy that gives me,
And this entire planet
Life
Will kill me if I get too close.

But I want to tell it thanks.
Tell it I love it and need it and want it.

But then, if I've got my head screwed on straight,
If I've got my theology right,
If I understand what the concept of "image-bearer" really means
Then
Then I get to turn to my friend and do just that.
I get to turn to my brother and do just that.
I get to tell my wife, my family, my peers

Thank you for giving me life. Thank you for letting me see life as God designed it,
Part of Him displayed in you.

Now, if only I could treat strangers like I treat the sun,
For they are life-giving too—their gas, their light—they radiate life too.
They've given me more than I can ever wrap my arms around.

THE FAMILY MADRIGAL: FAMILY SYSTEMS IN DISNEY'S *ENCANTO*

Paul Frederick

BY NOW WE'RE all used to the Disney sing-along whose protagonist undergoes some crisis of identity and through it learns to believe in themselves. I don't mean to be cynical; this can be a powerful and deeply truthful story. But *Encanto* is a very different type of story. In *Encanto*, we do follow a protagonist, but the focus of the narrative is broader; *Encanto* tells the story of an entire, multigenerational family system. Accompanied by Lin-Manuel Miranda's delightful (and very catchy) songs, we are drawn into the beauty, the tragedy, and the redemption of a family. In this review, I will try to use some counseling concepts to unpack these movements of beauty, tragedy and redemption, but the story itself is more powerful than any analysis could be. Some light spoilers are included below.

The story is set in a small town in the mountains of Colombia, where the teenage Mirabel lives with her family, the Madrigals. As we learn in the film's prologue, this town is a result of some kind of magic, a "miracle" which saved some Colombian refugees, among them Abuela Madrigal and her young children. This miracle was first of all a gift to Abuela (not yet an *abuela*), and so she stands not only as the leader of her family, but of the whole community. This position puts great pressure on Abuela and, as a consequence, on every member of the Madrigal family. With this great gift has come a great purpose and a high calling.

The magic continues. In the film's first song, "The Family Madrigal," we learn that all the members of the family, which has now expanded to include three generations, are imbued with a certain magical gift by which they can serve their family and community. All, that is, except for Mirabel. As the only non-magical member of the Madrigals, Mirabel's family role is clear: she's the black sheep, the oddball, the outsider. Though she

clearly adores her family, she longs for a chance to prove that she can be like them. She is, as she movingly sings, "Waiting on a Miracle." Yet this outsider position, this critical distance, turns out to be just what allows Mirabel to help bring her family towards health.

Though all appears well from the outside, we begin to see that there are cracks in the family system, cracks in the magic. Unsurprisingly, Mirabel is the only one who can admit it at first, and as we follow her investigations, we see the family dysfunction that was not so evident from the start. Mirabel counsels her older sister, Luisa, whose gift is super-strength. In Luisa's song, "Surface Pressure," we learn that however spectacular these gifts appear, they bring a burden. Naturally, her role in the family is "the strong one," the helper. But despite her tough exterior, she admits, "Under the surface, I'm pretty sure I'm worthless / If I can't be of service." Although she knows she really is helping people, the weight of this family role is crushing her. She longs for freedom.

Another key feature of this family should alert attentive audience members to its unhealth: a major family secret. Mirabel's uncle Bruno, who could predict the future, disappeared when she was young. And rather than mourning his absence, the family has a strict policy (which you will almost certainly get stuck in your head): "We Don't Talk About Bruno." Throughout this song we learn that Bruno is the family scapegoat. Bad weather, dead goldfish, and hair loss are all blamed on him and his prophecies. The song describes him as quite a villainous character; but the viewer may rightly wonder just how accurate this portrayal is. Maybe Bruno isn't all bad after all...

Indeed, despite all this dysfunction, there is hope for the Madrigals. That hope is first manifested strongly in "What Else Can I Do?" In this song, Mirabel's other



Image by Bailey Preib

sister, Isabela, “the perfect golden child,” breaks out of her role for the first time. She discovers that she is more than her role had suggested, that there is beauty beyond the perfect, clean, and predictable. In this scene we see both Isabela’s own self-discovery and liberation from the constraints of her role, as well as the reconciliation that she and Mirabel experience as a result of that liberation. Though this kind of individuality (one could say, differentiation) is messy, it brings deeper joy and unity to the family system. Amid all this messiness, Isabela is learning to be herself.

As the crisis precipitates and all looks hopeless, Mirabel finally comes face-to-face with Abuela, the matriarch. Abuela is able to put down her own emotional walls, set aside her unrealistic expectations, and see Mirabel for the gift she really is. Their deep reconciliation propels the family finally towards health. No longer do the Madrigals need to be the perfect family; no

longer does each member need to fit neatly into a role prescribed for them. Instead, as they try to rebuild what they have lost, Abuela sings, “The miracle is not some magic that you’ve got / The miracle is you / Not some gift, just you.” Through the painful process of watching all they thought they had fall apart, the Madrigals learn how to truly see and love each other, not just for what each contributes to the family, but for who they are.

As this summary may have indicated, this film has a lot going on. By following so many characters, it may sacrifice depth for breadth at some points and leave viewers wishing for more. But as a story, not of discrete individuals, but of a whole family, the movie works brilliantly. As we see the tragedies and glories of this family played out in splendid colors, we are invited more deeply into our own family systems, to humbly imagine what health and healing may look like for each of us. —



Photo by Jake Gee

Betrayal and Trial

David Augustine

His foot stepped on the path before that night,
Before he with them conspired
To sell the Son for silver.

For in money he did not see mercy,
But simply what it could make him to be,
Weeping for what was lost when she poured the nard on
His feet.

But are His friends much the better?
For they sleep instead of serve,
Unable to return the love given those years,
Thinking only of themselves.

Stage left: the accusers enter as the farce begins.
“What irony?!” we the audience laugh.
For He who has all authority is asked to submit,
And He who made the earth is asked to come quietly.

Then quietly, He goes.
Our laughter halts in our throat.
Why? Why go with them?
Where is the question to leave them gawking?

Another scene opens in a room filled with smoke,
Hidden so that none might see
For their justice is a joke,
And their witnesses breath out lies.

“He blasphemes!” they say.
Surely they must see their jest,
The comedy written in their lines.
All He does is Truth for He is Truth itself

But spit flies in His face and a hand is raised to slap.
“Condemned!” they say.
Our confusion ignites.
With mouths that should praise they curse!
Our anger flames!
With hands that should worship they strike!
LORD, why?!
The world at war with its Maker.

Immutable

Mary Schieferstein

I know
The right thing to do
Would be to run,
To fight.

But I'm exhausted,
Drained of life,
Resigned to my fate.

You don't even have to hold me
To keep me here.

I'll stay.

I'll stay
Because I've fought for so long—
Not to leave, but to be
Whole and wanted and seen.
I've fought for so long
There's no fight left in me.

I'll stay
Because I need you.
You can't meet that need,
But you need me,
And I know it.
I can keep you close.

I'll stay
Because this is what love is,
Isn't it?
At least, that's what you've taught,
And I want love
More than anything.

I'll stay
And he'll offer tea, sympathy.
We'll sit together, commiserating.
He seems free, but he can't free me,
Both of us equally trapped
Between the longing for what should be
And your immutability.

I'll stay
Until someone
Looks at my wounds
And tells me the truth—
That love isn't supposed to hurt like this.

I'll stay
Until someone
Sees what I'm seeking
And tells me I already have it—
If I would only look to Someone else.

And then—
Maybe then—
I'll find I'm not
As powerless as I feel.

Then—
Maybe then—
I'll leave.

But I will always come back,
Because I will always love you.
That, too, is immutable.

THE SECOND GREATEST COMMANDMENT

Caridad Kraus

LORD, I WONDER about Your image bearers who claim that they follow You.

I see churches that are more segregated than the city streets. They proclaim their love for You on Sunday mornings, but their hearts are divided in how they view the diverse colors on display masterfully throughout Your human creation. They recite Scripture from their minds, but their hearts are cold toward those who are different from them.

Lord, You said in Your Word, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.”

But why do many of Your people forget the second greatest commandment, which is to love your neighbor as yourself? They become focused on loving themselves and not following through with loving others as part of Your commandment. Many times, I have forgotten to love my neighbor as myself. How many times have I experienced it from Your people as well?

What is “it” that causes Your people to forget?

“It” is the division that was formed in our hearts when Adam and Eve ate of the fruit.

The enemy promised them that they would be like You, knowing both good and evil.

“It” is the force that drove Cain to strike Abel down because he was jealous and wanted all the attention for himself, instead of trusting that You had enough love for both him and his brother.

“It” is the force that motivated humanity to profit off the backs of their brothers and sisters just because their

beautifully different skin color was distinguishable from others.

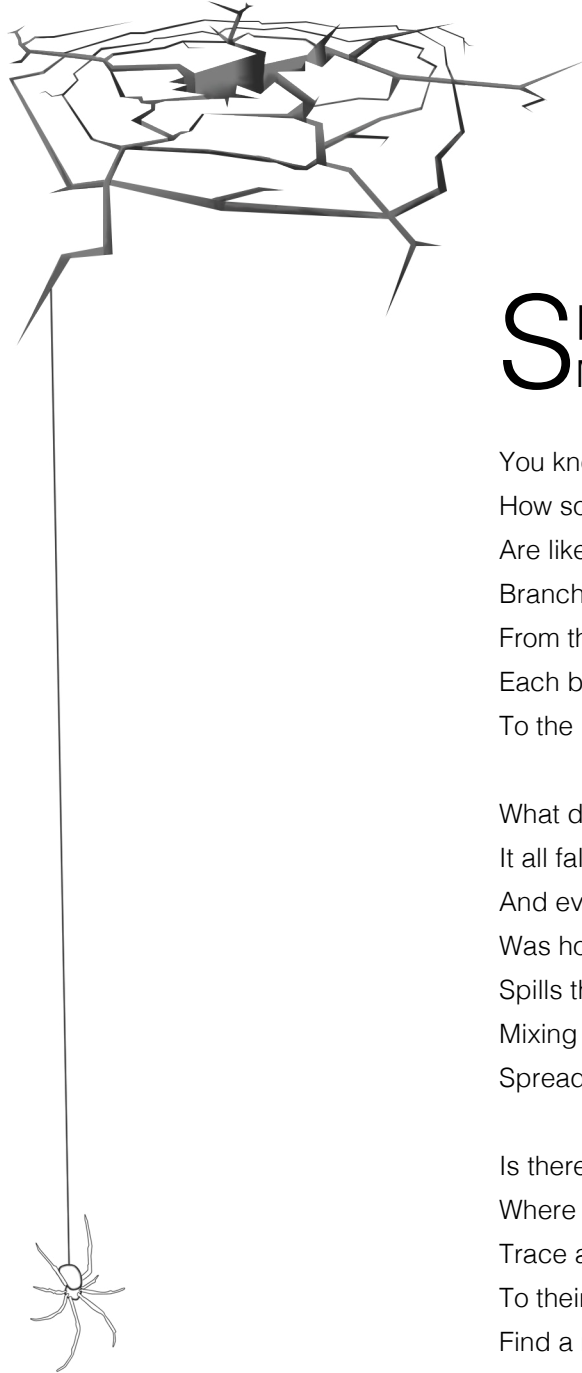
“It” is the greed, lust for power over another, becoming gods in their own eyes, ignoring the fact that they are created in the image of God, *Imago Dei*.

“It” has power on Earth, but not in Heaven. “It” is a defeated foe that lost when God took on the perfect form of the *Imago Dei*, knowing no sin, to bear the burden of our sin upon Himself, at the Cross. This is the true example of loving your neighbor as you love yourself.

Imago Dei, bearing the image of a perfect God, who still seeks relationship with His creation even after Adam and Eve’s rejection of trusting Your love for them. Imperfect and flawed though we are, You seek us throughout history, using circumstances and our consequences to draw us to You.

You are the only God who left His throne, to dwell amongst His people, taking on punishment meant for His disloyal servants, upon Himself. You are the only God who humbled Himself so we could see a perfect example of what it means to submit all authority and choice over to their King, out of love and obedience. You call us friend. You are not self-seeking, but selfless in Your pursuit of us.

This is true love; this is truly loving your neighbor as you love yourself. Lord, I pray that our hearts would soften to Your Word so that it comes to life out of our actions and deeds. Search our hearts, looking for areas that are not of You, encouraging us to love like You love us, Lord. Amen. —✠—



S

piderwebs
Mary Schieferstein

You know
How some cracks
Are like spiderwebs,
Branching out
From the point of impact,
Each break connected
To the last?

What do you do when
It all falls out,
And everything the glass
Was holding back
Spills through,
Mixing up the pieces,
Spreading them across the floor?

Is there some way to figure out
Where the bits fit,
Trace all the cracks back
To their origin,
Find a miracle glue
That could take this broken mess
And bind it back together?

If there is,
I bet the light would hit
Those flecks of glass
And dance.



OLMOS PARK-ITECTURE

Anna Ochoa

MOVED TO OLMOS Park last year, a quiet enclave near downtown San Antonio, TX, but I'm not new to the area. I have lived in or near San Antonio most of my life; and although every teen swears she'll get out of Dodge the minute she gets out of High School, I've since realized that my home city is a special and unique part of our country. San Antonio was founded three hundred years ago around the Spanish mission compounds established to bring Christianity—and Spanish civilization—to the native populations along the San Antonio River. Our five downtown missions have since become a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the only site with that distinction in the entire state.¹ ("Remember the Alamo!") I love the history of my city, and lately, I've especially loved jogging through the beautiful, sprawling tree-lined streets of Olmos Park. I also began to take notice of the unique architecture. I find I'm drawn to the white stucco houses with terracotta roofs that seem to shout "Texas" to me, yet I have trouble articulating their appeal in architectural terms.

The fact is, my father is a retired San Antonio architect, so you'd think I'd have picked up his design sense and building parlance. I didn't. He thrives in geometry and spatial reasoning, and I'm more adept in the lines and syntax of algebra and writing. I invited my dad to walk with me through my neighborhood one morning, in hopes that I might glean from his expertise and gain a lexicon for different building designs. One need not press my dad to wax ecstatic on subjects he likes. A born aesthete, he's arrested by detail and insists his audience enter the experience with him.

"Look!" he exhales, grabbing my shoulder and halting me in the middle of the street as he frames a building

with his hands. "This building is Spanish colonial, of course. You see that detail on top? That is a *button* on the house that references the historic missions downtown. Do you see? It's like a *kiss* from the architect."

Now he's delighting in a lintel, and I try to share the glee, but truthfully, I'm already thinking of breakfast. I'm much more foodie than architect. My dad delights in lintels; I daydream in lentils.

We keep walking and round the corner onto a sparse and streamlined edifice. He visibly recoils.

"Oh, I am so sick of this modernist style. Do you see how they try to 'bring the outside inside' with these floor-to-ceiling windows? And the minimalist lines—they call it 'cutting edge,' so *avant-garde*, but you know the truth?" He sniffs contemptuously, winning the argument in his head. "They have already become *the old guard!*"

I'm trying to track with his stylistic diatribe, but the only question I can conjure is an amateur curiosity.

"Alright, Dad," I prod. "Then what do you predict is coming next?"

He stops abruptly, wheels spinning as he puzzles over my challenge, and then his eyes squint teasingly. "Perhaps... Armageddon?"

I eye roll and chuckle at his apocalyptic riposte. Our serious walking tour has ended, and we are both hankering for breakfast. We traipse happily to our local Mexican dive and yammer on into the morning over a hearty taco repast. I may not have been blessed with my dad's geometric gifts, but I did inherit his taste for a good joke and barbacoa. —

¹ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1466/>.

Holy Saturday: Peter's Wife

Amanda McClendon

I'm worried about him.

John told me what happened the other night—
the curses, the denial, the rooster.

It's enough to break anyone's heart.

*O LORD, God of my salvation,
I cry out day and night before you.
Let my prayer come before you;
incline your ear to my cry!*

He's grieving—we are all grieving—
but his grief carries the extra weight of
his shame and guilt, one that no lamb or goat
could wipe out. God knows that he tried that;
he came back yesterday covered in blood
and the smell of incense.

*Your wrath has swept over me;
your dreadful assaults destroy me.
They surround me like a flood all day long;
they close in on me together.*

And my grief is compounded by his, because
I am his wife and I love him, and I don't know
anything I can do except be here and wait and
be worried. And we are all afraid, not
only because they might come for us next,
but also because we have no idea where God is
right now. Our teacher, our master, our friend
is dead, but more than that: our would-be
liberator is dead.

*You have caused my companions to shun me;
you have made me a horror to them.
I am shut in so that I cannot escape;
my eye grows dim through sorrow.*

Some of the women are talking about
going to anoint his body tomorrow morning.
I think I'll go with them; it'll be something to do
to distract myself from all this sadness.
And then we all have to figure out what to do
from there. We might go back to Galilee,
go back to being a fisherman and a fisherman's wife,
see if we can get back our boat from Zebedee,
live a quiet life, shake the authorities off of our backs.

God of our fathers and mothers,
where are you now?

*Do you work wonders for the dead?
Do the departed rise up to praise you?
Is your steadfast love declared in the grave?*

The Community Table

PROFESSOR PROFILE: MIKE HIGGINS

Dean of Students 2011 - 2019, Seminary Chaplain 2019 - 2022,
Adjunct Professor of Applied Theology 2011- 2022

David Augustine: During your time at Covenant what is one thing that you are thankful for?

Mike Higgins: I've been thankful for the friendship, the comradery, the mutual struggles that, as a part of the staff and faculty, we've had to endure. I mean the good times, but also when you go through things with a group of people. In the military you kind of have that family, comradery, the kinship, especially people like Dalbey and Yarbrough, Collins, Jerram Barrs, Ryan. People who have invited me to be a participant in their class. Dr. Calhoun whose office I had for almost a decade; he was just the kindest person. And I think as an African-American, when someone who is white is kind

to you and says, "man, I'm glad you're here" it starts to sink in that maybe you're in a good place.

DA: In the classes that you have taught, what have you hoped students have learned from you or taken from your classes?

MH: Well, I hope that they understood that relationships really are the key in ministry, racial reconciliation, social justice. The classes that I taught always tend to have something to do with my background in the black church and being a part of what I would call civil rights movement lite, because I didn't go through the stuff that John Lewis and Fannie Lou Hamer went through. But after Ferguson my teaching was tinted with "what

is the church doing to love its neighbor” when it came to things like understanding black culture, music, the worship, the stories of black focus coming on campus. I hope that they got out of it that African-Americans are just human beings, that their struggle and history is worth teaching about to students in a predominately white school. If we don’t know one another’s stories, we can’t say that we know one another.

DA: So, relationship that is grounded in actual knowledge of the struggles of the other?

MH: Yeah, and for me, I would say to be touchable, tangible. Even though I am an African-American male I am everybody’s dean, everybody’s chaplain. I want to kind of be the old black brother or uncle for students that they could ask me any question especially when it came to race and justice, and I wouldn’t put that down or tell them, “you’re being willingly ignorant.” I wanted to be touchable and wanted to let them know that what they didn’t know was important to me, because I wanted to be a vessel and a vehicle for change.

DA: How do you feel like you personally have grown or

learned new things in your time at Covenant?

MH: I’ve learned to be a school that is used by Jesus there will be a time when you get into trouble cause you say something that is prophetic. I think one of the things the church tries to do is to avoid prophetic voices, but the prophets were usually the ones who effected change, but were also usually the ones who lost their lives. But I think for us to hear the voices of women, the voices of the poor, the voices of LGBTQ people, you know, something has got to actually grab us by the collar and say, “these are actually human beings, they’re not just a classification or subhuman.” I learned even more so that the people who I think may not be human are just as human as I am. I learned that working with professors is not as overwhelming as it seems. For example, Jack Collins loves snakes, and I hate ‘em and that’s how he would unnerve me, just talking about snakes. And Yarbrough with his hatchet. I think another big thing is people like Yarbrough actually came to the St. Louis pastor’s fellowship, and they love him, and we need more of that. —✝—



MIKE HIGGINS REFLECTION AND QUOTES

Logan Ford

MIKE HIGGINS IS a man who is passionate about Jesus, racial reconciliation, and the Church. My wife, Emma, and I began attending South City Church in the fall of 2019, where I first heard Mike preach. Hearing him preach is a unique experience. He has an extraordinary gift of involving the congregation in his preaching in a way I've never seen before. His preaching is so personal that it sometimes seems like he's carrying out a hundred individual conversations instead of delivering a single sermon. It's a gift I admire, and one I'm sure can only exist because he knows and loves his people.

Mike is highly esteemed outside the pulpit as well. He's an essential part of the Covenant Seminary community. His experience and wisdom are sought out by churches across the nation, especially regarding matters of race and cultural engagement. He's certainly been invaluable in those areas for my own growth in grace. Mike's preaching and pastoral leadership at church and on campus has been instrumental in graciously revealing my blind spots and pointing me towards a more Christ-like way of engaging with the world. I'm sure this has been the experience of the many students who have

been blessed by his leadership over his years serving as Dean of Students and Chaplain at Covenant. I have no doubt that he'll continue to be an invaluable asset for individuals and churches inside and outside the PCA for the foreseeable future.

Mike is a man who is funny, humble, encouraging, and culturally intelligent. But reflecting on the few years I've known Mike, there's a single word that encapsulates my experience of him: endurance. Mike has endured some very difficult times in his pastoral ministry at South City Church. In our short time at the church, we've witnessed Mike lose an associate pastor (albeit on good terms), respond to increasing racial tension in our society, navigate a turbulent election cycle, and pastor during a global pandemic. In the midst of all these challenges, Mike has done one thing that I hope to emulate in my own ministry as a pastor: he's stayed. When the going got tough (and then tougher), he didn't leave the pastorate and he didn't leave our church; he stayed. Mike has faithfully served at Covenant Seminary through many challenges as well. I know such endurance can only come from someone who deeply loves Jesus, the very embodiment of faithful endurance. For that example Mike has shown, I'm deeply thankful.

T HIS IS A STORY about how Dr. Mike Higgins impacted my life.

I met Dr. Mike Higgins in March 2019 while visiting Student Life. I was an incoming MAC student starting in August but I wanted to see what Covenant had to offer as far as getting students connected. I felt intimidated about being in a predominately white male academic environment, but Dr. Higgins made me feel welcomed, seen, valued, and affirmed. Dr. Higgins helped me to find my voice in a space and place where I thought I had to be quiet. He helped me find language to the emotions and experiences that I was having and taught me how to use them in a productive way. Dr. Higgins inspired and encouraged me to think outside the box when being a bridge builder. Dr. Higgins has been a blessing to me throughout my time at Covenant. He helped me see what Micah 6:8 looks like when it is lived out.

Micah 6:8 "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

-Caridad Kraus

WOULD LIKE TO express my deep gratitude to the Reverend, Colonel, Dr. Mike Higgins for his years of service as Dean of Students and then Chaplain for Covenant Seminary! As you are aware, Pastor Mike officially retired from Covenant at the end of last semester after 11 years with the seminary. His years of service at this institution followed over 30 years of service for our country in the United States Army. I have learned so much from Mike. His wisdom and contributions to the Covenant community will be greatly missed. Pastor Mike, we salute you! Thank you for modeling for us what it means to stay the course, to fight the good fight, and to speak truth in challenging spaces. Thank you for your commitment to social justice and for your example of how to live out the gospel when faced with the issues of our day.

-Professor Suzanne Bates

WHEN I THINK about a suffering servant, the person who comes to mind is Mike Higgins. I have had the pleasure of getting to know Pastor, Colonel, Chaplain, Supervisor, and Professor Higgins these past three years as an intern at South City Church. He has taught me and opened my eyes to things I never would have found on my own. Even more so, he models what a godly man looks like during trials and personal suffering, sometimes at the hands of other believers. Pastor Mike continues to go where God calls him after all these years, and there is no shortage of people calling him. I am lucky to have him in my life and will always value his insights, care, and humor shared over a giant plate of breakfast.

-Bailey Preib



PROFESSOR PROFILE: JERRAM BARRS

Professor of Christian Studies and Contemporary Culture 1989 - 2022

Brendan DeJong: How has God worked in your life during your time at Covenant, and how have you seen Covenant change and grow?

Jerram Barrs: We moved to St. Louis November 30th, 1988, and I started teaching at Covenant in January of 1989, so I've been here for more than three decades, and the seminary's change and the change in my life are really bound up together. Before I came, while working in L'Abri and speaking in different settings, I encountered many Christians and, in particular, people in ministry who were appalled by what was happening in the culture around them, both in Europe and in North America. Sadly, a common response to what was happening in the broader culture was fear and a judgmental attitude. Along with that there was a call for personal separation from unbelievers and for retreat from the culture and a commitment to try to turn the church into a haven from the world around us. These attitudes,

quite understandably, made outreach and evangelism very difficult. If you hate people and are afraid of them, it's very difficult to talk to them. Yet, the New Testament clearly calls the Church to evangelism, so what could be done? One response was that I saw people relying more and more on a formulaic approach to sharing the gospel. You can learn this method and these are the words you should say to these people whom you don't like, and of whom you are afraid, and with whom you have no desire to spend any time. It should be no surprise that such an approach to sharing the gospel is both unbiblical and is utterly counter-productive.

At the same time, the Lord has put on my heart a passion for communicating the truth and reaching out to people because I come from an unbelieving background myself. I'm very thankful for what the gospel did for me as I was delivered from a path of self-destruction and the Lord used a Canadian believ-

er who truly loved me and gave himself to know me. The Lord put on my heart a constraint to try to be some sort of help; to teach people not to be afraid of the world and of non-Christians; to love them and to be glad to know them; and to be comfortable in communicating what we believe to those around us.

When I first came here, it would be wrong to say that the seminary itself was characterized by condemnation of and retreat from the world, but there were elements of that here. There were a couple of professors for whom this was their whole approach to outreach; but, in God's kind providence these two men left just a year after we moved here.

As a consequence of their leaving the seminary changed significantly. I think it would be dishonoring to the Lord for me to say that he hasn't used our time here to have a very profound impact on the seminary in its attitude towards the broader culture, towards communicating the gospel, and to be comfortable in knowing that it's right to love non-Christians. In terms of its impact on me, it's really encouraging to meet graduates who have put into practice for better than I have what I've tried to teach (for example, Mark Ryan!). It makes me very thankful for what the Lord has done here.

I have especially enjoyed being able to teach the women's tea, which they unfortunately called "Tea with Jerram"—I would've preferred it to be called "Tea at the Schaeffer Institute." I have always passionately believed in treating women with equal dignity and been deeply committed to teaching women. So, for the last fifteen years, I've been serving at the women's tea here and it's been a special gift from God, having the opportunity to do this.

Another area where I've benefited from my time at Covenant is that it's given me friends all over the world—China, Korea, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Africa, the Philippines, India and many other places; and also brothers and sisters from many diverse cultural settings here in North America. Having close friendships with people from so many different backgrounds has enriched my life immeasurably.

Finally, God has given me a happy relationship with my colleagues. It is a joy to work here. I respect them, I love them, and I'm proud of them. I think we've got some of the best biblical scholars in the world here, in both Old Testament and New Testament departments, and we also have the finest counseling department in the nation.

BD: A big part of how Covenant has changed during your tenure has to do with the Francis Schaeffer Institute. Could you speak to how that began?

JB: When I came to Covenant, I came with the intention of teaching apologetics and pastoral theology. I

did not expect to start the Francis Schaeffer Institute. Sometimes people assume that this the reason we came, but it wasn't. After my wife and I arrived, Paul Kooistra, the President, and David Jones, the Dean, asked if I'd be prepared to start the Francis Schaeffer Institute, and I said I would be glad to; it fit with who I was and what I had been doing in L'Abri and in the Church. However, I said it could only happen if Edith Schaeffer agreed. So Paul Kooistra contacted her, went to visit her and talk to her about it, and she said yes, very gladly, and so the Institute had its formal beginning in April 1989, during my first semester of teaching, and Edith came to speak in Chapel at the opening.

In terms of founding the Institute, I didn't want to start by asking, "What programs will we begin?", but rather, "What should the Institute stand for; what should be its heart?" I sat down and thought about the convictions to which the Schaeffers were passionately committed, and what about their living the Christian life was particular to them. I came up with eight points, foundational principles of their theological convictions, their Christian faith and practice and their calling. These eight principles are still our foundational document and they became the heart of what the institute was about, and gave us the criteria for what programs would serve them. As a consequence if you look through all the special lecture series and conferences the Institute has put on over the years, the art shows, the concerts,



the book store discussions, everything we have done fits in with the things emphasized in those eight points, including the conference on education and mission this spring.

In addition, over the thirty-four years I have taught thirty-six electives: covering apologetic issues and attitudes; biblical teaching on suffering, ethics, prayer, spiritual warfare, women's ministry, mission and many other matters; classes on the arts and literature, and much else. In teaching these electives I have been committed to covering those eight points. In a way, the electives I've taught have been a continuation of what I was doing at L'Abri, where regularly I would ask those staying with us what they wanted me a Bible study or lecture on; a week or two later, after preparing I would try to address these matters. Here, I've taught a number of classes on contemporary cultural issues, because it is helpful for our students and, of course, it helps me learn new things.

BD: What advice would you give to students entering ministry?

JB: First, I've tried to teach our students that you must keep growing. You have to keep growing in your own convictions and obedience as a believer, and in an ever deepening study and understanding of God's word. You need to be constantly working on new sec-

tions of Scripture that you haven't taught on before. If you do not have this commitment to continual development you will bore to death both yourself and any congregation or ministry you serve. But, if you keep growing, you can stay somewhere for thirty years without a problem.

Second, whatever you do, don't neglect your marriage or your family because you'll destroy yourself and your ministry if you do.

Third, be prepared to stay a long time in places of service. I was just talking to a graduate recently who said, "I've been at our church for three years now, and the people are just beginning to open their hearts to me. Even though I poured myself into their lives, it's only now that they're just starting to trust me and to share the deepest things."

BD: What are you looking forward to in retirement?

JB: Primarily, I'm looking forward to spending more time with my beloved wife, Vicki. This is the reason I'm retiring, and it's an entirely positive one. Every day, when I come in to class, she's sad, and I'm sad. Over the years she's given so much of me away. I used to travel one or two weekends every month serving our graduates around the country and overseas maybe two or three times every year, but I had to stop that as my energy began to decline. But it's time for me to





give myself completely to my wife. We've always had a happy marriage that has been a joy to us.

But in God's kindness, right now our marriage has a kind of preciousness to it. My main intention is simply to be at home with Vicki, to cook together, to work in the yard to grow flowers, fruit, and vegetables. We'll do a little bit of traveling. We hope to go to the UK once the mask mandates, etc. are over, perhaps next year to see family and friends there. This summer we are bringing our youngest son and his three teenagers over to spend time here. We haven't seen him, his wife and his five children for three years because of the pandemic. We also hope to drive out west to see Vicki's three brothers as we are very close to them.

Vicki hopes that I'll do some more writing, so we'll see whether I will have the energy to do that, once I have had a break from the academic life.

Right now I am reading the three volumes of CS Lewis's collected letters, and these are some of the most beautiful books I've ever read in my life. I've taught many classes on C. S. Lewis, but this is giving me a deeper understanding of many things about him. It's just been lovely to see the way he was moving towards faith in those years up to his becoming Christian in 1931, to see his attitudes changing and his heart and mind opening, though he didn't know it at the time. After his conversion, he grew so rapidly as a Christian. It has been a joy to see the way God was at work in his heart, transforming his mind, understanding, and affections into love for Christ and a longing to become more like him.

BD: Finally, are there any memorable or funny stories during your teaching career at Covenant?

JB: There is one story that stands out, and this dragon on my desk represents it. At the time, it wasn't funny at all, but it became amusing afterwards. As you know, I have a passionate hatred for legalism in all its forms, simply because it is profoundly unbiblical and because it is so destructive. I was giving a lecture in B111, and I was talking about legalism and how worthless rules are in helping young people to grow as Christians. You impose all these rules on your youth group, but they don't actually help them to grow or even to stop them from sinning. As Paul says in Colossians, even though such rules have an appearance of wisdom, they have no value in restraining the indulgence of the sinful nature. Instead, such rules keep them immature, and in addition, they encourage a spirit of rebellion, not only against the rules but against the faith and the Lord. While I was talking about this, one of the students stood up at the back of the class and said, "You are just giving a license to teenagers to have sex with each other!" I was furious. I don't easily get angry, but rage just came out of my mouth—I said, "If I were a dragon I would breathe fire and consume you." The astonished student sank down behind the desk, and the class looked aghast. Some of them laughed, and others were shocked, because I'm usually very gentle in character, whereas this was very severe. I went to find the student after class to apologize privately; and then publicly to the whole class at our next meeting for what I'd said.

It became a joke around the campus for the next couple of years. A group of Irish pastors were here for a Doctor of Ministry class, and they heard the story. At the end of the week's class, they presented me with this little red dragon as a memento of my dragonish words on that day. —

JERRAM BARRS REFLECTION AND QUOTES

Artis Love

I F YOU ARE FAMILIAR with Harry Potter, then you know that Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry had the blessing of a true servant and Shepherd known as Albus Dumbledore. Many would refer to him as the greatest wizard of all time. I know Harry would. Well, if you look at Covenant Theological Seminary, we have the blessing of Jerram Barrs. Similarly, to Harry I would call Jerram the greatest modern Christian apologist today. Like Dumbledore, Jerram has guided and taught so many students that have walked the halls of Covenant. Jerram has stood the test of time. He has loved and he has lost. Jerram Barrs truly, in my eyes, displays the meaning of Philippians 2:5-9. Jerram empties himself out to everyone in every lecture, every book, and every sermon.

Can I tell you what Jerram means to me and so many others? It would take far more than what I write to you today. Jerram Barrs is a mountain among men. He has shown me what it means to truly be gentle and lowly. Humility, gentleness, mercy, and compassion are traits that in the western world of Christianity have not been prioritized or glamorized. Am I saying he's perfect? No, he is far from that. Only Jesus Christ walked

this earth blameless. Jerram knows that very well and it has shown in his life. In our culture today—and, unfortunately, even in our churches—the loudest voice in the room often wins. If you were to meet Jerram you would find the complete opposite. He is a soft-spoken British gentleman. He may be the quietest voice in the room but will have the most impact. 1 John 3:18 says, “Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.” Jerram does just that. He has sat at the feet of Jesus and wept for God's creation.

Jerram Barrs is a faithful servant of Christ. Every office hour or every hug he's given me will always stick with me. Truly Jerram has displayed to all the “Imitate me as I imitate Christ” example. Jerram is a father, friend, and brother to many. He has inspired me and has taught me that sometimes the only thing we can do is weep for this world and that's ok. As Jerram rides off into the sunset of retirement a huge hole will be left at Covenant. I will miss his warm embraces in the hall and his stories in class. Jerram Barrs, you have challenged me in my faith so much. Jerram Barrs taught me to see the depravity and dignity in everyone, including myself. Dear Jerram, thank you for toiling for the Gospel.

WHAT JERRAM HAS meant for me:

I see Jesus' love and glory in Jeram's genuine smiles, soft words, generous heart, and humble attitude. He himself is a living textbook about mature Christian life, and much more.

His teaching and his living are humble and yet powerful apologetic testimony for the Lord our Savior. I couldn't help but thank God for his faithful servant on whom His face shines.

I ordered and listened to the cassette tapes of *Francis A. Schaeffer The Early Years* (\$48) and *Francis A. Schaeffer The Later Years* (\$52) from the Covenant Seminary in 1999. They are recorded lectures about Francis A. Schaeffer and his life story. Professor Jerram Barrs gave the lectures. This was my first encounter with Jerram. He was always excited when he talked about Schaeffer and many of his stories were deeply imprinted on my mind. I received a strong and clear impression about Francis Schaeffer through Jerram's cassette tapes. Not knowingly I was drawn into his apologetic approach in engaging the culture with biblical truth.

Fast forward 20 years, I enrolled to study in the seminary in 2019. I told Jerram the first day in his class that he was the reason why I was here. He had no idea who this middle-aged Chinese student was. During his lectures, he would recall what Schaeffer said, and I am sure he had Schaeffer's voice and image in his mind when he shares these moments. Jerram fills me with more details what the cassette tapes did not say. Jerram has good memory. I recalled many things that he said in the cassette tapes that appeared in the lectures that I took with him. His tone and excitement remain engaging all these years, now I can see his face and his expression too!

Fast forward 3 years, I am about to graduate in May 2022. I shall carry this heritage, preserved in my mind, the many voices and lessons I heard and saw during my time in the seminary. These memories become part of who I am. My identity in Christ was permanently shaped by the accumulative molding of people I met here. I bear the finger-print of Jerram and many others in me.

I am grateful to see all the predecessors' labor of this seminary and how their effort bear fruits in so many graduates and alumni's lives, throughout the world. I am excited to be here and see many faithful servants of God doing their jobs daily. Their life examples teach me more than books and essays I studied and read. I am grateful for many people here and especially Jerram, because of his passion in teaching the truth of God, he attracts me to this place. Thank you Jerram.

-John Sung

JERRAM BARRS IS one of the best professors I've ever had, and, more importantly, he's one of the best men I've ever met. In fact, Jerram is the kind of man I want to become. He's gentle and kind, not brash or abrasive. He's thoughtful and caring, not impulsive or indifferent. He's the kind of man who takes everyone's questions seriously, even when he has good reason to suspect they don't ask them with the same seriousness. In his teaching, preaching, and counseling he always seeks to serve those under his influence. He wants their good, their flourishing. And he does this, not by forceful statements made in grandiose eloquence, but by loving them towards the one who is Love.

Jerram has a way of making the things he talks about beautiful and desirable, so that we know not only that it's important, but that it's worth our time, effort, and affections. We know not merely that "this" matters, but we also begin to glimpse how deeply wonderful it is; that it's worth our lives. We see how it declares the truth and glory of our King for everyone's good. And he does all of this without ever coming off as a big shot. You know the kind of person; that guy who "knows" he's important. It's communicated subtly: in his tone, his posture, the way he approaches people. He projects, "You should be impressed by me." "I'm 'The Man'." Jerram never, not once, has come off this way to me. He's the type of person that you can't wait to be around again because you know that he's going to bless you and show you how to bless others. You almost want to ask him to adopt you so that you can get whatever he has via osmosis. When you're around him, you know that he's caring for you. This is exactly how his students feel, and because of that they're encouraged to become more like him. We want to follow him as he follows Christ.

-Anonymous

I am incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from Professor Jerram Barrs during my time at Covenant. When I think of the verse, “Imitate me as I imitate Christ,” I think of Jerram. No one else I know has been such an exemplary model of Christ-likeness in every sense. His kindness, gentleness, and sensitivity are unparalleled. His stories have taught me more about ministry than a hundred textbooks ever could. His approach has ingrained in me the most important aspects of ministry—from starting off Theology of Ministry and Worship with a series of lectures on “The Suffering Servant” to the frequent reminder that we ought not be “heroes” building God’s kingdom, instead humbly praying that God will build His kingdom and will use us if He sees fit. Jerram Barrs has shown me how to love people well, dealing honestly with all the realities of a fallen world while holding fast to truth and beauty. May his ministry and the ministry of those he has taught be something God is pleased to use to further His kingdom and draw many to Himself.

-Mary Schieferstein

FIRST HAD A course with Professor Barrs in the 90’s as I began taking courses at Covenant just to be a better deacon and small group leader in my church. I already had a Master’s Degree but just wanted to take courses to continue to grow spiritually.

With that first class, I found that I wanted to take every opportunity I could to be a part of any class, any small (or large) group discussion with Professor Barrs and to read everything he writes. His compassion, humanness, wisdom, humility, and solid theology is incredible. He has been a remarkable teacher and example of how to impact the world. He deserves this next stage of life in retirement, but we sure will miss him!

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.” Isaiah 60:1

-Pam Harlow

AM SURE AS Jerram’s time at Covenant comes to a close, many will have the opportunity to comment on how they have been impacted by Jerram. His total dependence on the Lord, his marriage, his instruction, his wealth of experience in ministry—all are hallmarks of “who” he is. What I want to highlight is something which I’m sure others will also identify: his gentleness. This character trait—his gentleness—is what will always be my first thought when I think of Jerram. To hear his gentleness as he speaks of his Lord, of his family, and of those who he has been entrusted to minister to—this will always be the example I hope to be in ministry, now and in the future. He has been a true blessing to the Covenant family.

-Casey Scharven

SOME QUOTES OF Jerram from my notes:

“I have never mistreated my wife.”

“What we do for the Lord is less important than what the Lord does for us.”

“Are we anxious to win arguments quickly, or are we prepared to take people seriously and listen to their views, their questions, and their objections? Do we see our own sin, rather than those of others?”

“Evangelism takes time. Evangelism is a long, slow process for most people.”

“Evangelism is not possible without commitment to know people.”

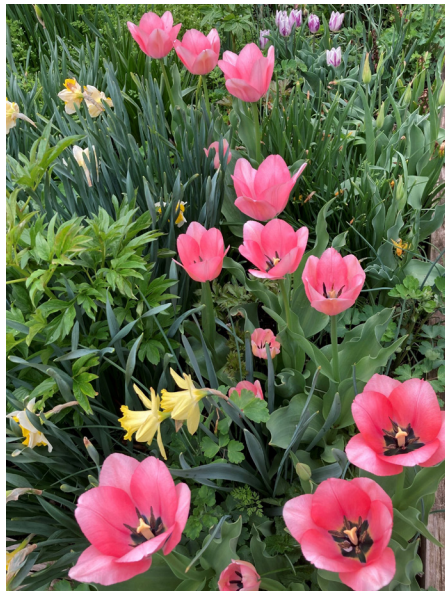
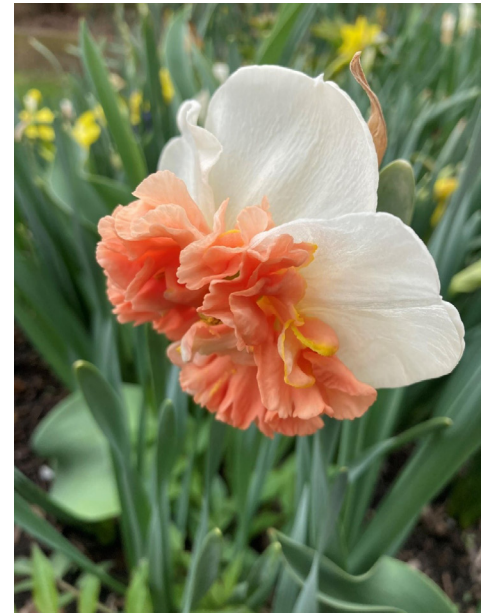
“Gospel must always be present in our lives and words.”

“There is no excuse for not speaking to people graciously. Never.”

-Wei Li

PHOTOS OF FLOWERS

Vicki Barrs



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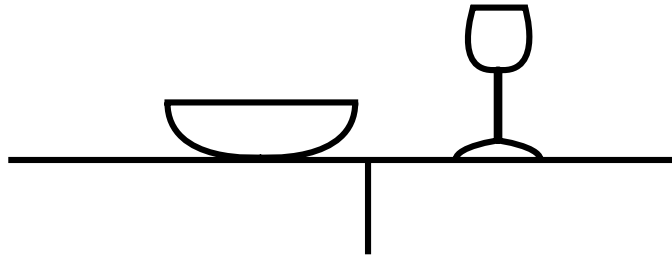
John Sung MDiv '22

Thank you to each and every one of you who helped make this magazine possible!



THE COMMON TABLE

The vision of the Common Table is to see student voices amplified, student skills developed, and student life improved, for the purpose of promoting the common good of Covenant Theological Seminary. In order to see this vision realized, the Common Table will work to promote critical reflection and dialogue on faith, theology, culture, and life through the semi-annual publishing of an online and print magazine —all for God's mission.



"All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations."

Psalm 22:27-28