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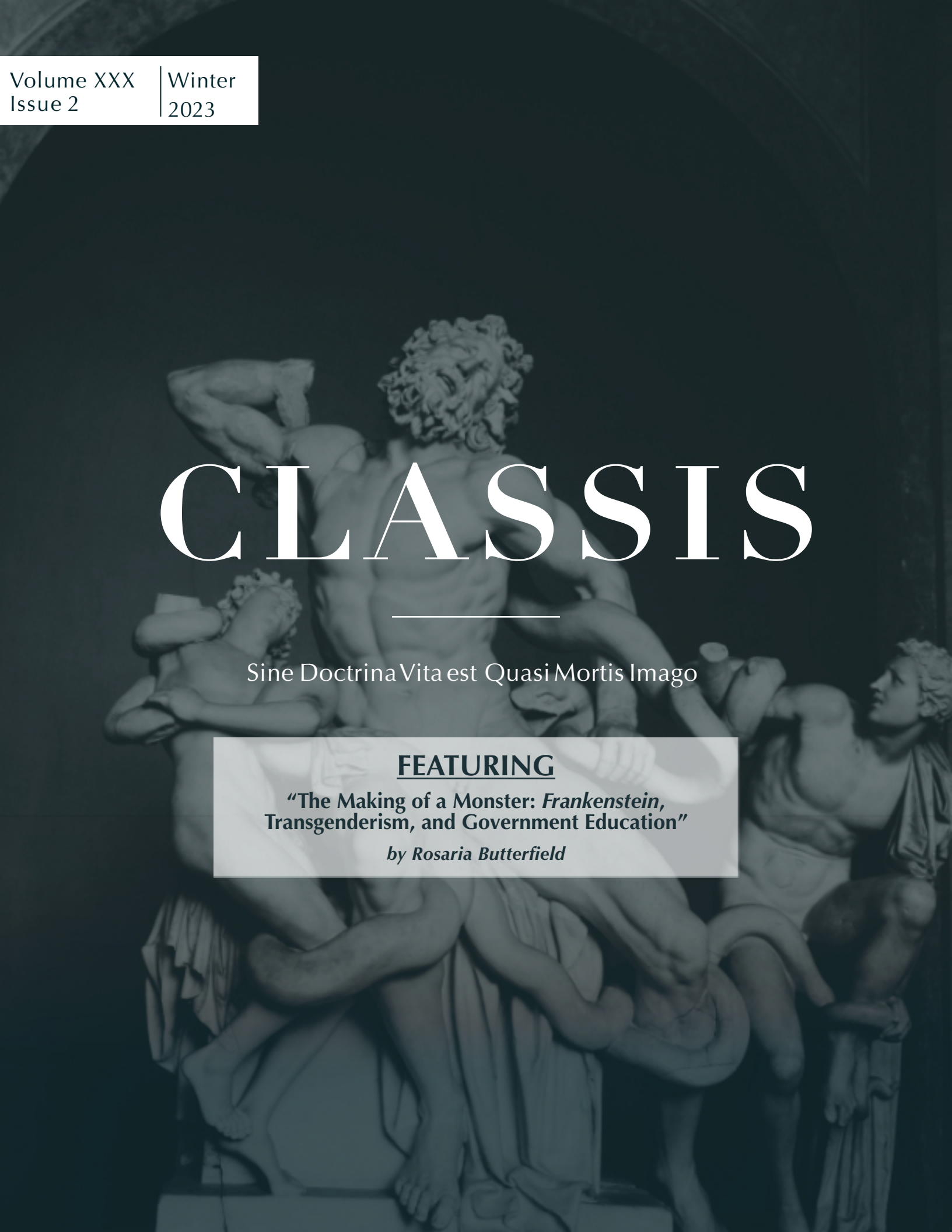

CLASSIS

Sine Doctrina Vita est Quasi Mortis Imago

FEATURING

"The Making of a Monster: *Frankenstein*, Transgenderism, and Government Education"

by Rosaria Butterfield

Volume XXX | Winter
Issue 2 | 2023

CLASSIS

A JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

CLASSIS is a journal promoting a new "old way" and is designed to edify, support, and encourage educators around the world who seek to recover classical Christian education in the twilight of the West.

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Friends, Colleagues, and Fellow Classical Christian Educators,

The recovery of things old brings with it a second sight, a new way of seeing the things that have been discarded. This is part of our mission at *Classis*, and with this vision comes a new opportunity to incarnate the virtues and ideals of our tradition of faith and learning.

This is one reason why we're introducing a new section called "Old Voices," which speaks to us from within the heritage of classical Christian learning. Life in the digital world has distractions without number, and it means our days and hours are spent sifting through the glut of information that continually crashes on the shore of our intellectual beaches. "Information everywhere, and not a thought to think; information everywhere, and how our souls do shrink." Along with the curses of the digital age, there are some blessings. We have access to a library that would tempt Milton to envy, and yet we often settle for the latest modern book on classical learning, while the numerous historical sources that speak directly to our vocations go unread. The problem is not one of quantity but quality. This is where *Classis* might be able to contribute something different to the ever-expanding catalog of academic journals. Instead of hearing only new thoughts on old things, let us hear the old thoughts on old things. In the spirit of C. S. Lewis' "On the Reading of Old Books," Let us eavesdrop on the conversations of the wise and read "the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period."

As this year's *Repairing the Ruins* theme is "Athanasius Contra Mundum," it's only fitting that we share a passage from the saint whose chief virtue, according to C. S. Lewis, was that "he did not move with the times." For a man who defended the Incarnation, we ought to embrace the gift that comes with learning, that we too might incarnate the bright wisdom of the past in the cultural twilight of today.

In addition to this, we are blessed to have the cultural and literary insights of Rosaria Butterfield, who muses on the allegorical connections of *Frankenstein*, Transgenderism, and government schools. Kyle Hughes gives us a lesson on virtue formation from Basil of Caesarea's "Address to Young Men." Austin Hoffman reminds us of why Boethius is not only a must for any classical educator to read, but also for any Christian. Jason Modar explains how to keep the most important things in mind in assessing students. And Jason Valley reminds us of how screen time affects our students and families. Finally, we are pleased to share student work in Commonplace from Trinitas Christian School in Florida and from Rockbridge Academy in Maryland.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Classis*.

Non Nobis,

Devin O'Donnell, Editor-in-Chief

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ARTICLES

Hope and Chance

Austin Hoffman, *The Ambrose School*

NFL games are sometimes decided by an overtime coin toss. Powerball by six arbitrary numbers. The study of history discloses other examples of chance events shaping outcomes. Croesus was almost killed because of an ambiguous prophecy, but then he was saved by a sudden rain-shower. The Chinese invasion of Taiwan in 1949 was thwarted by snails. Because the canals the Chinese soldiers trained in happened to be filled with a microbe-carrying snail, their forces were unable to conquer the island before the U.S. and allies arrived. Much of our lives are governed by seemingly random fortune, which is why we sometimes have occasion to complain about the injustice of fortune. Why do the morally corrupt enjoy prosperity, health, and fame while the righteous labor in obscurity and poverty? It would seem the random allocation of gifts denies the possibility of a benevolent governor of the world.

The seeming conflict between free will and providence, chance and fate has been a perennial philosophical problem. Pagans as well as Christians have wrestled with the question of how God can know all things, yet our choices remain free. Or, if God governs the world, why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? It seems this can only be attributed to random fortune rather than a benevolent helmsman. Many in history thus attempt to solve the question by either denying man's will or God's providence. Others, such as Boethius, reconcile these two as friends.

When Boethius addresses the subject of chance and providence, he structures the world in two tiers: there is the world and its natural causes and then there is God's direct oversight and governance. The two work hand-in-hand, with fate subservient to providence. What we may call fortune or fate is merely the complex interrelationship of secondary causes—the natures and wills of various entities in the world. Stones fall, rivers flow, men seek their own ends. Of course, God created all things, so He is also the author of their natures.

Boethius writes,

> The generation of all things, the whole progress of things subject to change and whatever moves in any way, receive their causes, their due order, and their form from the unchanging mind of God. In the high citadel of its oneness, the mind of God has set up a plan for the multitude of events. When this plan is thought of as in the purity of God's understanding, it is called Providence, and when it is thought of with reference to all things, whose motion and order it controls, it is called by the name the ancients gave it, Fate. (IV.m6)[1]

Further, Boethius explains that whenever something occurs which we cannot fully explain or know, we may assign it to chance, although if we were omniscient we would plainly see the causes. If I find one hundred dollars in a garbage dump, I find it by chance. Yet someone dropped the bill, some circumstances caused it to be forgotten or driven to the spot where I found it, and I was led by various desires and circumstances to arrive at a time where the bill might be found. It is only from my

1. Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy,* Trans. V. E. Watts (London: The Folio Society, 1998), 141.

limited perspective that this can be attributed to chance.

We may complain that fortune seems random, causing the good to suffer and the wicked to prosper, but this is because we cannot see the simple and higher order behind them. We see a chaotic and ever changing web, while God beholds the unfolding of His plan in its simplicity. Our happiness and contentment depend on living within our boundaries as creatures—we can't know all things or all causes. Virgil may claim, "Happy is he who is able to know the causes of things,"[2] but he is assuming a closed philosophical system accessible to the human mind.

What we may call fortune or fate is merely the complex interrelationship of secondary causes—the natures and wills of various entities in the world. Stones fall, rivers flow, men seek their own ends. Of course, God created all things, so He is also the author of their natures.

The Roman philosophers believed that the world was governed by fixed natural laws and that these were discoverable in their entirety. Further, if one was able to gain insight into the order of reality, he could arrange events and circumstances to guarantee a utopian outcome. This was the classical political project: by governing in accordance with nature, politics could solve the corruption in the human soul. By applying the right principles, we get the right results. Much like discovering a mathematical formula, if we follow the steps we arrive inexorably at the conclusion.

Yet both Christianity and Boethius reject this model of the universe, for we are not capable of discovering all of the complex relationships of secondary causes. Boethius confesses the world is ruled by God, but the exact means He uses to administer His providence are inscrutable to us. There is a gap or shroud through which we cannot peer. When we boast that we can see God's perfect plan or understand His purposes, we fall into pride and self-deception. Boethius should lead us to the humble confession that we don't know why something has happened and that we don't know what will be the outcome of our efforts.

Although goals for graduates, course objectives, or learning outcomes are all good things — we should plan — we must also embrace the impossibility of knowing the future in any absolute sense. There are too many causes in the world for us to boast a 100% success rate. Sow the seed. Await the harvest. But you do not know whether a drought will strike or whether seeds you did not plant will suddenly bear fruit. Sometimes your well-planned lesson should be discarded in the first five minutes; occasionally the detour is more profitable than the main road.

But this is merely living life under the sun. Ecclesiastes also reminds us that life is ultimately out of our control.

> "I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone

2. Virgil, *Georgics*, II.490.

3. English Standard Version Bible

> who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity." (2:18-23)[3]

This goes for class-time lessons as well as the chance meetings in the hallway. It touches the serendipitous harmony when an unplanned illustration or discussion bears immediate and visible fruit as well as the unexpected interjection from a junior higher that makes accomplishing anything impossible for the next five minutes. There is a destructive entropy in the fallen world that should not shock us. This is a common theme of ancient writers, yet often forgotten today to our vexation. There are crooked things that cannot be made straight (Ecclesiastes 1:15). Painfully, there are students who cannot be helped despite our best efforts. This is life under the sun.

Some would see this as fatalism and giving in to hopelessness; for the Christian, it is not. As Tolkien comments on *Beowulf*, "man, each man and all men, and all their works shall die. A theme no Christian need despise."[4] Boethius and Ecclesiastes testify that although the world under the sun is out of our control and seems random, there is a God beyond the sun who controls all things. This is a faith that liberates. We do not need to guarantee outcomes. We ought not take three hours to meticulously plan for a one hour lesson; instead, we might spend more time laboring with faith in the God who orders all things. Leithart writes, "The impossibility of controlling the world in any absolute sense is the foundation of his joy, rather than something that robs him of joy. He can say that because although he cannot control everything, there's a God beyond the sun who does."[5]

Although life is vapor, there is an eschatological hope in the God who makes all things right. Yet in the meantime, parents should remember the potential vapidity of laying up wealth for their children. Wealth can be lost or squandered. Likewise, education is not a golden ticket to a prosperous life. The world is unpredictable. Teachers should release their idealistic visions of engaging and lively discussions with students and embrace the repetitive nature of discipline. Teaching often feels like "shepherding the wind." The student may be reminded that their own failures or shortcomings are not the end of the story. They are a product of sin and the brokenness of the world—sometimes tests are just unfair. We can acknowledge the impossibility of controlling the world without giving in to fear. It should free us to know that our labor does not guarantee an outcome, nor is it in vain.

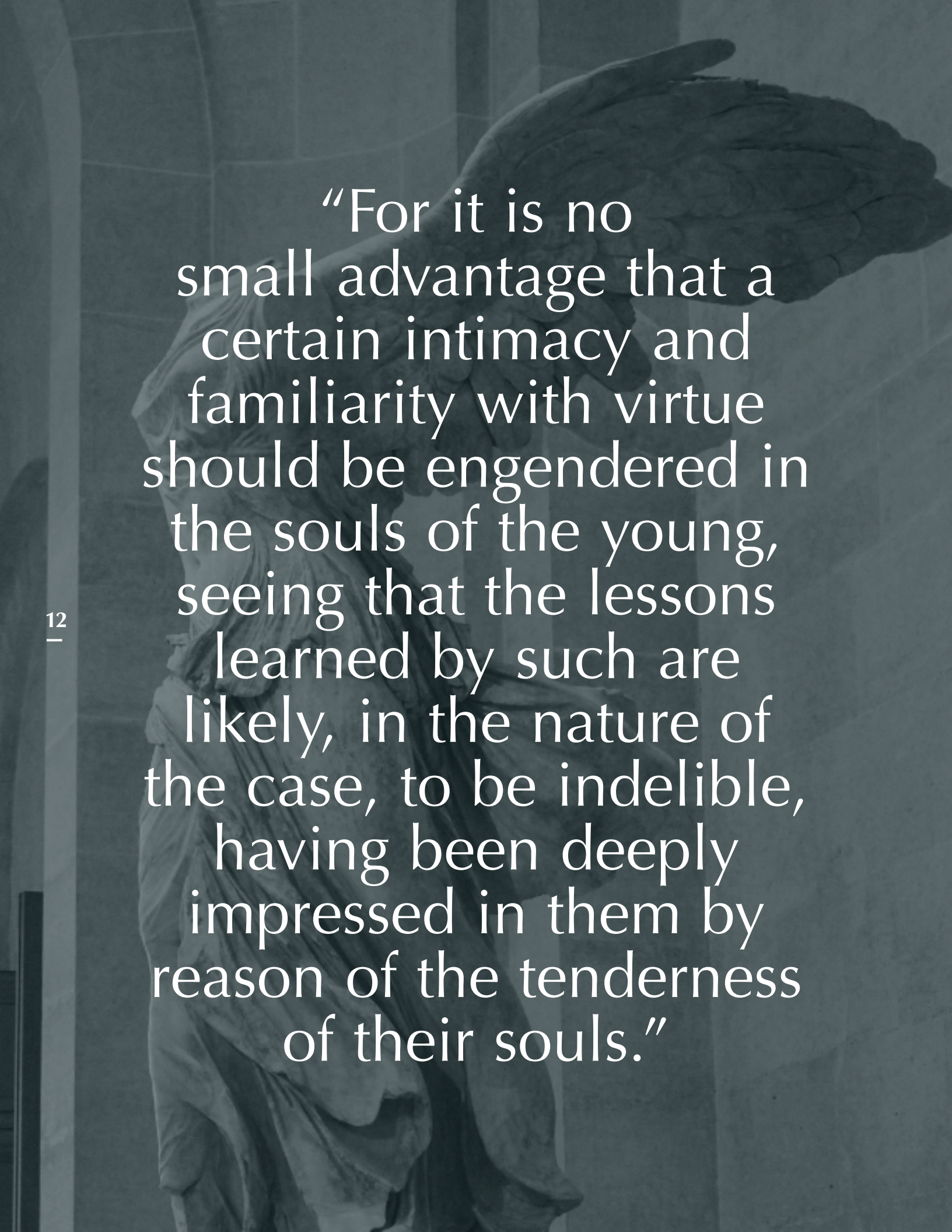
Sharpen the sword and fight where the battle is fiercest. It may end in glorious ruin and death, but that is all the better. This is the attitude that motivates the charge of the Rohirrim or infuses Reepicheep, whose mind "was full of forlorn hopes, death-or-glory charges, and last stands."[6] If this mortal life is a slow death by living, let it blaze with vigor instead of simpering like a damp wick. Plan, build, fight, enjoy. Be ready to lose it all and start again. And when we fall for the last time and the cloud of vapor is finally torn, we will rise in that kingdom of the Sun and know it was not wasted.

Austin Hoffman is a classical Christian teacher in Meridian, ID. He has previously written for FORMA, The Circe Institute, and The Imaginative Conservative. He, his wife, and two boys enjoy hikes, great books, and good music.

4. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Monster and the Critics and Other Essays* (Hammersmith: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006), 23.

5. Tony Reinke. Twitter Post. October 26, 2018, 1:31 PM. https://twitter.com/TonyReinke/status/1055919810691956736.

6. C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (London: The Folio Society, 1996), 69.



“For it is no small advantage that a certain intimacy and familiarity with virtue should be engendered in the souls of the young, seeing that the lessons learned by such are likely, in the nature of the case, to be indelible, having been deeply impressed in them by reason of the tenderness of their souls.”

An Early Christian Approach to Virtue Formation

Kyle R. Hughes, *The Stonehaven School*

One distinctive element of classical Christian education is its focus on virtue formation. However, many educators and administrators in the movement, myself included, came into their work with only a foggy sense of how ideas about virtue developed in classical antiquity, were incorporated into the Christian tradition, and can still be applied in the classroom today. Thankfully, a second distinctive element of classical Christian education — the principle of *ad fontes* — provides the solution, expanding our imaginations for how we conceive of virtue formation within the Great Tradition of our faith for the sake of cultivating truth, goodness, and beauty in ourselves and in our students.

The world of classical antiquity, as evidenced by figures such as Aristotle, understood virtues to encompass habits of right action, including attributes such as temperance, justice, fortitude, and prudence — attributes which would in fact become the four cardinal virtues of Christianity. In the wake of the conversion of Constantine, as Christians increasingly sought to appropriate the philosophical and literary heritage of Greece and Rome under the lordship of Christ, the Church Fathers of the fourth century naturally engaged with pagan teaching on virtue. One of the most outstanding early treatments of a Christian approach to virtue is found in Basil of Caesarea's "Address to Young Men, on How They Might Derive Benefit from Greek Literature."[1] Basil's insights as he wrestled with the place of traditional pagan literature within Christian education can generate powerful insights for our own approach to teaching and learning today.

After warning Christian teachers against exposing their students to the kind of pagan literature that is irredeemably immoral or scandalous, Basil sets out his first justification for the use of pagan literature in a Christian course of study: that it can act as an invitation to virtue. As we will see below, while Basil is careful to recast virtue (and, conversely, vice) according to the Christian gospel, it is nevertheless his contention that Christian virtues have some meaningful points of connection with classical ones. Thus, the classical literature of antiquity, insofar as it promotes virtues that align with the teachings of the Bible, should be set before students in order to form their souls:

> *"For it is no small advantage that a certain intimacy and familiarity with virtue should be engendered in the souls of the young, seeing that the lessons learned by such are likely, in the nature of the case, to be indelible, having been deeply impressed in them by reason of the tenderness of their souls."*[2]

Training in virtue is difficult, Basil acknowledges, and yet the virtuous life will ultimately be eternally worthwhile and truly satisfying. After all, he explains, unlike any earthly possessions, virtue cannot be stolen away by others and will endure into the next life.

By the nature of the examples from classical literature to which he appeals, Basil indicates that the texts he has in mind are not so much abstract, philosophical treatises on the nature of the good. Rather, it is those stories or narratives that celebrate the concept of virtue that are to be placed before students. Basil, therefore, helps us to see the power of story for stirring our souls to pursue something good, beautiful, and true beyond

1. All references to and quotations of this work are taken from the edition of Deferrari and McGuire, Basil: Letters 249–368, On Greek Literature (LCL 270; Cambridge: MA: Harvard University Press, 1934).

2. Basil, "To Young Men," 5.

ourselves. Many of our most powerful cultural phenomena tap into our deepest desires to live lives of purpose, meaning, and adventure. We can easily imagine ourselves as Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars*, gazing up at the twin suns of Tatooine, yearning to explore the larger galaxy, or as Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*, who unexpectedly receives the One Ring from Gandalf and now has to contemplate a dangerous journey from the Shire to Mordor. We connect powerfully with the very human struggles and redemption arcs of characters such as Jean Valjean or Dmitri Karamazov. Such stories resonate so powerfully in our culture precisely because there seems to be in all of us a longing for a call to adventure that will enable us to take our first steps into a larger world, to plunge us into a battle between good and evil that transcends our otherwise seemingly mundane existence and challenges us to embrace our best, most virtuous selves. Even if it is the movies of the Marvel Cinematic Universe and not the epic poems of Homer that fire our students' imagination, the underlying principle is the same: to the extent that good stories inspire our students to a life of virtue and meaning, Basil reminds us that Christian educators need not wholly reject every aspect of culture around us but can identify within it accessible starting points for conversations about virtue and meaning. And we can, time and again, point our students back to God's story of creating, redeeming, and restoring our world as the most true and beautiful story of them all, a story within which we are invited to find our ultimate identity and purpose.

Basil reminds us that Christian educators need not wholly reject every aspect of culture around us but can identify within it accessible starting points for conversations about virtue and meaning.

Basil goes on to identify a second, related justification for Christians studying pagan texts: that they can give students virtuous deeds to emulate. The particular examples Basil selects, along with his means of interpreting them for a Christian context, reveal much about his understanding of how Christians can engage pagan literature. While Basil draws his examples from pagan authors, he defines the virtues in light of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Thus, for instance, Basil suggests that Socrates' willingness to let a drunk man repeatedly strike him without resistance or physical retaliation is akin to Jesus' teachings not to resist an evildoer and to turn the other cheek (cf. Matt 5:38–42). The appeal of such examples, Basil argues, is that such positive examples can be "recalled to memory" by the student in pivotal moments of decision-making, "for whoever has been instructed in these examples beforehand cannot after that distrust those precepts as utterly impossible to obey."[3] Such positive role models thus inspire students to make virtuous choices in their own lives.

From Basil's approach to pagan literature we can extrapolate an approach to how Christian educators can point their students to virtue in their engagement with non-Christian materials across all aspects of the curriculum. Teachers can, for example, help their students identify those places where the values of this world do not align with those of the Christian faith and push them towards understanding and then embracing Christian virtue. To illustrate this approach, consider the following lesson I have taught a U.S. History class on the effects of industrialization on Gilded Age America.

At the outset of this lesson, I task students with reading and analyzing texts by Andrew Carnegie and Russell Conwell, who each in his own way sought to justify the extreme levels of economic

3. Basil, "To Young Men," 7.

inequality resulting from industrialization. In his 1889 essay "Wealth," Carnegie, the famous steel magnate and philanthropist, drew on the ideas of Social Darwinism to argue that the widening gap between rich and poor was actually a positive thing. Carnegie actually suggests, directly against the historic Christian practice of almsgiving, that the rich should only help those who are willing to help themselves. Carnegie's articulation of the good life depends on the application of Darwin's "survival of the fittest" to human society, and this often causes my students to stop and question if this is in fact "gospel," as Carnegie puts it.

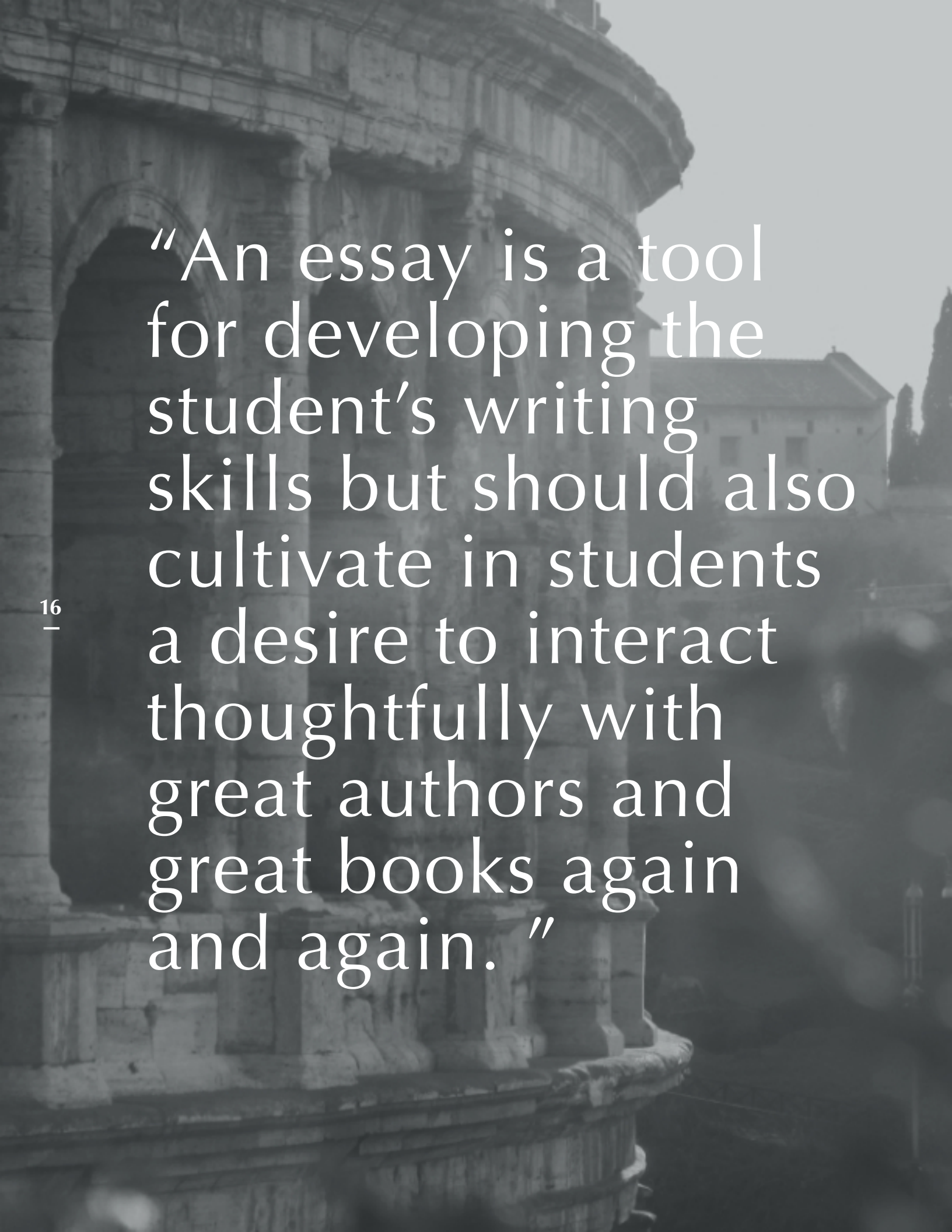
Likewise, in his famous 1890 lecture "Acres of Diamonds," Baptist minister Russell Conwell makes explicit his contention that God wants us to get rich; given that the poor are being punished by God for their sins, we should only help those who are truly deserving. With his nauseatingly self-congratulatory dialogue and exaggerated language, Conwell's vision of the good life offends my students. Rooted in consumerism and materialism, the *telos* is hardly different from that of modern society, and this sets it up nicely for further interrogation with my students. After all, I probe, does human flourishing not consist of going to the best college, getting a marketable degree, making a lot of money, and enjoying all the comforts of this world – all while giving back to the truly needy only out of one's "surplus"?

After having had students ascertain the view of human flourishing undergirding the approach to wealth found in Gilded Age America, I then have my students identify what the Bible and even the broader Christian tradition have to say about the subject. Beginning with the account of Jesus and the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17–22 pars.), we find that Jesus never promises material wealth as a reward for obedience, and that Jesus is very clear that costly economic stewardship is an essential aspect of Christian discipleship, as it demonstrates that the believer's true master is God and not Mammon (cf. Matt 6:24). *Contra* Carnegie and Conwell, Christians must be sacrificially generous and not proud, refusing to lord their wealth over the poor or claim moral superiority over them.

Students conclude the lesson by reading portions of Basil's powerful homily "To the Rich", which features a sharp yet beautiful call to economic justice that challenges them to reflect on their own attitudes towards money. While not losing sight of differences in historical context and interpretive challenges, this activity nevertheless provides an opportunity to challenge students' natural inclinations as Americans towards materialism and consumerism. Basil himself serves as a powerful example of virtuous living in this regard; after his baptism, Basil sold some of the inheritance he had received and distributed the proceeds to the poor.

It is not just in the humanities that teachers can use their curriculum to invite students to a life of virtue. In a society that continues to experience rapid cultural and technological change, it will be exceedingly important to train Christians who are able to engage these difficult topics from the perspective of biblical truth. Let us, then, following the example of St. Basil, boldly train our students to pursue virtue as they grow into the full measure of Christ's likeness.

Kyle R. Hughes (PhD, Radboud University Nijmegen) is Lower School Principal at The Stonehaven School in Marietta, GA. This article is excerpted and adapted from Dr. Hughes' book *Teaching for Spiritual Formation: A Patristic Approach to Christian Education in a Convulsed Age* (Cascade, 2022). For more on Basil of Caesarea's vision for forming students in faith and virtue, see chapter 4, "What Are We Teaching? Basil of Caesarea and Training in Virtue." The book is available now.



“An essay is a tool for developing the student’s writing skills but should also cultivate in students a desire to interact thoughtfully with great authors and great books again and again. ”

Good Men or Good Grades? *Assessing Students Classically*

Jason Modar, *Regents Academy, Nacogdoches, TX*

Classical educators are seeking to turn education back into what it once was: the liberating force of humanity and the cultivator of human souls. However, parents and college admissions departments often define academic success today by elements such as high GPAs and high standardized test scores. "Why is my child's grade so low?" and "Can I do some extra credit to increase my grade?" are common questions from parents and students. While these questions deserve a legitimate response regarding the status that numerical grades possess within the milieu of education, they also betray an underlying philosophy of education often at odds with liberal arts training. The question we all have to ask ourselves is "Do we want good students or good grades?" The purpose of this article is not to turn the classroom into a safe space devoid of objective standards. The purpose is to get parents to question the primacy of numerical grades and better understand why classical Christian schools are far more interested in partnering with God as co-laborers in the formation of children's character than they are in supplying children with a form of currency called "grades."

When placed on a timeline in the history of education, grading is a new phenomenon. It was not until the mid-19th century that grades started to become the established norm seen today. How, then, did the ancients, medievals, and early moderns build Western Civilization without grades? How is it possible to be sure that an author such as Jane Austen is worth reading if there is no access to her report card? Yet, the ancients, medievals, and early moderns built Western Civilization without grades. Authors such as Jane Austen, published before grading became orthodoxy, were deemed worthy to read. The report card did not matter; Austen was worth reading because her work was true, good, and beautiful. Western Civilization was built because its builders believed in and operated out of the objective standards of truth, goodness, and beauty. Truth is God's revelation of His ordered, reasonable, objective world, and that truth is able to be discovered by man. Goodness is the excellence of a thing or person, while beauty is the loveliness of and a desire for the true and the good.

With a proper understanding of truth, beauty, and goodness, a look at something false, ugly, and bad is worth consideration. Dr. Brian Williams, Dean of Templeton Honors College, explains in a series of lectures, "[I]f we habituate students to get good grades, we nurture them towards *curiositas* and we undermine attempts to cultivate their intellectual, affective, and moral, and spiritual formation."[1] What is *curiositas*? Meaning "curiosity" in Latin, *curiositas* is a vice that misuses the intellect to pursue knowledge for unsavory purposes. Such unsavory purposes include pursuing knowledge as a means of exerting power over others or as a means of getting good grades. In both instances, *curiositas* has landed on the shores like a horde of

1. Dr. Brian Williams, "The History of Grading" (Assessing Students Classically, Classical U/Classical Academic Press, 2019).

Scandinavians going a-Viking. A misuse of "knowledge" can also involve treating it like a cash cow whose sole purpose is to exchange it for financial aid and college acceptance letters. In contrast, classical educators want their students to love learning, be virtuous, and learn the arts that liberate them to be free men and women. Thus, there are better ways to assess students classically beyond the grind of grades.

Illustrations from athletics help to shed light on what assessing students classically looks like. No seasoned basketball coach gives his players grades on their jump shots. He corrects their footwork, the position of their body towards the basket, their release, and any other element of a jump shot in which they are deficient. The same kind of training ought to take place in the classroom. For example, students should receive more than the empty feedback of "you wrote a B essay." Their teachers ought to deliver specific, detailed, and timely feedback regarding the students' development as writers and critical thinkers. The goal is not to make Joe Student a 94% essay writer; the goal is to turn Joe into an eloquent young man who conveys his thoughts truthfully and beautifully with the written word.

Summative assessments, like tests, should never signal to students that the learning is over. Yes, tests can assess a student's development and understanding of learned material. Students waste tests, however, when they do not use the test itself as a tool for learning. An essay on *The Tempest* should neither signal that a student's time with Shakespeare has come to an end nor that writing essays on great pieces of literature can be dispensed with. An essay is a tool for developing the student's writing skills and should also cultivate in students a desire to interact thoughtfully with great authors and great books again and again.

I understand that I'm presenting something of an either/or fallacy with the title of this article. Of course, good students should be producing good grades and good grades ought to come from good students. Wanting both is fine and having both is doable. But, as C.S. Lewis points out in a letter, when the "second things" become the "first things," you lose both. Grades are an example of the "second things." Virtuous young men and women who love Christ and speak eloquently are the "first things" classical educators strive for.

The depth of this topic is beyond the scope of this article. I'll close with a thought experiment meant to challenge underlying assumptions that one may have regarding education. If you were freed completely from grades and a grading system, what would you have your students and your children do and how would you assess them? What would you want your son or daughter, or even yourself, to get out of their education if grades were no longer a part of the equation? Thoughtfully chewing on and answering those questions are worth their weight in gold.

Jason Modar teaches Economics, Logic, Rhetoric I, and Omnibus VI (Modernity II) in the Logic & Rhetoric School at Regents Academy. He managed to hoodwink his alma mater, William Jessup University, into awarding him with a degree in Bible & Theology. Before escaping to Texas and working at Regents, Jason worked at a Christian radio station in California. He and his wife, Kelsie, have been married for seven years. They have three daughters and a son. You will occasionally find Jason attempting to recapture his youth by playing basketball with Regent's students. Jason also likes to read, run, and write.

“Just as Victor and the Monster had a tragic flaw that doomed them from the very beginning, so government schools have always been tragically flawed.”

The Making of a Monster: *Frankenstein,* Transgenderism, and Government Education[1]

Rosaria Butterfield

I. Monsters of Free Love

Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley (1797–1850), author of *Frankenstein* (1818), was the daughter of two revolutions, the French Revolution and the first Feminist one. History credits her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, as the founder of western feminism. A journalist by profession and the author of both *The Vindication of the Rights of Man* and *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft became the live-in lover of radical political justice philosopher William Godwin after the revolution. Welcomed into their intellectual and literary circle were notables such as Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, philosopher Thomas Paine, inventor Benjamin Franklin, and politician Aaron Burr. Eschewing marriage as enforced female slavery, Godwin and Wollstonecraft cohabitated and only consented to marriage just before their daughter, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, was to be born, so as not to render this baby a bastard. Her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, died eleven days after giving birth because the attending physician did not wash his hands. Thus began Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin's inconsolably melancholy life.[2]

After Mary Wollstonecraft died, William Godwin married Mary Jane Claremont, a harried woman characterized by biographers as both resourceful and impatient. Young Mary lived with her older half-sister Fanny Imlay (from Mary Wollstonecraft's previous relationship with a soldier) and younger sister, Claire. Mary met Percy Shelley when she was a young teen, and he was an older, married man of 19. Percy Shelley became William Godwin's disciple and patron. He eventually abandoned his pregnant wife, Harriet, moved in with Godwin and the girls, and ran off with Mary and Claire, having first courted Mary at her dead mother's grave and later having a sexual relationship with both sisters. Percy, Mary, and Claire met up with Lord Byron and Byron's personal nurse John Polderi, and everywhere they traveled, they were known and despised as an "incest league." If the sexual "freedom" that William Godwin once extolled horrified his peers, the boundaries that his daughters now pushed flagrantly offended him. Such goes the inconsistent morality of a sexual warrior.

As a model of these next-generation sexual revolutionaries, perhaps it goes without saying that Percy advocated for the emerging vision of feminism too. The archetypal feminist man, he was a proponent of free love, communal living, and the right for a woman to choose her lovers and initiate sexual contact outside of marriage. Percy died in a boating accident, and when his body washed up on shore, Mary requested that his heart be cut out so that she could have it always. Some historians believe she slept with it under her pillow. Eventually, this decrepit wafer of flesh found its resting place between pages of *Adonais*, one of Percy's last books of poetry, where it was discovered two years after Mary's own death in 1852.

It may come as no surprise that death always seemed mingled with their creative work. One finds a trail of blood following in their wake wherever they went. In 1815, Mary gave birth to a baby girl who died shortly after delivery. In 1816, Percy's legitimate wife Harriet committed a double suicide, drowning herself and her unborn child in the Serpentine River (thus leaving one child dead and two children orphaned, since Percy's atheism had then rendered him an unfit father in the eyes of the law). That same year, Fanny Imlay, Mary's half-sister, also committed suicide in the Serpentine. A year later, Claire gave birth to a baby girl named Allegra, whom she surrendered to the father, Lord Byron, when Byron decided that he despised her. It was during this time that Mary Shelly wrote her famous novel, *Frankenstein*. Abandon now any longing to sentimentalize the past as an idyllic world, only recently ejected from Eden

1. A version of this paper was delivered as a Plenary talk at the Repairing the Ruins Conference, Association of Classical Christian Schools, Dallas, TX, June 2021.

2. See Marilyn Gaull, *English Romanticism: The Human Context*. New York: WW Norton & Company, 1988: 247-249.

when prayer was driven out of government schools in the 1960s. No, Mary Shelley's life and her monsters of "free love" remind us that evil is not only a modern problem.[3]

II. Fated for Destruction

Frankenstein is a gothic novel and is considered the founding literary work of the horror mode. The story has three narrators and uses the literary device of frame narrative, which legitimizes the strange and supernatural tale it contains by positioning the most logical and reliable narrator as the one who bookends the fiendish tale. It tells the story of a student of natural philosophy, Victor Frankenstein, who rejects the provincial expectations of his professors and instead works himself into madness by creating life out of body parts he desecrates and steals from graveyards. He is delirious with lust over the idea of creating something that will render him a god to be worshiped. But when he succeeds in bringing the Monster to life, he despises and rejects it with a fury twice that of the lust that fueled his rewriting of God's creation ordinance. He banishes his Monster, collapses in sickness and guilt, but is later nursed back to health by his childhood friend Henry Clerval. When a letter from his father reports that his brother William had been strangled and that their loyal housekeeper was now on trial for his murder, Victor feels a deep foreboding that the Monster he unleashed (and hasn't seen now for years) is responsible. Victor knows this information could spare Justine's execution and false conviction. He knows his silence condemns Justine to execution, but his pride outweighs his guilt, and he passively watches her execution, all the while knowing the blood is on his hands. Trying to flee from his responsibility, he travels to Geneva.

At Geneva, he meets his Monster again. At this point in the novel, the third narration takes place. This one features the Monster telling Victor his story of how he came of age, how he understands his origin and destiny, how he learned to read and speak, and what his creational worldview is. The Monster deeply wants to tell his tale in the style of Bildungsroman, but he can never achieve the optimism or dodge the doom of being one of this novel's tragic heroes. Because his creation was wrong from its inception, he is fated for destruction. The Monster's narrative frame carries hefty worldview weight, made clear by the novel's epigraph, taken from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay to mold me man? Did I solicit thee from darkness to promote me?" (Book X, 743-745)[4]. This epigraph stands as a beacon for the Monster's classical reading list, which includes Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Johann Wolfgang Goethe's 1774 epistolary suicide novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther.* The Monster's hope is that he can read his way into humanity. Through good books, the Monster learns to cast his murderous rampages in Rousseauian light. Like Goethe's Werther, he feels himself a victim despite all the evidence that condemns him as the perpetrator. Victor has his reasons, and so does the Monster. He murders because he was rejected. It wasn't his fault.

Frankenstein's Monster has symbolized any number of modern horrors, from the dangers of having a bachelor creating life in a laboratory to the botched surgeries of transgenderism. Whenever someone violently tries to make something good out of some atheistic desire contrary to the Good, it is always a tragedy.

The Monster learns to speak and read by watching others, usually through holes in boards or windows in the dark of night. Indeed, the Monster is always on the outside looking in. After learning to read, he serendipitously finds in his jacket pocket Victor's journal that recounted his hideous origin. Sickened by his birth story and repulsed by his reflection in a pool, he desperately tries to make friends. Each rejection is more painful and more violent than the previous one. Confessing the murder of William and the framing of Justine for that murder, the Monster demands that Victor make him a wife. He wants someone like him. He wants someone who is similarly trapped and cannot reject him. Because Victor has already violated the Creation Ordinance

3. See Miranda Seymour, *Mary Shelley*, London: Simon & Schuster, 2000, and Janet Todd, ed., *A Wollstonecraft Anthology*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1977.

4. John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1674). Edited by Rebekah Merkle. Moscow, ID: Logos Press, 2015.

by creating the Monster, he feels compelled to make the Monster a wife. It's difficult not to see Victor as the prototype of the modern man for whom gay marriage looks like a good and sensible solution. Victor is a pluralist.

But this second time, as Victor is back in the laboratory making another monster, he no longer has lustful delusions of being the worshiped idol of this new race. Victor knows that his creation will reject him and that there is nothing in this for him. Filled with rage at this attack on his pride, Victor viciously rips the Monster's bride apart with his bare hands and dumps her lifeless and dismembered body in the sea. The Monster, who always seems to lurk behind a window, door, or tree, sees the whole thing in plain view and plots revenge. He tells Victor that he will see him on his wedding night. Victor flees to Ireland, where the body of Henry Clerval washes up the strand, and Victor is held on suspicion of his murder. Eventually found innocent, Victor condescends to marry Elizabeth, who becomes the next of the Monster's victims on her wedding night. (I know. Who saw that one coming?)

The Monster has killed everything Victor loved. With nothing left to live for, Victor becomes like his Creature. Isolated. Rejected. He decides he must hunt down and kill the Monster. He pursues the Monster through Europe and Russia and finally ends up in the Arctic Tundra, the Monster always eluding him. Lest the reader forget this is a frame narrative, this point in the story marks the end of Victor's narration. With a boat stuck on the ice in the middle of the frozen tundra, Victor finishes his tale and dies. It is here that the bookend narrator, Robert Walton, picks up the narrative thread. Robert is a reasonable guy. When the Monster appears at the window—always on the outside looking in—Robert calls on him to stay. Never before had anyone called him to come inside. So touched by the gesture, the Monster falls apart. His grief and remorse are profound. Without a battle of wills with his creator, the Monster has nothing to live for. He leaves—returns to the outside—to take his own life.

III. I, the Miserable and Abandoned

Frankenstein's Monster has symbolized any number of modern horrors, from the dangers of having a bachelor creating life in a laboratory to the botched surgeries of transgenderism. Whenever someone violently tries to make something good out of some atheistic desire contrary to the Good, it is always a tragedy, and Frankenstein's Monster has symbolized this for over 200 years. The novel's two protagonists—the Atheist Creator and the Monster—are tragic heroes, who suffer deeply because of the combination of pride, the malicious actions of others, and the supernatural powers that contravene. This is partly the meaning of Mary Shelley's allusion to the "Modern Prometheus" in the book's subtitle. Like all tragic heroes, Victor and the Monster embody a recognizable worldview—in this case, a dark romanticism. But what were the tragic flaws that Victor and the Monster embodied? What does this mean for the classical teacher, and how can we recognize the tragic flaws afflicting our society today?

The first tragic flaw was The Empathy Problem. The first narrator, who inhabits the outer literary frame, is Robert Walton, a reckless explorer in the Arctic tundra who writes letters to his civilized sister back in England and dreams of finding a friend who can empathize with his passion for breaking all of the rules for the glory of discovering new lands. The operative word here is "empathize." Both the protagonist, Victor Frankenstein, and the frame narrator, Robert Walton, desire empathy, not sympathy. It's important for the classical Christian educator to recognize the difference. Sympathy acknowledges the truth of suffering and acts with compassion. The sympathizer can offer care and help "with suffering," as the literal meaning of the word suggests. In contrast, empathy puts emotion just beyond the reach of moral judgment and registers all suffering in the experiential terms of the listener, who offers nothing apart from the existential hope that misery in company is somehow less miserable (which it's not). Empathy, a relatively new word, means "to suffer in." Robert is the only character who learns the value of sympathy and thus is the only character who learns from the tragic hero's fatal flaw of desiring empathy over sympathy.[5]

The second tragic flaw was The Origin Problem. Victor Frankenstein makes a horrible Creator because his creation was a revolutionary rejection of the historic Christian faith. Victor wants to replace God and cares nothing about God's perfect design for humanity, which clearly demonstrates his Promethean idolatry:

5. Joe Rigney, "Do You Feel My Pain? Empathy, Sympathy, and Dangerous Virtues." *Desiring God*, May 2, 2020. Accessed December 13, 2022. https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/do-you-feel-my-pain

> A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs. (49)[6]

Adding insult to injury, his act of creation is arbitrary and careless. He didn't even bother to collect enough skin to cover the Creature's internal organs, an oversight that he didn't attend to until the Monster came to life:

> I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs….His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath. (52)

As an atheist god, Victor has nothing to give his creation but sin and misery. The Monster is denied the Imago Dei. When the Creature gives his final soliloquy before his suicide, he says, "I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on. Even now my blood boils at the recollection of this injustice" (219). This ranks as the most intriguing coming-of-age line in Western literature, and the only one where the word abortion is used as a present-tense term of identity. And why does the Creature feel that he *is* — ontologically speaking — an abortion? Because the God of the universe did not make him in His image. In Mary Shelley's world, human creation is a violent act of expulsion, which only moves a person into further isolation, where survival depends on self-invention.

The third tragic flaw of the protagonists is the Epistemological Problem. Mary Shelley was both a product of and a proponent of literary romanticism, a worldview of the 18th century that valued feelings and emotions as central to finding and telling the truth. In romanticism, emotions are epistemological; from this posture is born the postmodern idea of "my truth" or "your truth." Truth in romanticism lurks within, only unearthed and legitimized by the empathy and affirmation of another. This romantic epistemology foregrounds Victor's worldview. "No sooner did that idea cross my imagination," he says, "than I became convinced of its truth….The mere presence of the idea was an irresistible proof of the fact" (71). Facts are not observable but rather internal intuitions that take shape because of the empathy and affirmation of someone else. If union with Christ is not your identity, then your identity will demand affirmation from some outside source.

IV: Educational Frankensteins in the Business of Monster-Making

Consider an allegorical interpretation. Government Schools in the US are not unlike Frankenstein's Monster, and they have always been so. In today's post-Obergefell,[7] post-Bostock,[8] and post-Respect for Marriage Act[9] world, Government schools are the primary engine advancing LGBTQ+ politics and the dangerously false redefinition of personhood. In her groundbreaking book, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters*, Wall Street Journal writer Abigail Shrier recounts a letter that she received from the program coordinator for the Los Angeles Unified School District.[10] The letter read:

> Dear Mx. Shrier,
>
> The role of schools has changed…Technically, we are an educational institution. But schools have expanded to be the hub for a lot more social searches and looking more holistically and emotionally at what's going on with children. Looking at schools as a source of social justice, our role continues to expand, and the outreach now is profound. (61)

Shrier further explains,

> In June 2019, the policy-making arm of the California Teachers Association (CTA) met in Los Angeles at the Westin Bonaventure Hotel. On the agenda was a new business item…This was a proposal to allow trans-identified minor students (ages 12 and up) to leave campus during school hours to obtain gender hormone treatments without parental permission (59).

This is now the law of the land. Because gender ideology (transgender support and LGBTQ+ affirmation) is not part of sex education but rather mainstreamed into anti-bullying measures in public schools, parents who put their children in government schools cannot exempt them from this indoctrination. And, Shrier asks, "who are the bullies from whom our children must be protected? They go by 'mom' and 'dad' (77).

6. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*, or *The Modern Prometheus* (1818). Ed. James Reiger. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
7. Obergefell v Hodges, Supreme Court case which extended the right to marry to same-sex couples in 2015.
8. Bostock v Clayton, Supreme Court case which extended Civil Rights to the LGBTQ+ spectrum in 2020.
9. The Orwellian codification of gay "marriage" signed into federal law by President Joe Biden on December 13, 2022.
10. Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters.* Washington, DC: Regnery Press, 2020.

The last chapter of her book is entitled "The Way Back." The way back for children whose government school sponsored LGBTQ+ indoctrination has grafted them into this Frankensteinian self-mutilating cult is to remove the child from the school. Shrier is not a Christian. Nor is she against government school. But she is raising a clarion call for parents. And she points out that this cultish anti-parent LGBTQ+ affirming culture is in the posh private schools, too.

Just as Victor and the Monster had a tragic flaw that doomed them from the very beginning, so government schools have always been tragically flawed. The biggest problems in government school are not the LGBTQ+ takeover. That is merely the outworking and symptom of its tragic flaw. The biggest tragic flaw is that government schools have violated God's order for the government of the family:

> And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou fittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou rises up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand and they shall be as frontlet between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house and on thy gates. (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)

The problem with Government education is not merely that prayer is prohibited or that drag queens are commended. The problem is that government schools were born as a rejection of the historic Christian faith and as a usurpation of the biblical government of the family. Government schools carry with them the same tragic flaws that we rehearsed in *Frankenstein*: the empathy problem, the origin problem, and the epistemology problem. Monsters and the egomaniacs who create them leave a wake of death and destruction behind them. Lest we forget, Frankenstein was born of the romantic movement in England, a movement that elevated emotions and feelings to the level of epistemological integrity. Today, we bear out these scars in the form of "expressive individualism," the idea that emotions are as much an integrated truth as an arm or a leg would be.[11] Today, failing to affirm someone's emotional truth is equivalent to a violent amputation of their personhood.

Today we are hearing a growing concern with government schools, and voices are rising from within and from without Christian churches, families, and organizations. All of this leads to some essential questions: are we who teach in Christian Classical education ready to aid the war refugees from government schools that we will see emerge in the coming years? Are we ready to help fellow Christians get out of Government schools? For those who are tasked with building and guarding the culture of their classical Christian schools, how should administrators guide and help parents wrestling with these issues? And what is our assignment from God as Classical Christian teachers? What is our responsibility to Christian parents who place their covenant children in government schools because they currently don't have any other good options? In response, I believe that we have four assignments:

1. We need to speak the whole biblical truth on the matter: no Christian child should have to go to a government school.
2. We need to make room for more students. Administrators must do this wisely, with a variety of creative means that support and educate parents as well as students.
3. We need to work with our churches and schools to provide funding for Christian families who need help.
4. We need to train Classical Christian teachers who love the Lord Jesus Christ and who love and incarnate the wisdom, virtue, knowledge, rigor, and light that the Bible calls us to embody.

This is our moment. Let us resolve to do our work well and to open our arms wide to include those who do not yet know the delight of Christian Classical education. Unless we learn how to help Christian families caught in government schools, the future of our social order will resemble Frankenstein's soulless monster: barren, self-destructive, and hell-bent.

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11. Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publications, 2020: 79-80.

Social Media or The Savior? *The Answer to the Adolescent Quest for Identity*

Jason Valley, *Heritage Classical Academy*

Sophie, I'd love to help you with your capstone project on screen time. Out of curiosity, why did you choose this topic?"

"Well, Dr. Valley, I struggled with social media over the past couple years, so I want to understand more about it."

Social media. These two words together possess the potency to send shivers up and down our spines as we, as parents and teachers, become concerned about our students finding their way into this ominous world. Because of the ubiquity of screen-based devices with social media capabilities, the natural progression of adolescence today entails the heedless wandering of adolescents into the wardrobe between two worlds. We will call these the natural world, where physical reality occurs, and the virtual world, where all transpires behind a screen. Irrespective of our opinions about which they choose, the evidence shows that the overwhelming majority of adolescents today (90% - 97%) exit the wardrobe into cyberspace.[1] We are all well aware of the amount of productive time that screens consume, but the true danger lies in their ability to consume one's sense of self.

Sophie, an 8th grade student at a classical Christian school, contacted me for an interview as an "expert" on the topic of screen time as I had recently completed my dissertation on adolescent time use on screens. During my research, one particular construct continuously surfaced and caused me to tremble at the implications of its vulnerability in the virtual world of adolescent social media: *identity*. Just like Sophie, adolescent classical Christian students are by no means isolated in or immune from this battle with social media and its influence on identity.

According to renowned psychologist, Erik Erikson, identity formation is arguably the most crucial developmental task undertaken during adolescence.[2] Identity formation in adolescence can simply be defined as the process by which adolescents formulate an understanding of who they are. It is a pilgrimage on which adolescents seek out a true sense of self. (Please take note of the word *true* here).

Doubtless there has never been a time in which this age group is more confused about identity and simultaneously crying out to know who they are. A multitude of external sources in the lives of adolescents are readily available to offer an answer: family, friends, teachers, coaches, pastors, celebrities, etc. However, one of these sources of adolescent identity impartation sits in sinister silence; behind the curtain awaits perhaps the most intriguing and alluring, yet deceptive of all identity gurus, the world of social media.

It is well-established that identity formation is a significant motivating factor for adolescent participation on social media. Online participation fosters an opportunity for identity exploration through innovative and exciting avenues. Adolescents utilize features of social media to disclose information about themselves, allowing them to flexibly experiment with self-exploration

1. E.A. Vogels, R. Gelles-Watnick, and N. Massarat. August 2022. "Teens, Social Media and Technology 2022." Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-technology-2022/.

2. E.H. Erikson. 1968. *Identity: Youth and Crisis.* New York, NY: Norton.

and desirable identities. Moreover, adolescents who continuously attempt to define themselves use social media to strive for positive feedback to help them perceive how their identity fits into their world. Identity becomes formed through the validation and feedback adolescents receive about their profiles. The feedback they receive enables them to evaluate the appropriateness of their attitudes, behaviors, and values, thus reinforcing the formation of their identities.

Many adolescents striving to discover who they are and how they fit into the world are unwittingly at the mercy of social media to provide answers to such questions. Disturbingly, there is a world (and an enemy) out there that yearns to tell the youth of today who they are. Because adolescents today spend approximately three hours per day on social media, the screen is arguably the main vehicle by which the villain attempts to accomplish his task. In numerous respects, he is deplorably reveling in substantial success.

I have talked with many parents, Christians and non-Christians, who are desperately longing for their adolescent children to escape the trap of deception of identity malformation imposed by the ethos of social media. I have also talked with many parents who are on their faces, praying that their pre-adolescent children never taste the forbidden fruit of social media identity distortion. Furthermore, many of the adolescents with whom I have chatted, who admittedly spend an extreme amount of time on social media, are patently confused about who they are.

Now, causation between time on social media and identity confusion cannot be inferred here, but I think it is safe to say there just might be a correlation. Identity confusion ensues because the "truth" about who adolescents find themselves to be through social media cannot be true. In the social media world, whom one finds him-herself to be, is constantly changing based on validation (or the lack thereof), feedback from peers, or the measuring of oneself up to his or her peers, which often leads to either exalted or despairing thoughts about oneself, both of which can be perilous. Is it a wonder why we are witnessing unprecedented levels of adolescent anxiety and depression?

But there is an issue with the prevailing concept of *identity formation*. Formation requires the manipulation, or bringing together of different elements to construct and shape a whole. Formation is suggestive of change. Thus, according to secular thinkers such as Erikson, identity formation implies that who we are is an evolving concept. If this were indeed true, a self-understanding of identity is tantamount to a grasping of the wind! Into what, exactly, is identity being formed, and when does identity finally arrive? And what elements, exactly, are adolescents supposed to bring together to form themselves? It is clear that social media identity formation is an exercise in futility.

So the question becomes, is identity really capable of change?

So the question becomes, is identity really capable of change? Because I am a classical Christian educator, I would be remiss to forgo examining the Latin origin of the word identity. The English word, identity, derives from the Latin word, *identitas*, or "sameness, oneness," or "state of being the same." Mathematics is also at our disposal to help in this understanding of the unchanging nature of identity. Can we imagine attempting to *form* the concept of 3+2=5? May it never be so! (As Andrew Kern submits, 3+2=6 is quite unsettling to the soul!)[3] In reflecting on the laws of identity with respect to addition and multiplication, 0 + any number always equals that number, and 1 times any number always equals that number.

3. Andrew Kern. 2020. "Andrew Kern on Classical Education, Part 2." YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zClEAsOOts4.

“Many adolescents striving to discover who they are and how they fit into the world are unwittingly at the mercy of social media to provide answers to such questions.”

We cannot undervalue the meaning of the word, *always*. Truth is always the same. If the truth of who I am, then, is my identity, my identity is always the same. So, for the adolescent attempting to form his or her identity from the world of social media, any resolution to his or her quest will result in disharmony. Perhaps our adolescent students, who are engaging in identity formation online, are experiencing a bit of 3+2=6 within their own souls.

Adolescents crave understanding into the question of *"Who am I?"* This most important question is not satisfied by a flimsy response that alludes to a personality trait, a skin color or gender, a particular role of the adolescent, or a list of achievements. This is a much deeper question that demands a response grounded in eternal truth, because embedded in the question is an equally important question: *"What is my place in this world?"* Classical Christian education is well equipped to illuminate the answers to both of these vital questions.

Fundamentally, classical Christian education is a relentless pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty. The pursuit of these transcendentals by means of the liberal arts prepares students for an arrival at the throne of God where they cannot help but "behold the beauty of the Lord and . . . Meditate in His temple" (Ps. 27:4 NASB). As they do so, they come to find out about their King and who He says *they are*. It is the King who made each one of them, and because He has made them, *He alone has the right to identify them.* The soul of the classical Christian student is cultivated to recognize truth as an eternal concept that is found in the Logos, the person of Jesus Christ. It is Truth who calls them by name (John 10:3), bestowing upon them their true identity. Furthermore, classical Christian education is a quest for virtue and wisdom, and the attainment of such illuminates the students' vision of their own souls to discover how they fit into the world that God has created. The adolescent student is ultimately emboldened to exit the wardrobe into the kingdom; the true world in which the student can explore his or her true self.

"Students, 3+2=6."

"Noooo, Dr. Valley!"

"Why are you so distraught by this?"

"Because the answer is 5! Our souls long for the true answer!"

The true answer, as pursued in the classical Christian classroom, must include the truth of who our students are and how they fit into God's story: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9 NIV). The fires of social media adolescent identity formation are extinguished in light of this glorious truth. As we parents and teachers enter into the new year, may we embrace the urgency of reminding our students who they are, because if we neglect this duty, someone else out there is chomping at the bit to do so, and he can be found hiding behind a screen.

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COMMONPLACE

The Wiseman's Folly: *A Reflection on Foolishness and Wisdom*

Claire McNeill, *Trinitas Christian School*

What do we picture when we think of a wise man? The image we typically conjure up is a man who is reputable, well respected in his community, and sought by all for his sagacity. He is a man of considerable rank and influence. In most of our imaginings he is surrounded by wealth, like Solomon or the Magi. In contrast, what do we picture when we think of a fool? One who is laughed at, scorned; when he is not ignored, he is either despised or held as ridiculous. These associations are firmly fixed in the minds of men; folly and wisdom are the difference between a child and a man, a jester and a king.

Shakespeare was well aware of this concept in the writing of *King Lear*; throughout the play he manipulates and challenges our ideas of wisdom and folly through their expression in his characters. Lear starts out as a figure of authority; he is a father obeyed by his daughters and a king respected by his subjects. The catalyst of this tragedy, however, is the rashness and foolishness of Lear's actions. His wealth does not establish his security; it is the division of his wealth that causes his daughters to rise against him. His rank does not add to his credibility; it is the pride of his position that separates him from his favorite daughter and most loyal servant. By forsaking the council of those faithful to him, he ensures his own destruction. Lear's madness can largely be attributed to senility, but the play still illustrates that folly invariably leads to destruction. Shakespeare closely associates folly with deception and greed, as we see in the play's clearest protagonists. Regan and Goneril are initially praised for their flattery, but time reveals the wickedness of their motives. The sisters' and Edmund's greed for power and material gain dissolve any sense of family loyalty, which ultimately leads to their deaths. The actions of these characters directly imitate those of the Immoral Woman in Proverbs, who is the embodiment of folly. She leads men astray with sweet lies and flattery, but Solomon makes it abundantly clear that "her house leads down to death" (Prov. 2:18)[1]. The fool of Proverbs is outside of God's promises because he has forsaken His law. Just like King Lear, he rejects wise counsel and is easily captured by poisonous lies.

The fool of Proverbs is outside of God's promises because he has forsaken His law. Just like King Lear, he rejects wise counsel and is easily captured by poisonous lies.

1. 1982. The New King James Version. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

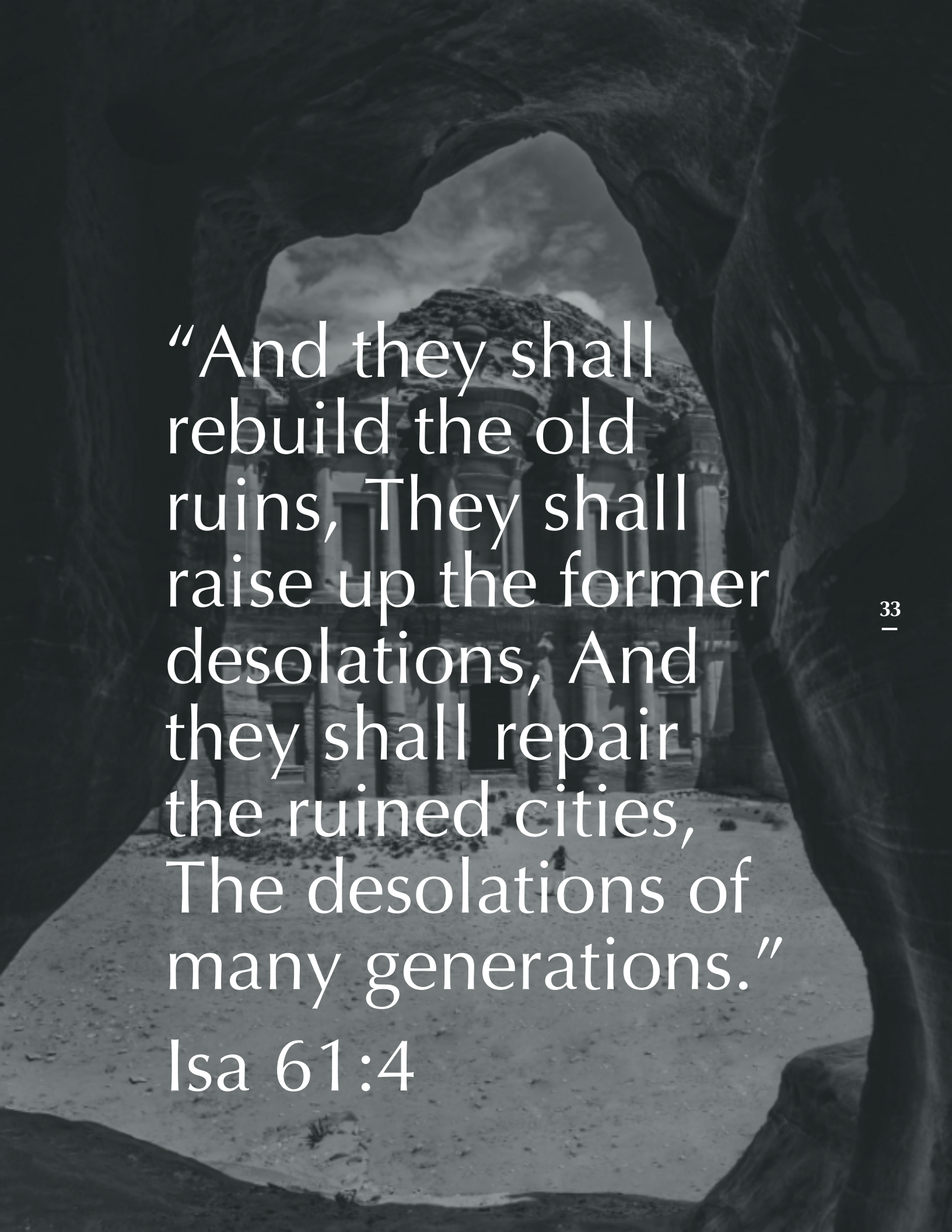
Throughout Proverbs, the Immoral Woman is contrasted with Lady Wisdom. Wisdom is not a passive character; rather she is illustrated in the first two chapters as crying out in the open squares, calling men to come and receive knowledge. She speaks truth without fear. Those who are most faithful to King Lear are those who come into opposition with him for his own good. Cordelia's unwillingness to flatter or lie to her father is falsely interpreted as ingratitude but is really an expression of her loyalty. Cordelia's honor and wisdom are further emphasized by her willingness to stand by the truth in the face of personal loss. Kent, rather than letting Lear carry on blindly in his folly, addresses the King's abnormal behavior and seeks to reason with him. Even the character of the Fool shows wisdom by warning Lear of the destruction that his folly will inevitably lead to. He rebukes Lear for trying to suppress the truth, comparing it to a dog being whipped and locked in a kennel. He even offers Lear a few words of practical wisdom: "Have more than thou showest, / Speak less than thou knowest, / Lend less than thou owest."[2] All of these are lessons that can be found in Proverbs, and that Lear can undoubtedly stand to learn from. In every circumstance, wisdom is bound up in the idea of Truth; it adheres to a law that transcends the inconstancy of the world. Lady Wisdom advises the reader to know God's laws intimately, to "bind them around your neck" and "write them on the tablet of your heart" (Prov. 3:3). Cordelia and Kent are bound by loyalty, to the king, to friends, and to family; they are bound by honor and by conscience to preserve truth at any personal cost.

Proverbs suggests that to gain wisdom, we cannot simply engage God's law with our reason, but we must also embrace it with our hearts. Pascal comes to the same conclusion in his *Pensées*: "That is why those to whom God has given religious faith by moving their hearts are very fortunate, and feel quite legitimately convinced, but to those who do not have it we can only give such faith through reasoning, until God gives it by moving their heart, without which faith is only human and useless for salvation."[3] The wise and fortunate man is one who loves God's law, delights in it, and meditates on it; the foolish man is he who rejects it.

Claire McNeill is a senior at Trinitias Christian School in Pensacola, FL. She will be attending Hillsdale College in the Fall where she will be pursuing a degree in English with minor concentrations in Art and the Classics. Claire is the winner of the national ACCS Blakey Prize in Fine Arts in Drawing in 2022. She also has received numerous essay and presentation awards including the Liberty and Learning Scholarship award at Hillsdale College and 1st place in the 2022 Chrysostom Oratory competition for Trinitas Christian School.

2. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear,* Edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (Folger Shakespeare Library).

3. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées,* Translated and edited by A.J. Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin Books, 1995).



“And they shall rebuild the old ruins, They shall raise up the former desolations, And they shall repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations.”

Isa 61:4

An Exercise in Coalescence

Kate Spraul, Bailey Lamar, and Jessi Wenger, *Rockbridge Academy*

Juniors in Monica Godfrey's Ancient Literature class at Rockbridge Academy were asked to cross-apply ideas between works and examine ideas they had studied recently, particularly *The Odyssey* and *The Oresteia*, with a focus on Christian worldview. Following are the prompts and answers given by three of her students.

Kate Spraul

Prompt: Where do you see the need for the Gospel highlighted in Ancient Literature?

In the *Oresteia*, the chorus longs for a light, a beacon of hope, to end the curse of the House of Atreus. First, they look to Agamemnon, but Clytemnestra kills him out of revenge, and the curse lives on. Then they put their hope in Orestes, but he kills Clytemnestra, and more conflict ensues. After Orestes kills his mother, he seeks to be cleansed, purged from his sin. Orestes prays to Apollo, "Lord Apollo, you know well the rules of justice, / know them well. Now learn compassion, too. / No one doubts your power to do great things" (*Eum*. 88-90). Orestes knows he is a sinner in need of a Savior. He knows he deserves punishment for his crime, but he is asking for forgiveness, for mercy. Throughout the *Oresteia*, there is a longing for mercy to be a part of justice. Aeschylus sets up Athens as the beacon of hope and light, the city of justice. Aeschylus is saying that we can save ourselves and that democracy and persuasion is the solution to all problems. Ultimately, those human ideals fail and the gods do as well because they were made up by humans and carry out human ideals. They do not break the curse of sin. The ancients need a king who will break the curse of sin and death once for all. This king is Jesus, the light of the world, the beacon of hope for mankind. He died on the cross, paying the penalty that we deserved, satisfying justice, and he rose from the dead, defeating sin and death once and for all. He frees man from the curse and offers mercy, forgiveness, and eternal life for all those who believe and trust in him as their Savior. This Gospel is the beacon of light and hope that the Ancients need and long for in their literature.

Bailey Lamar

Prompt: Where do you see the need for the Gospel highlighted in Ancient Literature?

The need for the gospel permeates all of Ancient Literature and is clearly presented in Homer's *Odyssey*. *The Odyssey* is about an *andra*, a great man or hero, who has finished fighting the war and starts his long journey home. On his journey he meets Achilles, another hero who died a glorious death fighting in battle. Achilles' afterlife is most significant, because he was the greatest Greek warrior, and so was entitled to the best afterlife. When Odysseus asks him how he is, though, he says, "No winning words about death to me, shining Odysseus! / By god, I'd rather slave on earth for another man-- / some dirt poor tenant farmer who scrapes to keep alive-- / than ruled down here over all these breathless dead" (11.555-8). Achilles would rather become a poor, inglorious slave for a poor inglorious master than be ruler of death. Achilles' only hope is to live on in the minds of earthly men through his glory and his son. This is a depressing option, but it is the only option without Christ. All people in all times know the reality of death, and the Greeks were no different.

Achilles shows a longing for eternal life, not in hell, nor on earth, but something greater. He shows that he needs the redemption of Christ that results in eternal life. Therefore, Achilles' longings reveal the need for the Gospel.

Jessi Wenger

Prompt: Using Lewis' essay "On Reading Old Books," demonstrate the value of reading *The Odyssey* or *The Oresteia*. Explain how Lewis' argument has been proven true in your reading of these books.

Lewis' essay "On Reading Old Books" demonstrates the value of reading books from another time. He says, "Not, of course, that there is any magic about the past. People were no cleverer then than they are now; they made just as many mistakes as we. But not the same mistakes. They will not flatter us in the errors we are already committing; and their own errors, being now open and palpable, will not endanger us" (Lewis, 2). Here Lewis is saying that old books are beneficial for us to read because they do not encourage us to continue in sins that our culture is blind to. Our culture tempts us all the time, and we often do not ever realize we are being tempted because we are so used to being surrounded by the sinful desires of our culture. This does not mean that people of the past did not struggle with sinful desires. They merely struggled with different ones or struggled with the same ones but in different ways.

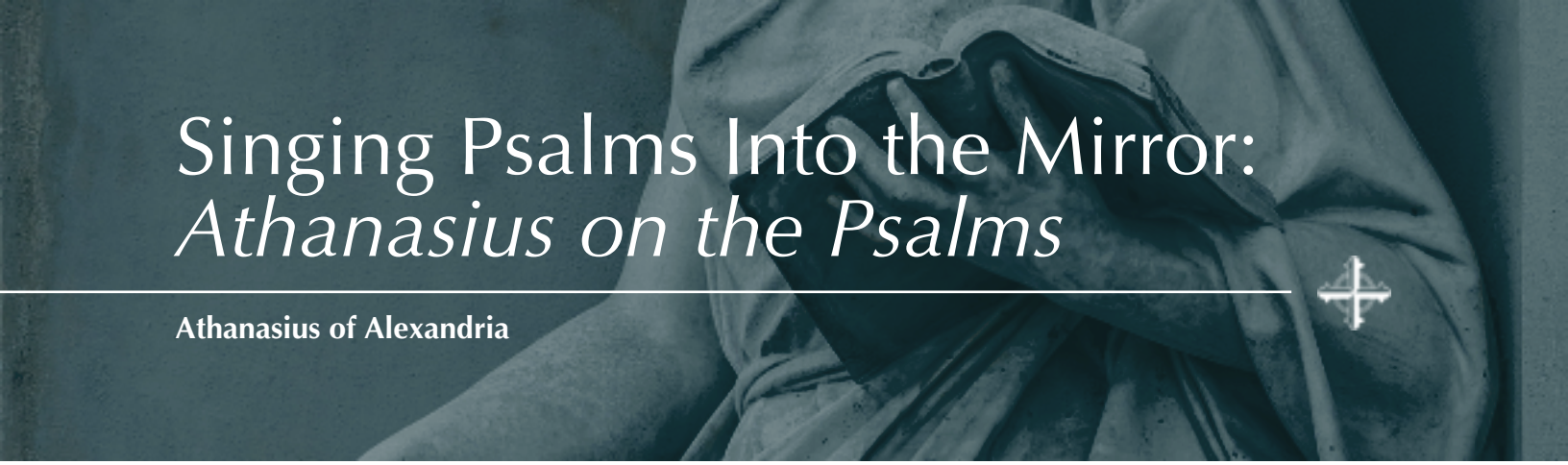
This argument is definitely proven true in my experience of reading *The Odyssey*. In our culture, happiness is often seen as the highest good. Our culture often tells us to put ourselves first and to do whatever it takes to make ourselves happy .The ancient Greeks did not think this way. Odysseus is often put through suffering by Athena. When the suitors are mistreating Odysseus, it says, "Athena had no mind to let the brazen suitors / hold back now from their heart-rending insults-- / she meant to make the anguish cut still deeper / into the core of Laertes' son, Odysseus" (Homer 1997, 20.316-9). Here Athena wants to put Odysseus through suffering. This is because he gains glory through suffering. His time at war and on his journey, while painful, is what earns him his great name. While personal glory should not be our primary goal as Christians, this still reminds us that happiness is not the greatest good. God can accomplish great things through suffering, including saving humanity.

Kate Spraul is a junior at Rockbridge Academy in Crownsville, MD. She spends most of her free time in the water as a year-round competitive swimmer for the Naval Academy Aquatic Club in Annapolis, MD. Her favorite things include her two happy golden retrievers, playing her guitar, and reading good literature with a cup of hot tea. Kate hopes to major in English Literature while chasing her dream of swimming at the collegiate level. She and her family attend Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC.

Bailey Lamar is a student at Rockbridge Academy in Crownsville, Maryland, where he plays varsity baseball and basketball. He enjoys studying biblical Hebrew, Spanish, and computer programming in his spare time. His current project is a computer program that plays the game Wordle for him. He spends his summers on the international mission field and thanks God that he could be a part of His work there.

Jessi Wenger lives in Annapolis, Maryland and is in her junior year at Rockbridge Academy. She is involved in her school's variety show as one of the main choreographers and also sings and dances in the show itself. She teaches dance to ages seven to ten and also participates in ballet, musical theater, lyrical, tap, and jazz. Outside of school, she also enjoys writing poetry, reading Tolkien, baking, and selling handmade soaps and candles. At school, she particularly enjoys studying literature, philosophy, and being a part of her school's choir.

OLD VOICES



Singing Psalms Into the Mirror: *Athanasius on the Psalms*

Athanasius of Alexandria

Many of us know Athanasius as the inexorable saint who defended the Incarnation, refuting objections from both the Jews and the Gentiles and thereby providing one of the most formative understandings of what it means to be human. He lived during the turbulent time of the 3rd and 4th centuries, while the theological dust was still settling from the eccumenical Council of Nicea. He also wrote on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and produced a biography of St. Antony, without which we might not have the likes of Augustine or Benedict. In his famous introduction to Athanasius' *On the Incarnation*, C. S. Lewis notes,

> [Athanasius] stood for the Trinitarian doctrine, "whole and undefiled," when it looked as if all the civilised world was slipping back from Christianity into the religion of Arius—into one of those "sensible" synthetic religions which are so strongly recommended today and which, then as now, included among their devotees many highly cultivated clergymen. It is his glory that he did not move with the times; it is his reward that he now remains when those times, as all times do, have moved away.

Dead things go with the stream, as Chesterton observed, but only living things can go against it. Athanasius was indeed alive in faith and virtue, and he was formidable against the heresies of his time. That is why he earned the title, *Contra Mundum*.

But he was not just a fighter. Athanasius possessed a pastoral wisdom that equally complemented his fortitude to swim against the current of his day's zeitgeist. A work that illustrates this pastoral quality is a letter he penned to a young man named Marcellinus, who was ill and suffering at the time. Athanasius praises Marcellinus for not wasting "the leisure necessitated by [his] recent illness," that the young man was instead taking the occasion of his sickness "to study the whole body of the Holy Scriptures and especially the Psalms." Athanasius writes to him, explaining the right manner of reading Holy Scripture and directing his young friend about which psalm to sing (and pray) for which occasion.

How blessed was Marcellinus to have such a teacher! May we learn from him as well, and may we too stand *contra mundum*.

From *The Letter to Marcellinus*[1]

It seems to me, moreover, that because the Psalms thus serve him who sings them as a mirror, wherein he sees himself and his own soul, he cannot help but render them in such a manner that their words go home with equal force to those who hear him sing, and stir them also to a like reaction. Sometimes it is repentance that is generated in this way, as by the conscience-stirring words of Psalm 51; another time, hearing how God helps those who hope and trust in Him, the listener too rejoices and begins to render thanks, as though that gracious help already were his own. Psalm 3, to take another instance, a man will sing, bearing his own afflictions in his mind; Psalms 11 and 12 he will use as the expression of his own faith and prayer; and singing

1. "Letter to Marcellinus on the Interpretation of the Psalms," in Athanasius: On the Incarnation, anonymous (tr.) (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), Appendix; pp. 97–119 ('Letter' orig. publ. 1953). Accessed Jan. 26, 2023; https://mcusercontent.com/6def1bb7c65d07cd5bcbd6cc2/files/f65febb0-f084-3db8-562d-c1d3a398ea01/The_Letter_of_Athanasius_to_Marcellinus_on_the_Interpretation_of_the_Psalms.pdf

the 54th, the 56th, the 57th, and the 142nd, it is not as though someone else were being persecuted but out of his own experience that he renders praise to God. And every other Psalm is spoken and composed by the Spirit in the selfsame way: just as in a mirror, the movements of our own souls are reflected in them and the words are indeed our very own, given us to serve both as a reminder of our changes of condition and as a pattern and model for the amendment of our lives.

. . . Briefly, then, if indeed any more is needed to drive home the point, the whole divine Scripture is the teacher of virtue and true faith, but the Psalter gives a picture of the spiritual life. And, just as one who draws near to an earthly king observes the formalities in regard to dress and bearing and the correct forms of words lest, transgressing in these matters, he be deemed a boor, so he who seeks to live the good life and learn about the Savior's conduct in the body is by the reading of this holy book first put in mind of his own soul's condition and then supplied with fit words for a suppliant's use. For it is a feature of this book that the Psalms which compose it are of many different sorts. Some such as 73, 78, 114, and 115, are narrative in form; some are hortatory, like 32, 97, and 103; some are prophetic, for example, 22, 45, 47, and 110; some, in whole or part, are prayers to God, as are 6, 16, 54, 102; some are confessions, notably the 51st, some denounce the wicked, like 14; while yet others, such as 8, 98, 117, 125, and many more, voice thanksgiving, praise, and jubilation, Psalm 66 alone of these having special reference to the Resurrection of the Lord.

It is possible for us, therefore, to find in the Psalter not only the reflection of our own soul's state, together with precept and example for all possible conditions, but also a fit form of words wherewith to please the Lord on each of life's occasions, words both of repentance and of thankfulness, so that we fall not into sin; for it is not for our actions only that we must give account before the judge, but also for our every idle word.

Suppose that you want to declare anyone to be blessed; you find the way to do it in Psalm 1, and likewise in 32, 41, 112, 119, and 128. If you are persecuted by your own family and opposed by many, say Psalm 3; and when you would give thanks to God at your affliction's end, sing 4 and 75 and 116. When you see the wicked wanting to ensnare you and you wish your prayer to reach God's ears, then wake up early and sing 5; and if you feel yourself beneath the cloud of His displeasure, you can say 6 and 38. When you see the boundless pride of many, and evil passing great, so that among men (so it seems) no holy thing remains, take refuge with the Lord and say Psalm 12. And if this state of things be long drawn out, be not faint-hearted, as though God had forgotten you, but call upon Him with Psalm 27. Should you hear others blaspheme the providence of God, do not join with them in their profanity but intercede with God, using the 14th and the 53rd. And if, by way of contrast, you want to learn what sort of person is citizen of heaven's kingdom, then sing Psalm 15.

"It is his glory that he did not move with the times; it is his reward that he now remains when those times, as all times do, have moved away."

C.S. Lewis on Athanasius

Another time, perhaps, you find you have been led astray by others' arguments—well, then, the moment you perceive it, stop your sinning, sit down and weep, as they did of old by Babylon's waters, using the words of Psalm 137. Since it is precisely by being tempted that one's worth is proved, Psalm 139 will meet your need when you thank God for testing safely past. And if the enemy once more gets hold of you and you desire to be free, then say 140. If through the weakness of your nature and the

strain of life you find yourself at times downcast and poor, sing for your consolation Psalm 102, and use 103 and 104 to lift your heart in thankful praise to God, as in and through all circumstances we should always do. Psalms 105, 107, 113, 117, 135, and 146 to 150 not only show the reasons why God should be praised, but tell you how to do it. You feel that, like the Apostle, you can now press forward, forgetting all the things that lie behind? Then you have the fifteen Gradual Psalms (120-134)for every step of your advance.

For prayer and supplication, sing Psalms 5, 141 to 143, and 146. Has some Goliath risen up against the people and yourself? Fear not, but trust in God, as David did, and sing his words in Psalm 144. Then, marveling at God's kindnesses to everyone and mindful of His goodness to yourself and all, praise Him, again in David's words, with Psalm 105. For Psalms in praise of God, you have all these, 105 to 107, 111 to 118, 135, 136, 146, 147, 148, 149, and 150.

If you want to sing Psalms that speak especially about the Savior, you will find something in almost all of them; but 45 and 110 to relate particularly to His Divine Begetting from the Father and His coming in the flesh, while 22 and 69 foretell the holy cross, the grievous plots He bore and how great things He suffered for our sakes. The 3rd and 109th also display the snares and malice of the Jews and how Iscariot betrayed Him; 21, 50, and 72 all set Him forth as judge and foretell His Second Coming in the flesh to us; they also show the Gentiles' call. The 16th shows His resurrection from the dead, in flesh, the 24th and 47th His ascension into heaven. And in the four Psalms 93, 96, 98, and 99, all the benefits deriving to us from the Savior's Passion are set forth together.

Let each select from the Psalter, as from the fruits of a garden, those things of which he sees himself in need. In the words of this book all human life is covered, with all its states and thoughts, and that nothing further can be found in man. For no matter what you seek, whether it be repentance and confession, or help in trouble and temptation or under persecution, whether you have been set free from plots and snares or, on the contrary, are sad for any reason, or whether, seeing yourself progressing and your enemy cast down, you want to praise and thank and bless the Lord, each of these things the Divine Psalms show you how to do, and in every case the words you want are written down for you, and you can say them as your own.

Athanasius of Alexandria (293-373 BC), also called Athanasius the Great, was a church father and Bishop of Alexandria, Egypt. His important works include *The Life of St. Antony, On the Incarnation,* and *Four Orations Against the Arians*.

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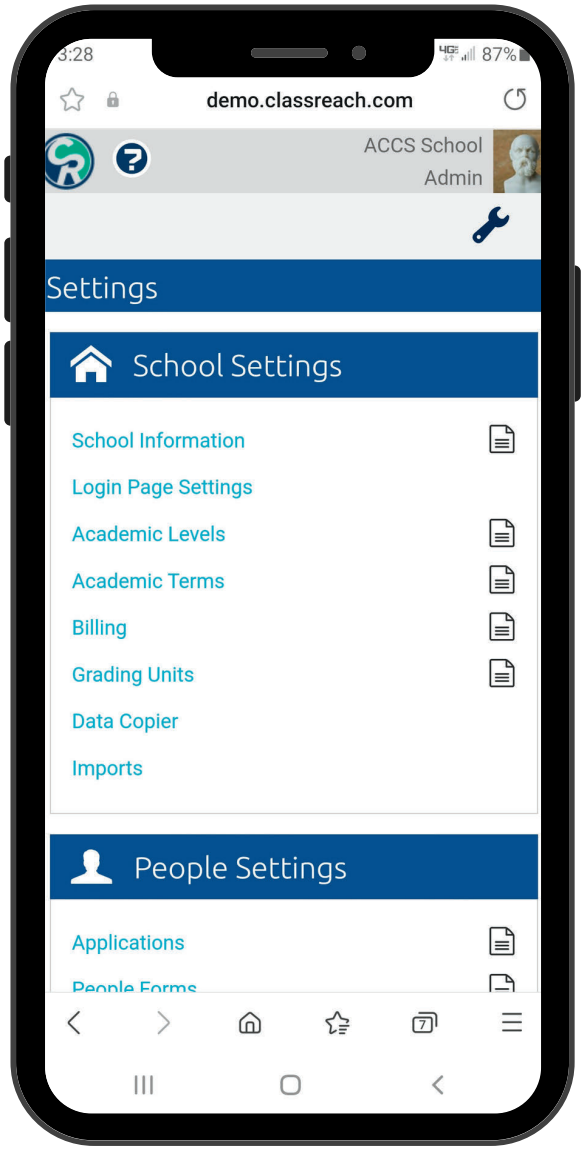

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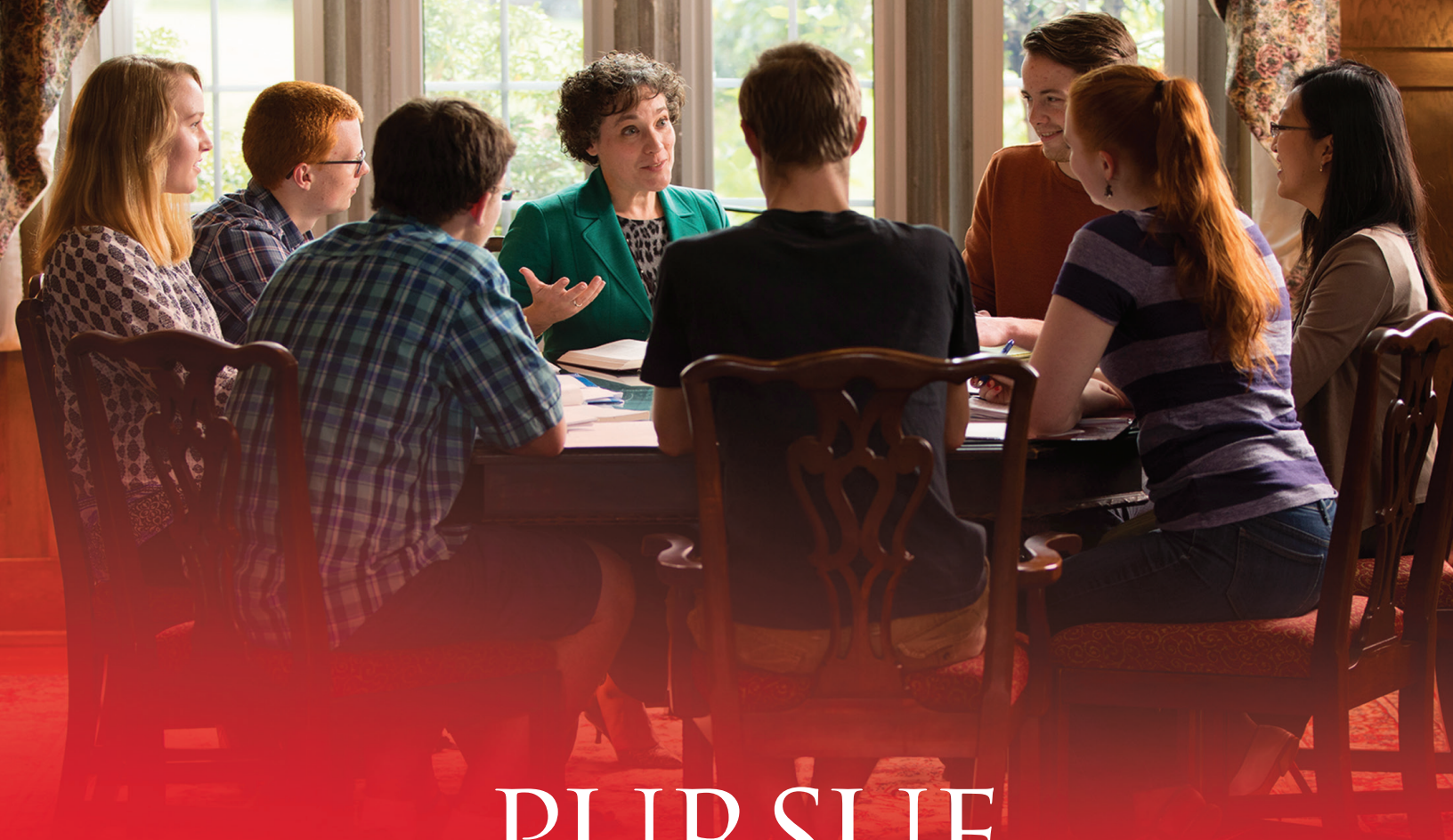

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Stand at the crossroads and look, ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it. – Jeremiah 6:16

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