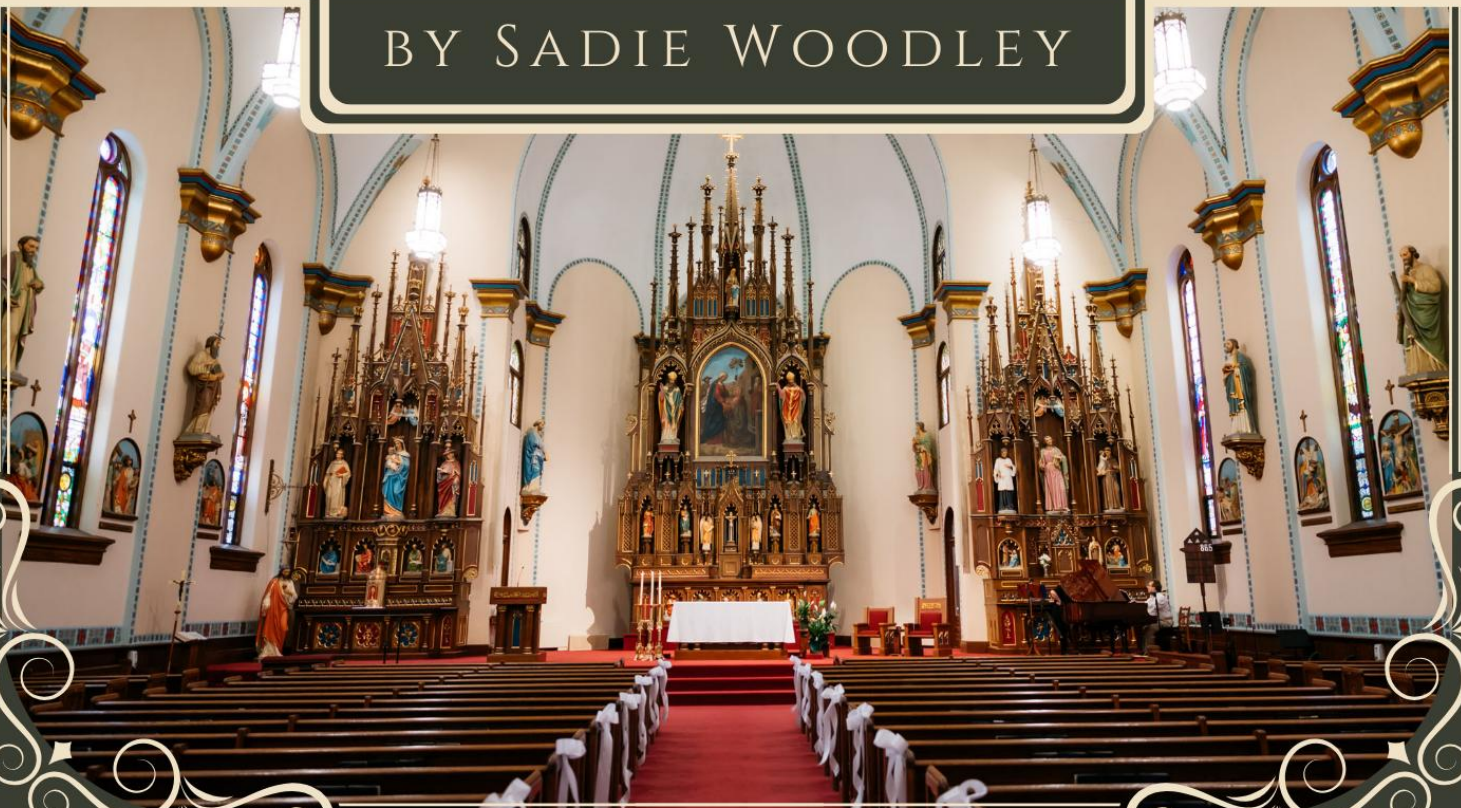




THE GREAT CATHOLIC BOOK CLUB 2025 STUDY GUIDE

PROTOEVANGELIUM

BY SADIE WOODLEY



THE GREAT CATHOLIC BOOK CLUB

2025 STUDY GUIDE: PROTOEVANGELIUM



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-Sadie Woodley

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INTRODUCTION

PROTOEVANGELIUM: IT'S GOT A NICE, SPACE-Y RING TO IT

"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

-St. Augustine, The Confessions

DON'T PANIC. Just be warned that this study guide contains spoilers! If you like the surprises, save the study material for after you read each book.

Welcome to the 2025 inaugural year of The Great Catholic Book Club! We're so excited to be on this journey with you through pop-lit, sci-fi hits, literary classics, and more. The books for this year are quite diverse. There's **DUNE**, a soaring saga about galactic domination, giant worms, and drugs, set twenty thousand years in the future on another planet. And there's **PRIDE AND PREJUDICE**, about a guy and a girl who like each other and don't know what to do about it, and have long discussions about their feelings over delicate refreshments in eighteenth-century, high-society England. Other books include dinosaurs, astronauts, space battles with human-sized bugs, international espionage across glamorous cities in Europe, genetically and socially engineered humans, a comic book (excuse me—graphic novel), and musings about Napoleon's fate in the afterlife. And no one forgets their towel, presumably.

So what are we doing with this motley collection? We're going on the best kind of adventure: hunting for God! Each of these books offer fertile ground for analyzing Sacred Scripture and Catholic teachings, within settings and themes that are both fantastically outside of normal experience, as well as poignantly familiar. They are all fundamentally about human yearnings—for familiarity, home, safety, love, control, success, survival, and knowledge. Human beings need to understand what's going on. It's an insatiable drive. We are curious and oftentimes frustrated in our search, but we can't seem to stop.

Of course there is One who knows and has all answers.

"Protoevangelium" refers to Genesis 3:15:

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."

- Genesis 3:15

This is known as the "first Gospel," because it is the first announcement of God's plan to save and redeem humankind through the Messiah. He tells us at the beginning of the story not to worry; He will fix things. We don't know what that means, or how that's going to happen. But right then and there, He

begins to teach us what is going on and what He is going to do about it. And it turns out that's a slow process. The entire Old Testament is essentially this story of human beings who are really trying to figure things out, without yet the benefit of knowing the full picture in Christ. The Lord patiently guides us, letting us know when we are on the right track and when we need to adjust, so that we get to readiness for Jesus.

The Protoevangelical state is not limited to the Old Testament, of course. It is the story of all people—we are all fractals of that bigger picture. Our individual lives mirror this narrative of coming into existence, realizing we are lost, and searching until we find the One who has been searching for us the whole time. No matter when or where or what circumstances we were born into—inside or outside of the Church, far from truth or pretty close—we all experience that state of stumbling around grasping for truth. Oftentimes we land pretty darn close, and other times not so much. But each of these attempts are such a valuable source of wisdom and learning. The experiences bring us closer to the divine, even if trying to learn about God was the last thing on our mind.

A great deal of art reflects this protoevangelical aim. All art is a search for truth, and a desire to express it. Some books do this quite well. There is a joy in finding God in the work, hidden in themes like the drive to explore space, win battles, defeat international assassins, escape an artificial society, or find a way off of Mars.

The books on this 2025 list are very, very good sources for protoevangelical analysis. They're also really fun. Our suspicion is that the two things are necessarily related. God has a sense of humor, after all.

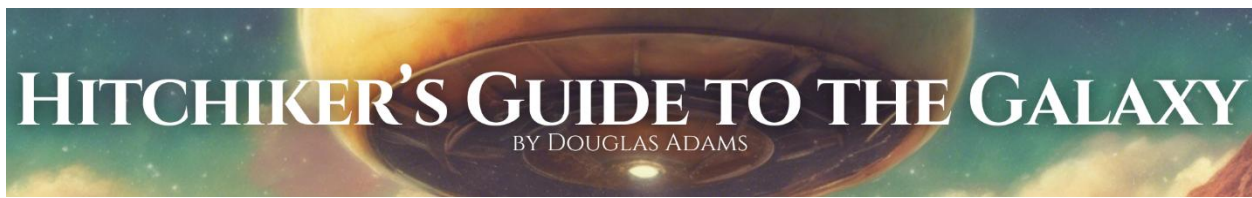
We hope to have a great time reading, discussing, and growing in Christ with you this year!

Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam!

-Tyler and Sadie

CAUTION: PLEASE READ

The books on this list contain many mature themes that some may find disturbing or offensive. The mature themes include violence, sexual violence, sexual sin, childhood trauma and abuse, bullying, profanity, horror, and other potentially unacceptable content. Please be mindful of your mental and emotional health surrounding these topics.



LIFE, THE UNIVERSE, AND EVERYTHING

“The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God; it is fulfilled in his vocation to divine beatitude. It is essential to a human being freely to direct himself to this fulfillment. By his deliberate actions, the human person does, or does not, conform to the good promised by God and attested by moral conscience. Human beings make their own contribution to their interior growth; they make their whole sentient and spiritual lives into means of this growth. With the help of grace they grow in virtue, avoid sin, and if they sin they entrust themselves as did the prodigal son to the mercy of our Father in heaven. In this way they attain to the perfection of charity.”

- Catechism of the Catholic Church (para. 1700)

Imagine a world where divine revelation never happened. Or at least if it did, no one paid attention. What would we do if we wanted to know why we exist? What is the point of life, the universe, everything?

This is exactly the world that Arthur Dent, Ford Prefect, Trillian, and Zaphod Beeblebrox, the main characters of Douglas Adams' **THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY**, find themselves exploring.

This is an interesting state of affairs, seeing that as Catholics we already know the answers to those questions. We know that God exists, and that He is infinite truth, beauty, and goodness. We know that nothing happens outside of God's will, and we can trust that He is always in control. We know we are His beloved children, created to be perfected in charity in order to join with Him for all of eternity in heaven. Oh gracious God, how good You are!

But.... what if we didn't actually get any of those messages? What if God were silent and left us to ourselves to figure things out? Could we ever have figured out this divine plan for human existence, with only our unaided reason?

According to St. Thomas Aquinas (and, presumably, Douglas Adams), not a chance. In *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas holds that the quest for wisdom—our natural human desire to have an organized understanding of the world and our place in it—is a desire to know God. If a searcher wishes to know the answer (or the question) to life, the universe, and everything, he won't go very far unless he starts with trying to learn about the One who created all things. That One would presumably be in the best position to give answers.

So: we can't know much of anything unless we first start with God. That is the only logical place to begin. And in this kind of search, Aquinas gives natural reason its due—there are some things we can know about God just with the use of our human intellectual capacities. For example, we can figure out that He

exists, and that there is only one of Him. Aquinas—unlike *Oolon Colluphid*—asserted confidently that our natural philosophy demonstrably proves God’s existence. We could even use natural reason to extrapolate further and make some conjectures about human beings, such as the likelihood that our intellect and creativity appear to be a finite, small-scale reproduction of the divine intellect.

But as far as anything else about the nature of God or the nature of man? Natural reason alone fails; it must be supplanted and surpassed with faith.

What does that mean? To a Christian, that means that we heard the Gospel—an account of things from God Himself—and decided we believe it to be true. We believe, even though we have no means of proving it. In fact the means of proving this kind of truth is, by definition, completely outside of our grasp. But we believe because having read God’s own words, we find the communication trustworthy. Going forward we commit the use of our natural reason, illuminated by faith, to the task of increasing in our knowledge, love, and service of God.

In this life, the only real issue is whether or not to believe the answers that God has given. There are some serious related issues here of course, such as interpretation and application. But while the devil is certainly in the details, we are blessed to avoid the impossible task of figuring out things like the Trinity or the beatific vision for ourselves.

In **THE HITCHHIKER’S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY**, Adams presents a world where the desire to know the ultimate meaning of life is achingly, anxiously familiar. But the idea of asking God about the matter is implicitly dismissed. The person of Jesus Christ is referenced early in the novel as just a guy who suggested we could all be nice to each other, and gets himself killed for the trouble. No other faith system or theology is referenced. There is a frustration amongst all the creatures of the universe—if God exists, then He surely has a lot to answer for! But alas, He won’t answer a thing, so something else must be figured out.

In this kind of environment, the quest to know the point of everything doesn’t just go away. Instead we do what humans do best—we try to figure it out on our own. **THE HITCHHIKER’S GUIDE** is an impressive, absurd, and entirely realistic tale of one way we might try to do that: by building a supercomputer.

Interestingly enough, even though Adams tries to create a world where there is no divine revelation, in reality we *do* live in a world where the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection have occurred; where God has revealed Himself as Trinity; where He has told us of His love and His beautiful plan to divinize humankind; where He has told us that the entirety of creation quite decidedly revolves around us. It is impossible not to know what one knows. So even in the thought experiment of **THE HITCHHIKER’S GUIDE**, the end result is that Adams can’t help but make a universe where human beings are the most important figures.

THE LION AND THE LAMB

Besides the quest to know the ultimate answer to life, the universe, and everything, **THE HITCHHIKER’S GUIDE** illustrates another inescapable fact of divine revelation: original sin.

The Lord revealed to us through Sacred Scripture that because our relationship with Him has been damaged through disobedience, we are lost sheep. We don’t know who we are, why we exist, and how we

got here. Some of us respond to this severance with a deep, pained need to restore this relationship with truth. Others respond differently. They'd like to know how this need can be exploited for personal gain.

In the world of **HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE**, there are those who quest for wisdom, and there are those who wish to personally profit from the quest. Adams spares few words describing the shallow profiteering that is displayed by many of his characters, such as the philosophers who insist that the supercomputer will put them out of work. Another example: the mice who wish to get answers from Earthlings are not interested in the content of the knowledge itself, but rather in how much money they can make by selling it.

Original sin is not only the cause of our abandonment anxiety, but also the catalyst for the industry of false prophets. For every sincere sojourner of truth, there are at least a dozen snake oil salesmen, petty cult leaders, and would-be gurus ready to push their version of truth in exchange for money and power.

To the false prophets, the actual existence of God is quite inconvenient. They want to be God themselves, or at least claim the kind of deference and power that a god would possess over others. The grief and pain of original sin—separation from God—is so twisted that it becomes a cynical covetousness. Who needs the real God, who exists independently and cannot be controlled? That kind of God can leave. On the other hand, becoming your own God gives a sense of full control, even if that control is totally illusory.

If you go far enough down this path, then the possibility of divine revelation can only be responded to with horror. Any information about or from God Himself must be silenced, lest the masses turn away from false prophets in favor of the real thing. Alternatively, false prophets can be persuaded to tolerate the existence of the real God...if they can control His message. They have to be the ones on the talk show circuits, spreading the message for a pretty coin. No one claims to love God quite like a prophet for profit.

Adams may or may not have been aware that his constant indictment of false propheteering is something our Lord Jesus Christ spent a good amount of time on as well. Indeed nearly every exchange that Jesus had with the Pharisees could be interposed over the lampooning passages of **HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE**.

The end result of Adams work is an interesting rendition of the Gospels without Christ—our state of affairs if God gave us no communication. It is a hilarious, absurd, endearing take that makes one so very affectionately grateful for divine revelation!

As far as the answer (and the question) to the ultimate meaning of life, the universe, and everything? In his first papal homily, Pope St. John Paul II passionately proclaimed that human beings have two questions that emanate from the depths of our hearts: *Lord, who are You, and who are we?* The answer to both those questions is: the person of Jesus Christ. He is the answer to every question, the truth of who we are and why we exist. Amen and Alleluia!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Who were your favorite and least-favorite characters in **HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE**, and why?
2. Adams devotes much of his story to parody and commentary on governments, corporations, and the wealthy. But there is no critique of churches. What do you think of Adam's portrayal of governments and secular powers? What do you think of the absence of criticism of spiritual authorities?
3. **THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE** introduces a number of technological tropes and tools. What were your favorite uses of technology in the book, and why? What do you think of how humanity is using technology?
4. Do you think our use and development of AI has aims similar to the creation of the supercomputer Deep Thought?
5. Many of the characters in **HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE** are frustrated by the randomness and senselessness of the universe. How do you think they might react if you could go into the story and share the Gospel with them? Which character or characters would you most want to have that conversation with?



WHAT IS CHILDHOOD INNOCENCE, ANYWAY?

“The morality of human acts depends on: the object chosen; the end in view or the intention; the circumstances of the action. The object, the intention, and the circumstances make up the 'sources,' or constitutive elements, of the morality of human acts.”

- Catechism of the Catholic Church (para. 1750)

Imagine a stalwart, fundamentally good young boy, the youngest in his family. The youngest of too many, with a faint whiff of illegitimacy. Loved, but also perhaps guiltily unwanted. He's brave and kind; he doesn't want to hurt anyone, but he seems condemned to a life of being put in positions where he has no choice, if he wants to survive. He's learned no one will come to his aid. When the wild things come for him, he's got to rely on himself and do things no child should be expected to do. When an ultimate, overwhelming enemy threatens his people, he watches the adults fail. Cowards, the whole lot of them. They're willing to take advantage of the innocent helpfulness of a child, to let him walk unarmed towards certain death. All he has are the skills he acquired by being abandoned to figure out his own way, when he should have been protected by adults. And now these same adults know he is their only option. A little boy, anointed even above the heads of his older siblings, to take on the enemy against overwhelming odds and save them all. To win, he must do what no child should have to do. He has to kill, and still somehow keep enough of his conscience afterwards to be the innocent hero. What kind of people would do this to a child?

This is a story of the young King David, destined to become their greatest pre-Incarnation ruler of Israel.

Did Orson Scott Card mean to reimagine young David amongst battleships in the stars? Probably not. But it is impossible to tell story about a child soldier with the weight of humankind on his shoulders without using the original as a template.

There are many differences in Card's version, of course. The most notable is that the adults in *Ender's Game* struggle with their empathy and compassion for the little boy. No such empathy is shown towards young David in the Scriptures. The adults in Ender's world are aware of their mercenary exploitation of a child. **ENDER'S GAME** is full of adults justifying the things they do to Ender, even admitting that there is no true way to avoid the reality of their sins. They can only hope that the end result sanctifies their evil. Their savior must have the innocent, hopeful malleability only found in a child. This is a world where the adults know they owe something to children, and that what they're doing is a violation of those duties. But the desperation of war and the possibility of extinction of the human species create special circumstances where they must use the only course they believe could possibly lead to victory. Or so they tell themselves.

There is no such acknowledgement in the Scriptures for David. The adults who are willing to put a young boy against the giant Goliath, armed only with his slingshot, cannot even say they were out of other options. And David spent a lifetime being put out in the fields to look after the sheep, forced to slaughter lions and bears on his own, well before he was anointed. It was a role for a disposable child, youngest in a family that apparently already had enough skilled warriors. Even though the work of a shepherd exposed a child to unthinkable dangers, it didn't earn him anything but scorn from his brothers. David was trained to put his own life in danger and suffer terribly, presumably for the valid good of his household, but no one appeared to value his life.

The adults that trained Ender, on the other hand, saw him as far from expendable. The horrors of his training are frankly acknowledged and even agonized over. If they could come up with a different answer, they would have happily done so. Still, they reasoned, nothing would be done to Ender that wasn't directly related to making him the most effective commander possible. They didn't want to break his conscience or damage the fundamental goodness in him. The adults around Ender reckoned with the moral realities of what they were training a child to do, and their main concern was how to get him to do it without turning him into a sociopath.

Little comfort for poor Ender, but it was much better than what David got.

When David offered to battle Goliath, the adults around him seemed to fully understand it as a suicide mission. King Saul could not have thought David was their best chance of defeating the enemy. Saul didn't even know who David was. It is unclear what kind of moral reasoning Saul employed in deciding to throw armor on a random child and shove him towards certain defeat and death. It wasn't David's innocence that he valued, but his ignorance. How could David have any idea what Goliath could do to him? Saul didn't appear to wrestle with subjecting a child to horrors from which adult men shied. Ultimately if the kid died, then he died. Saul was entirely unconcerned with the state of young David's body or heart, before or after his battle with Goliath.

What do we do with the Biblical narrative of David as a seemingly throwaway child, used to a lifetime of being left to fend for himself under deadly conditions, thoughtlessly exploited as a child soldier, surrounded by adults who have absolutely no empathy or protective instinct towards him?

Well, David had God. The Scriptures, after all, are telling us about the anointed one. The point of the story isn't how human beings treated David—he wasn't fighting for them anyway. His loyalties belong to the Lord. Everything he went through was about being prepared, by a loving heavenly Father, for the task of becoming the King of Israel. David's work as a shepherd, his terrifying experiences of fighting off wild animals with his bare hands, the contempt of his older brothers, even the murderously exploitive willingness of Saul to put him on the battlefield against a foe that no adult man would face...God, the good father, knew it wouldn't break young David. It would make him the best soldier and king he could be.

So then, God's moral reasoning is that the end justified the means, just like Ender's handlers decided? Did the Lord have no other choice but to use this child soldier? Did David's innocence have to be sacrificed to save humanity? God did as little harm as He could, didn't He? He must have tried to make sure that He didn't fundamentally damage David's goodness. But He had to do what was necessary. God's ends are always perfect, so His means are always perfectly justified. That must be a definitive example of applying Judeo-Christian moral reasoning, right?

Oh my, well now the comparison breaks down. That can't be right. But why not? How is God's plan for salvation, in shaping human beings towards a particular moral end, different from what the adults in

ENDER'S GAME did to Ender and other children? God's actions must be different. Because what the adults did to Ender was monstrous by God's own standards.

GOD, GROFF, AND GEOPOLITICS

It is worth noting here that Card never explains why religions are persecuted and banned in Ender's world. While Card left this thread dangling, it does make perfect sense. Every totalitarian or would-be totalitarian government in human history has tried to control or ban religion. This is not because they want to get rid of people's faith. It is because they wish to command it for their own use. If your people follow God, instead of trying to stamp it out of them, just convince them that YOU are God. You decide what is right or wrong.

A bit of history from a Catholic perspective: The "Wars of Religion" that plagued Europe from the fifteenth to early eighteenth century were fundamentally about political authorities chafing under the outsider moral authority of the Catholic Church. These rulers wished to claim the mantle of "Vicar of Christ" for themselves. Across Christendom they had long realized their subjects ultimately took their moral marching orders from the papacy. Kings and emperors only ruled by the blessing of the Church.

The moral measure of any action, include the actions of the monarch, were independently judged according to the Magisterium, which spoke for God. This was an unacceptable Achilles heel to the ambitions of the various European nations. Over centuries, the Church frequently could, and did, thwart a variety of imperial actions, including desires to declare war, commit genocide, choose certain successors, and even divorce unwanted spouses. If the Church said these actions were forbidden, the earthly rulers would be unable to justify it to their subjects. Brute, violent enforcement could do little against a Christian laity willing to die for the moral pronouncements of the Church.

The Wars of Religion, pointed to by many an atheist as evidence for why religion is the cause of all problems, were in fact a stunning bit of proof that real religion is the best protection against earthly tyranny. The Church served as an international body of spiritual oversight and protection for its members—a global lobbying group of sorts. Subjects could collectively turn to the Church if their leaders wanted to act in ways contrary to the teachings of Christ. This was leverage against the abuses of temporal authority.

But then Martin Luther created the revolutionary possibility that everyone could be their own Pope. Many kings and emperors seized on this opportunity to claim the right for themselves, as well as anyone under their thumb. It was well worth going to war for the power to call oneself God.

The Wars of Religion were eventually quelled, after centuries, by the treaties of Westphalia. These agreements essentially gave rulers the right to impose their own self-serving interpretation of Christianity within their borders. In other words, each King was now also the Pope, and sole arbiter of the moral compass. Passing moral judgment on the throne could now be both treason and heresy. Rulers had the right to play God over their subjects. Christ wants whatever *they* say he wants.

From this point, it didn't take long for rulers to wonder why Christ had to be used as a middleman at all. The King who wishes to speak for Christ still has to deal with the pesky matter of Christ's own words in the Gospel. These words were often inconveniently constraining. Better then, to get rid of the supernatural God altogether. Perhaps the State itself is God and arbiter of the moral compass. The most murderous regimes the human species has known stemmed from these modern atheist, nationalist,

totalitarian states that have given themselves the power to absolve their own actions. No outside authority, earthly or supernatural, could exist to limit them.

This is the current state of affairs that are commonly referred to as the “post-Christian” world order, where morality subjectively changes based on geography, and shifting political and cultural currents. Right and wrong are a matter of who is in a position of power to declare it, and moral reasoning stems from particular conditions.

Now getting back to **ENDER’S GAME**: Is this the world that Ender lives in? Then why did his pseudo-father Groff have to justify anything? Why suffer guilt and anxiously scramble, why try to limit harm? Why would an anti-religious world government that authorizes the use of child soldiers decide not to be too inhumane about it? By what measure does one decide what is “too far?”

It seems that despite the atheist governmental structure, they know this is not how God treats His children.

Or does He?

Let’s examine the common charges against God in our modern age and see how He stacks up to His own standards.

God could be accused of using child soldiers. There is the case of young King David, detailed above. There are also harrowing stories of young martyrs. St. Jose Sanchez del Rio was brutally tortured by the Mexican army at age fourteen—the bottoms of his feet were cut off and he was forced to march to his execution site, where he was slaughtered for his refusal to renounce the Lord. St. Agnes, a young girl of twelve or thirteen, was publicly tortured and killed for her refusal to become a child bride, declaring herself instead to be a spouse only to Jesus Christ. Fourteen-year-old St. Kizito was death-marched by Ugandan soldiers for approximately 30 miles, to the area where he was burned alive for the crime of refusing the sexual advances of the king.

These are only a few examples of the children that suffered horrific, painful childhoods and deaths for the Lord.

God also stands accused of exposing His children to the Adversary, making the Adversary our first and greatest teacher. Human beings are relentlessly and endlessly attacked and forced to learn to withstand the overwhelming power of the evil one, who has dominion over the Earth. The circumstances we are in could hardly be called “fair.” We are broken, limited, moral creatures going up against unfathomably intelligent, supernatural, immortal beings that exist outside of space and time. The demons know our every weakness, and strike us at any time and place. For all that, Ender got quite a few more breaks and rest from his tormentors than we do, as humans fighting against the forces of hell.

Another charge: God, so much like Groff, is training us towards a particular type of mold. He wants these experiences to create a human character that is centered around an inexhaustible capacity for perseverance. Scripture is centered around this notion of “wrestling” with God until we get our blessing. Jacob wrestling all night with the angel of God, even withstanding a dislocated hip. What does God want with these endlessly stubborn soldiers? Is this what it takes for us to be worthy soldiers in His army? It appears that God is willing to allow His children to endure any kind of trauma and emotional destruction to turn us into automatons that simply persevere in doing His will despite all the torture thrown at us. That is how we are the most useful tools to Him. Humans are merely the means to His ends in winning His war.

By that measure, the false “God” of the I.F. seems downright loving. At least, the I.F. appears to have more fidelity to God’s moral rules than God Himself.

But no. None of these charges against God are true. God is nothing like Groff—or better to say: Groff and the I.F. are nothing like God.

First of all, this world is full of suffering because of original sin—not because God created it to be some kind of sadistic training ground to create automaton soldiers in His army. This isn’t Battle School; it isn’t God’s active will that the evil one had dominion over the world. God did not create humans or the Earth because He needed soldiers. He made us to be co-creators, to enjoy the gift of participating in the completion of the world.

When sin entered the world and Satan attempted to destroy creation, God did not send His children to do battle against an impossibly strong enemy. He sent His own Son to save us. He promised us He was handling it, and it wasn’t our problem to save ourselves. He wanted us to know we don’t ever fight alone—unlike the adults in Ender’s world, God wants us to know that we can always count on Him to come save us, to intervene whenever we are threatened.

And God has no need to exploit the innocence of child soldiers. The Lord is in fact the reason young saints could resist the manipulation of adults. The Lord gave them the grace to say no. Worldly powers can do whatever they want, but no one can force servitude out of one who is already bound in service to God. To belong to Him is to be incapable of being held slave by any fellow human.

God gives His children the power and courage to resist all coercion and exploitation. Ender’s handlers psychologically destabilized him to the point where he could only resist them when pushed to totally apathetic defeat. This is the diametric opposite of the vibrant, living and joyful resistance of the child martyrs who said no as act of victory rather than defeat. Whatever the adults did to St. Jose Sanchez del Rio, or young David for that matter, God took those experiences and turned them into perfect preparation for overcoming the forces of evil. As the young Joseph of the Old Testament noted to his brothers, what others do with the intent for evil, God uses for good. Only God can sanctify bad means after the fact. This is not a power that is in the hands of any earthly authority. He doesn’t use the innocence of children to take advantage of them. Rather, God uses the evil acts of the wicked against them, to turn everything for the good for His children.

And the Lord also does not shape our character as a means to an end. We are not just intelligent tools for His use, though it is the greatest good to be of use to the Lord. Rather, the Lord is intimately and specifically concerned with each and every one of us for our own sake. God shapes man purely so that we become our fullest selves. The purpose of God’s work in man is man fully alive. Our holiness is the point, not the war against evil. We were created to be our own end.

And what does holiness look like; what does it accomplish? What kind of perseverance are we being trained towards?

It is a perseverance that completely resists coercion and slavery. It is also completely resistant to hatred. This is the kind of character that is so unbreakable that it can forgive and love those who would kill it.

Lastly, the charge that God makes the Adversary our teacher is false. The Adversary could never teach us how to love. God does not use evil to teach us how to defeat evil. God sent his own Son, the person of Jesus Christ, to show us how to be vessels of perfect charity, and therefore perfect power. We are not called to try to understand the mind of Satan. God would not do that to us. We are called to look to Him

and learn from Him. That is what a *Father* does. God isn't training soldiers. He's raising children. When we love like Him, we are undefeatable like Him. That's His end goal.

In **ENDER'S GAME**, even Ender's handlers knew that they could only overcome Ender's "no" by successfully convincing him to fight out of love—to feel a brotherly sense of connection and responsibility towards the human race. Ender couldn't be coerced by fear or threat, much less hate. He had no lust for power. He was *good* and they knew it. He was good by God's standards, and a person like that is ultimately impossible to control. Even his effectiveness as a commander depended on the I.F. knowing they dared not destroy his capacity to love, because he would be useless to them as a sociopath. Their moral reasoning centered around how this goodness could be manipulated and tricked into doing what goodness would never knowingly do.

The adults in Ender's life tried to dump the crushing weight of the cross of genocide from their own shoulders onto his. They hoped they could salvage it by arguing to forgive Ender, for he knew not what he was doing. But if they applied God's standards fully in the first place, they could have come up with a better solution than using child soldiers to commit genocide, and then feeling bad about it.

Even in a world where despots would try to suppress the truth of Jesus Christ, there is no way to measure the morality of our choices outside of His authority. It is impossible to come up with perfectly good ends, much less perfectly good means, without the Lord. **ENDER'S GAME** is a very fine example of what it looks like when a post-Resurrection world tries to act as it never knew Jesus, but can't really pull it off.

Try as they might, it's not possible to create a new moral compass and do better than God. It's all in, or eventually we will turn to the evil one to teach us what to do.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What do you think of Ender's experiences with his siblings? How do you think they shaped and affected each other in terms of identity? What do you think of the ways that siblings shape the family experience, as opposed to the ways that parents shape it?
2. Do you think the religion of Speaker for the Dead is a Mormon understanding of the need for the Sacrament of Confession? How do you think Ender's founding of Speaker for the Dead affected the daily actions of people who wanted a Speaker to speak for them after their death?
3. What do you think of what Battle School and Command School taught Ender about leadership? Are there some valid morals and virtues that they taught the kids?
4. Ender is an incredibly gifted, virtuous, lonely child. In the novel it is unclear whether his genius or his moral code is more responsible for the bullying and isolation he experiences. Do you think people are more likely to be lonely and misunderstood for being gifted, or for being virtuous? Do you relate to Ender?
5. What do you think of Ender's position that if he has to fight, he must win so definitively that there are no more fights afterwards, aka the doctrine of overwhelming force? What are the moral arguments for and against this position?



POWER, PAGANISM AND GOD AS HIS OWN END

“The God of our faith has revealed himself as HE WHO IS; and he has made himself known as ‘abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness’ (Ex 34:6). God’s very being is Truth and Love.”

- Catechism of the Catholic Church (para. 231)

Dr. Manhattan is not God. The very idea is absurd. But it is the kind of mix-up that the real God has been working to clear up from the beginning.

Man’s understanding of God, limited by nature and mutilated by original sin, struggles to rise up as high as it ought. The greatest elevation we can imagine is a god that controls the created order. If a being can rearrange atoms, see the full expanse of time, and have no need to sleep or breathe or eat, then we are satisfied enough to call it a god. It can do what no human can do. But of course, that doesn’t mean such a being can do what *God* can do.

Super-human does not mean super-natural. The ability to manipulate creation is not the same thing as being able to create out of nothing. The former is a very understandable concept of god as a kind of omnipotent human—perhaps exactly the kind of god that the serpent promised Eve that she could become. But the latter is the actual nature of God, who simply *is*, apart from any created thing that could be controlled.

This idea of God as beingness itself, not to be perceived on the same plane as the various pagan gods, is a major part of the teachings of the Old Testament. Through His prophets, the Lord reveals that He is not in competition with the gods of the Amorites or the Canaanites. He is not vying to be chosen above Baal or Asherah. God simply *IS*. He is the reason man exists to imagine creatures with power over nature. There is no conception of Baal without the God who made consciousness itself. Humans dream of super-creatures that can only hope to control what God made. As theologian Christopher West noted, the devil does not have his own clay. Creatures can only sub-create.

Yet sub-creation that far surpasses any human ability is mightily impressive to the human eye. It might be interesting, in a dryly abstract sense, to ponder God as the cause of existence. But the flesh has dominance over the intellect—human beings are drawn to whatever appears to have the greatest power over the material. If you are looking at a being that can arrange atoms at will, then what is the likelihood you will pause to give supreme worship to the One that created the atoms themselves? What good is the One who made the world, when you are concerned with flattering the being that seems to have the power to make it do whatever it wants?

This is the emblem of original sin: instrumentalization of God, self, and neighbor. Something is only good for what use you can get out of it. Any goose that lays enough golden eggs is a god. God is the thing that

promises the greatest possible gratification, and the trick is to control it so it will give us what we want. Worship is flattery, sacrifice is quid pro quo, and heaven is pleasures of the flesh. Such a god can be cruel and capricious; quick to enslave us with our own desires. But despite the dangers, this god is the only source in the universe with the power to give us what we want, providing that we please it enough and catch it in the right moods. This is the kind of god that is ultimately good for something.

Of course, the above is a perfect description of Satan. One can gather why the real God would start with teaching us who He really is.

The Old Testament is replete not only with human worship of false gods—various conceptions of control over the material world—but most significantly with human attempts to instrumentalize those false gods. The accounts of the battles with the various Canaanite tribes outline the practice of bringing one's "god" onto the battlefield as an ultimate weapon. This is like using God as a kind of Pokémon. Whoever has the strongest one wins the battle. The Lord responded by giving the Israelites the Ark of the Covenant, meeting us where we were at, at a level we can understand.

Of course the Lord goes on in the Old Testament to show that He cannot be controlled—the Ark is not taken into battle against His command. God is not a being that can be used at the whim of the creature. God is not a means to an end. He does not desire sacrifice; this isn't a quid pro quo relationship. He is not there to be flattered into granting wishes. A relationship with the Lord has a bit more to offer than merely tipping the scales in ones favor in a battle. Throughout the Old Testament, God patiently teaches the Israelites what it means to obey the Lord for His own sake, preparing the groundwork for humankind to have the emotional maturity to be ready for what a relationship with Him is really about. He makes us ready for the glory of Jesus Christ—a true relationship with God based on charity.

We have been trying to snatch back the use of Baal ever since.

A pagan conception of God—as a being that has ultimate power to exercise dominion over creation, and can give us what we want, or withhold it in displeasure—offers a relationship defined by mutual exploitation, not love. But it is familiar and safe. It offers the possibility of control. If you know what this kind of god wants, you can make the right sacrifices. This kind of god is just as much a slave to the relationship as the poor human creature that is involved with it. And again due to original sin, human beings prefer relationships based on gratification and control, not love and freedom.

So back to **WATCHMEN**: how is Dr. Manhattan any different from Baal? Well for one thing, he really exists, at least in the universe of the graphic novel. And Dr. Manhattan is self-aware; he sees how he is used as a glorified Pokémon by the American government against the Russians. This is a "god" who is merely the ultimate trump card weapon. He isn't loved. He is gratified and bribed. His relationship with Laurie, begun before she was of legal age, is indulged despite the impropriety, providing that she keeps him happy. He can roam about nude, be flattered everywhere he goes, and his amoral apathy for humankind is ignored. Who cares, so long as he intimidates the Russians? God, after all, is merely a means of wielding power.

This is all the people want from God, in Moore and Gibbons' world. No spiritual journeys please. No need for a God that loves us. We just want the upper hand against our enemies. Dr. Manhattan is the ultimate rejection of Jesus in favor of Baal. But the people of Watchmen find themselves abandoned by Dr. Manhattan as dismissively as any other false god has done. He who would seek a god of power rather than love soon finds himself both enslaved and despised.

Dr. Manhattan, by definition, could never be God. He didn't create the universe, and he does not love it. Abandoning it is meaningless to him.

Power—as opposed to service—is fundamentally about using and being used. It is a means to an end, which God is not. But only love creates and sustains, existing for its own sake. That is absolutely what God *is*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. As a graphic novel, **WATCHMEN** uses visual communication as much, or more, than linguistic. Many cues about the emotions and motives of the characters are only expressed by how they are drawn in a given panel. What do you think of the graphic novel format to convey artistic expression? Do you think it works well to tell the story of **WATCHMEN**?

2. **WATCHMEN** explores the psychology of the kind of people who would dress up in costumes and fight crime. In many parts of the novel, the Watchmen face significant pushback and rejection from the population they claim to serve. But the rejection and opposition does not influence the decisions of the Watchmen. Why do you think the Watchmen continue their activities despite being largely unwelcome? Is it moral to continue insisting on helping people who do not want your kind of help? Do you think there is a place for vigilante justice in God's moral order? Why or why not?

3. Laurie exists because of the possibility that there was forgiveness between Silk Spectre and the Comedian. Dr. Manhattan finds that so improbable that it convinces him to come back to Earth to try to save mankind. The implication could be that forgiveness is miraculous and unexplainable by natural forces. Do you think forgiveness, especially of serious sin, is impossible in the world, without grace? Is it evidence for God?

4. The character of Rorschach is presented in great detail, with a complete history of his childhood and his decision to become a Watchman. What do you think of Rorschach's moral position of unwillingness to compromise? Is it extreme, or in line with Christian theology? Do you agree with any of his choices? Do you find his character sympathetic? Why or why not?

5. the character of Adrian Veidt is presented as a genius and self-made success whose main desire is to stop the possibility of mutually assured destruction. But **WATCHMEN** goes into detail about Veidt's business dealings and his plans to make sure his company profited after the creature was released. How much of Veidt's desire to "save" mankind was about his desire to gain greater economic and social control? Do you think any of his motivation was genuinely to help humanity? Why or why not?



LOVE, ACTUALLY... IS COMPLICATED

“St. John Chrysostom suggests that young husbands should say to their wives: I have taken you in my arms, and I love you, and I prefer you to my life itself. For the present life is nothing, and my most ardent dream is to spend it with you in such a way that we may be assured of not being separated in the life reserved for us.... I place your love above all things, and nothing would be more bitter or painful to me than to be of a different mind than you.”

- Catechism of the Catholic Church (para. 2365)

Well, St. John Chrysostom, that sounds beautiful, but what if husband and wife are of the same mind in being equally terrible?

The Lord, of course, offers us an answer: the goal is not for spouses to sink to the lowest common shared denominator. That is the essence of marriage as a sacrament: our minds and characters change continuously—the tether of marriage propels that change upward, encouraging the other to grow in virtue towards Christ. Wherever there is a gap between husband and wife, the one who is closer to the Lord selflessly and tirelessly works to lift the other up. To commit to being of the same mind is to commit to a personal journey of elevating one’s mind toward the person of Jesus Christ, and never ceasing to spur the other to do the same. This is the true purpose of marriage: a virtuous, upwards cycle of holiness founded on the covenantal unity of mind and heart.

The goal is not only to be of one mind as husband and wife, but to see evidence over time that this unity has resulted in two people who have grown in character together—having achieved a level of holiness together that neither could have done alone. A husband and wife should make each other better people.

In **PRIDE AND PREJUDICE**, the Anglican Jane Austen may in fact have created the most stirring treatise in existence on Catholic marriage. She does this with the most straightforward teaching style: three bad examples of marriage, and the influence of all these examples on the central characters of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy. The bad examples are Lydia and Wickham, Charlotte and Mr. Collins, and, painfully, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. Each of these couples and their influence on Elizabeth and Darcy need to be explored to fully understand the masterclass in marriage that is **PRIDE AND PREJUDICE**.

LYDIA AND WICKHAM: A LUST STORY

The obviousness of this “bad example” is part of the appeal in the genteel world that Austen creates. Wickham is a superficially charming sociopath. He uses his looks and easy social graces to create an illusion of gentility that makes the listener *want* to be fooled. What sort of virtues are these? Has this man

developed self-control, patience, kindness, self-sacrifice? He is obviously a predator, looking to see what he can get out of any young lady that is unlucky and/or unscrupulous enough to take what he offers: fleeting attention based on the degree to which she can give him gratification. As far as marriage material, Wickham is a pass.

So why does Elizabeth fall for it? Because her ego was hurt. She needed the attention in the moment, and it was coming in strong from a man not only willing to make her feel attractive, but also happy to denigrate the character of the man who slighted her. Of course there is a tradeoff of turning to a man like this for validation. You end up as dependent on him for your own sense of self-worth. And after a while, being used comes to feel better than being loved. It got so bad that even when Wickham dumped her for not being wealthy enough, and quickly turned to more gratifying prey, Elizabeth made excuses for him. She quickly looked to denigrate her financial position as so obviously deficient that one could hardly blame him.

Her experience with Wickham did indeed result in the two coming to the same mind. Elizabeth's had to be lowered to match his.

Wickham's subsequent marriage to Lydia is a bit of a cliché—the shotgun wedding of two immature, amoral, gratification chasing louts, only concerned for their pleasure in the moment. The marriage is a sham and everyone knows it. Despite the desperate beliefs that the wedding would at least cure the social damage they caused, no one entertained any belief that Wickham would help Lydia become a good person over time, or vice versa. But they could certainly help each other become worse.

Was this a marriage that honored the institution? No—this is a classic example of the kind of marriage that the Catholic Church would declare invalid. There was significant pressure to marry, including the use of financial inducement. One could hardly say there was freely given consent on both sides. Neither party had the requisite intentions of chastity and fidelity, nor the mental understanding of marriage as a lifelong, indissoluble bond that the Church requires. Nothing about this marriage met the criteria set by the Lord, who elevated the bond to a sacrament.

Wickham and Lydia are a perfect example of a nominally Christian society that is so intent to save face and maintain conventions that they are willing to completely degrade the institution of marriage. Even the social understanding that Lydia was ruined for any respectable marriage is a tacit acknowledgement that marriage isn't about love—it's about a quid pro quo exchange to maintain hierarchy. And sometimes it's also useful for brushing sin under the rug. Who cares if two people, exclusively concerned with how to use each other for maximum personal gratification, get married? They can hide that shared lack of virtue in their marriage, which is the "right" thing to do.

This is precisely why even if the genteel English upper class of the early nineteenth century thought a marriage under such circumstances was necessary and morally proper, the position of the Catholic Church would have recognized that a marriage between Wickham and Lydia would be insulting to the parties as well as to the institution.

Today's modern view of marriage as merely a device for two people to consensually use each other for pleasure—and that such a bond should last exactly as long as the pleasure is flowing—arguably stems exactly from this seemingly "respectable" use of marriage as a vehicle to enable such mutual gratification. Each party is reduced to an object that exists only to use and be used, and a successful marriage is one in which each party can joyfully point to how the other provides those good sensations. The modern cultural understanding of marriage is really a natural evolution of the hypocrisy of Austen's era, just without the pretense.

But this is not God's design, as Austen beautifully demonstrates. No one is more pained by this degradation of marriage than Elizabeth, who had to personally confront her own willingness to use and be used by Wickham. This kind of bond is ugly and poisonous. Even if Elizabeth previously thought herself immune to ever falling into the kind of sin that Lydia chose, she undoubtedly was tempted by the mindset to be drawn to someone for the purposes of gratification. Had Wickham not dumped her first, who knows how the beloved character of Elizabeth Bennet would have devolved? How many of us are truly immune to such sin, especially if we are in the closest company of those who would encourage it?

CHARLOTTE AND MR. COLLINS: EWW

That leads to the second bad example of marriage: the embarrassingly transactional nuptials of Elizabeth's friend Charlotte Lucas, to Elizabeth's cousin Mr. William Collins,

Now this is a marriage done right, according to every social convention in the world of **PRIDE AND PREJUDICE**. The parties of course agree to marry before living together. Both are, presumably, chaste and from good backgrounds. Mr. Collins has an established living and is well able to provide for a wife and family, and Ms. Lucas is a respectable woman who would make an excellent wife to a clergyman.

But there is the pesky matter of neither party having any feelings of love for the other. Mr. Collins proposed to Charlotte nearly instantly following his rejection by Elizabeth. But the particular woman involved makes no difference to him. His interest, which he states clearly in a letter before his arrival, is to find a wife much like one buys a car. A wife is a useful commodity and status symbol; he sees himself as generous enough to buy one at above market value, as a favor to his entailed uncle.

Charlotte for her part is merely interested in avoiding spinsterhood and being a burden on her family. If she can be properly married, she can claim status and keep a roof over her head. It makes no difference to her who she ends up marrying. A husband is as much of a commodity as a wife, and both parties are equally of one mind in their quid pro quo dehumanization of the other.

This is just as monstrous of a betrayal of the nature of marriage as Wickham and Lydia's sham arrangement. There is little to separate Charlotte and Mr. Collins' view of marriage from long term prostitution. Both parties are simply after what they want, and willing to use the other to attain it.

Certainly one could argue that what they want is sensible—not merely ego gratification, attention, or sexual access. Both Charlotte and Mr. Collins want a home and family, and there is nothing wrong with that. Those are good things to want. Marriage is exactly the correct vehicle for establishing a home and bringing children into the world. And of course a reasonable concern for financial stability is not mercenary. One must live in the real world, and women are concerned with choosing a husband who can demonstrate a capacity to provide. This is important for the sake of the children that would be created from the union. By every measure including that of today's world, it seems unfair to criticize two people who are doing things the "right" way to get the "right" things.

The problem of course is that the desire for a spouse and family can easily become an idol that is misused and twisted into self-serving purposes. Depending on the social context—whether nineteenth century English high society, or a modern-day conservative parish community—there can be major hierarchal rewards for getting married and having children. Those rewards can involve social acceptance, approval, a friend group, elevated status, and the ego gratification of seeing oneself as the "right kind" of person. The spouse and children are instrumentalized just as easily as humans can instrumentalize anything.

Likewise individuals who fall to this way of looking at marriage are just as guilty of commodifying themselves. Charlotte sees herself as a useful prop who can play her role of making Mr. Collins feel good and look good. She is painfully aware of her willingness to exploit herself to get a husband. Her goal is to find a man willing to settle for a plain faced spinster with little social or financial capital. She is aiming down, hoping to advertise her low standards as a selling point.

Mr. Collins on the other hand is shockingly ignorant of how he degrades himself, but just as culpable. Like the modern-day “incel,” he is convinced that he has all the external trappings that a woman desires: a good income, a respectable profession, a home, and the right connections. Though he claims that he cannot fathom why a woman would not want him, he is careful to aim for women that he feels have a low enough market value that they ought to be grateful for his attention. His only goal is to avoid rejection. A wife ought to be as much of a guaranteed purchase as possible, for a man with no internal self-worth.

Are these the kind of people who enter into a marriage with the right formation and understanding of the sacrament? Do they truly love each other and commit to helping each other grow in holiness? Definitely not. When Charlotte hears Mr. Collins embarrassing himself in public, she pretends not to hear. Is she capable of loving him enough to gently discuss his behavior? Does she will his good enough to risk having an uncomfortable conversation that helps him improve in his character?

Why should she, when all she wants is the house, the income, and the status? Why rock the boat when the spouse is merely a means to an end? It is impossible for Charlotte to respect her husband as Scripture commands—her very willingness to marry him is a sign of her lack of respect for him. And it is impossible for Mr. Collins to love her as Scripture commands. He has no interest in her heart or her character, she exists to make him look good.

What kind of home life can be expected for the children that are the fruit of this union? How can these two individuals shape the moral worlds of those little ones, let alone help each other grow in virtue?

This is a bad example that Elizabeth—despite bearing just as much pressure to marry for the sake of status and money—refused to follow. But while her rejection of Mr. Collins proposal was admirable, it was also theatrical. She didn’t truly know what she was refusing. It is possible that her mother’s pressure, combined with time, and the witness of her elder sister being jilted, may have caused her to experience some anxiety and regret. Even if she had no selfish concern for her own welfare, it certainly weighed on her to be a burden to her father, or an impediment to the marriage of her younger sisters.

But the direct witness of Charlotte’s decision was a concrete affirmation of her refusal to abandon the divine commands of love and respect in marriage. There was no pressure in her world to enter into a marriage like Wickham and Lydia’s, but as Christians we often do need tangible evidence to help us refuse the pressure to conform to a “Charlotte and Mr. Collins” situation of surface-level acceptability. A bad example is at least good as a cautionary tale.

MR. AND MRS. BENNET: CONTEMPT AND MISSED CHANCES

The one kind of cautionary tale no one wants is the kind where your own parents are the bad example.

The most wrenching parts of **PRIDE AND PREJUDICE** are the scenes where Elizabeth must confront the flaws in the marriage of her parents, and how those dynamics have affected her.

Mr. and Mrs. Bennet did everything right. They courted and were married, and duly produced five lovely children. They participate in society and Mr. Bennet is known as a gentleman. That's about where the good story stops.

Mr. Bennet is a poor husband to his long-suffering wife. He openly mocks her, especially in front of his daughters, for sport. He has no interest in Mrs. Bennet's inner world, does not care about her fears and concerns, and does not feel any responsibility to correct her character defects. Mrs. Bennet is not necessarily a sympathetic character with her gossiping and socially inappropriate behaviors, but a wife deserves a husband that loves her enough to gently help her see the flaws to which she is oblivious. This would be for her good, to leave her spotless and blameless before the Lord. It is his responsibility to help his wife become holy. But Mr. Bennet cannot be bothered to do anything besides make fun of her.

Likewise, Mrs. Bennet's concern for her daughters is quite reasonable, considering that they really are in a bad spot if they cannot be married. Mr. Bennet shows absolutely no empathy for his wife, and in fact leaves her entirely alone to worry about their children. In this regard and many others, his failings as a father are clear to Elizabeth, who clearly wishes to look up to him. But Mr. Bennet doesn't want to make the effort to care, even when Elizabeth earnestly pleads with him to put some attention into his family and make some difficult decisions.

Despite Mr. Bennet's humorous and enjoyable persona, there is little that poor Elizabeth can glean for how a man ought to treat *her*. She gains nothing good from witnessing how her own father behaves towards his wife and children. She also has no example of how a wife should address the character flaws of her husband—how do spouses have constructive arguments and challenge each other? If a spouse is unhappy with the behavior of the other, what do they do about it besides engage in contemptuous mockery? How do spouses work together to be of one mind in regards to critical matters of parenting and family life?

The marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet presumably would meet the Church's criteria for consent and intentions at the time of marriage. But one could hardly accuse Mr. Bennet of having a tenderness and concern for being of one mind with his wife, or committed to the command to raise up his children in the way of the Lord. The most understated grief of **PRIDE AND PREJUDICE** is that after a few decades of marriage, Mr. Bennet can only express a distant, sporting contempt for his wife. There is no example at home for Elizabeth to follow for how spouses are supposed to help each other grow in holiness. All she knows is that she must marry, and she will not do it for mere status or financial self-preservation. But what evidence does she have that marriage is supposed to be something more—the kind of loving, mutual, total self-giving that is beautifully described by St. John Chrysostom?

ELIZABETH AND DARCY: THE SAVING POWER OF LOVE

In this world of bad examples (including the superficial values of Mr. Darcy's social circle—no less mired in exploitation, status-chasing, hierarchy-establishing, and empty sentiment), here are two people who are suffering under the degrading norms and expectations of marriage that have been imposed on them throughout their lives. But they have so much on their side: both want genuine love. Both are willing to take risks that the world finds foolish. Elizabeth will not marry Mr. Collins even if she ends up an impoverished spinster. Mr. Darcy will propose to Elizabeth even if he scandalizes and upsets his entire social circle and upends an estate-combining scheme that has been set up for him since birth. They are daring, principled, idealistic, and passionate—a perfect match. How could two people like that not easily get along and figure it out?

Because they have no idea what they're doing.

For these reasons, the pivotal fight scene during Mr. Darcy's first proposal is beautiful, even though few might consider it as such. Elizabeth clearly explains her problems with Darcy's character and behaviors, and why she finds them unacceptable. What previous experience does she have that a spouse can make these kinds of difficult statements not as a jab of mockery, but an earnest statement of fact? When has she seen this happening in a constructive way, where the husband takes heed and actually works on himself to get better? Even though her goal was not to change him, she learned that it was safe, and in fact necessary, to express her needs and observations in a relationship. She learned that doing so does not end the relationship, if the other person has good character. And before this, no woman in Darcy's life had the strength to be honest with him and give him a chance to rise to the occasion by improving himself.

Likewise Darcy's letter to Elizabeth, given after their fight, was her first experience of having her flaws and mistakes respectfully pointed out to her by a man who cared enough about her to take the time. Darcy was not merely defending his own ego and reputation. His letter betrayed a sincere concern that Elizabeth not be deceived by a bad actor. He wanted her to know that her feelings and opinions matter to him, and he wanted to give her information to improve her judgement. Prior to this point, no man in Elizabeth's life had the strength to care about her for her own sake, and give her the opportunity to benefit from good counsel so she could grow as a person.

Even before the graces of the sacrament were in place, Elizabeth and Darcy, two people motivated by love and truth, learn the most important thing in premarital prep: how to have a good fight.

Honesty and genuine desire to help the other person change and grow, for their own sake, is not for the weak of heart. It's even harder when neither person has a particularly good childhood, or good examples to fall back on. How many people enter into marriage without ever daring to test their love with real communication? It can only happen when both parties are virtuous enough to approach each other with no ulterior motive in the relationship—no desire to use each other for gratification, no transactional mentality, no thought of status or social acceptance, no fears of being alone or impoverished or unwanted. If both people can get to that place of stripped-down self that seeks only to know, love, and serve the other, to will their good, to want the other for their virtues.... well *then* you can start to really talk about what it takes to make a marriage work.

Elizabeth and Darcy overcame incredible odds long before meeting again at Pemberley. Overcame bad childhoods and bad examples. They conquered their own egos. They can really know the other, because they helped create each other. And it is natural to love the one who prompted such transformation. This is the kind of love that calls both parties to urge each other to grow ever closer to Christ and each other—the genuine bond that defines marriage as a sacrament.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What do you think of Darcy's interference between Bingley and Jane? Do you think his actions were warranted as a good friend? Or was he wrong to do what he did?
2. **PRIDE AND PREJUDICE** does include an example of a good marriage: that of Mr. and Mrs. Gardener, Elizabeth's aunt and uncle. How do you think their witness affected Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy?
3. Do you think Darcy's decision to refuse to marry his cousin Anne de Bourgh, and propose instead to Elizabeth, and Elizabeth's decision to refuse Mr. Collins? Do you think these were realistic choices for people in an era where money and status were such a strong factor in marriage?
4. What do you think of Elizabeth and Darcy's willingness to self-examine and change as a result of their argument? What virtues play a role in spouses making each other better people?
5. While Elizabeth and Darcy both develop and grow as people, the characters around them stay fixed. How could characters such as Jane, Bingley, Mr. Bennet, and others mature as a result of the story?



ANTI-CONSCIENCE AND ANTI-SELFHOOD

“In the formation of conscience the Word of God is the light for our path, we must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice.”

- Catechism of the Catholic Church (para. 1785)

Aldous Huxley's **BRAVE NEW WORLD** is a perfect synthesis point of the texts covered so far this year: In **THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY**, we discussed how the most logical way to get an answer about the meaning of life is to ask the Creator directly, rather than turning to elaborate man-made mechanisms. In **ENDER'S GAME**, we reviewed the Wars of Religion, and how Europe fractured under the ambitions of rulers who wanted to speak for God within their geographic borders. In **WATCHMEN**, the concept of God as Creator of the material world was so far divorced from daily life that the power to manipulate the material was good enough to claim god-hood. In **PRIDE AND PREJUDICE**, we saw the critical impact of how those moral rules apply as humans relate to each other, particularly in marriage. The wrong set of rules reverberates over generations and across whole societies and cultures. But even a single instance of two people working to understand and apply the right set of rules—given by the Creator, and interpreted without any distorting filters—can result in miraculous healing and beauty.

It's worth it to take a moment here to appreciate the entirely improbable fact that Christendom ever existed. An entire continent (and then some) all pretty much collectively disposed of the inferior idea that a god was something that merely had control over material existence. They agreed that the only thing worthy of calling "God" is the One who created everything out of nothing in the first place. Then they agreed that this Creator had communicated through various prophets. They agreed that He came Incarnate and spoke directly to humankind about who He is, who we are, why we exist, and what we are supposed to be doing. And the final improbability was that enough of them agreed that God established a specific human institution that was exclusively authorized (and ultimately held accountable) to guard and interpret His communications. These agreements created the breathtakingly beautiful legacy of Christendom, the fruit of Jesus Christ and his apostolic Church.

Now of course everything happens under the will of the Lord, including the fact that these threads frayed as the agreements fractured—about five hundred years into the post-Reformation world, we see how each agreement has slowly come undone, beginning with the disintegration of Christian unity, then the rejection of Christianity itself as the truth, and finally with a questioning and dispensing of the whole notion that God, if He even exists, has communicated anything at all, and whether His Word should be trusted.

This is a story literally as old as humanity. It goes right back to the Garden of Eden when the serpent convinced Adam and Eve that God may have given them a set of playing rules, but He was holding out on

the cheat codes. This God character, the serpent convincing argued, only gave humans a set of moral codes because He wanted them to stay ignorant and enslaved. Following those rules would get us nowhere—if we really wanted to be happy, have power, and even be like God Himself, then we need to ditch those repressive divine commands.

Every single time we have ever fallen for that argument—first from the serpent, and thence from all varieties of bad actors—it has always, unfailingly led to our ruin. To stray from God’s rules does not result in freedom. The total opposite is true—we become slaves to our appetites, our fears, our impulsive, short-term grasping. We become addicted. Our anxiety makes us easy to control and manipulate. Other people, institutions, and even substances and habits easily gain power over us and can tell us how to live. Our new tyrants demand that every aspect of our existence conform to their dictates. Ask any alcoholic how much power King Alcohol has over his life and how it orders his priorities, and you get an easy example of what this kind of subjugation looks like. To stray from God’s rules is to wander into abject enslavement.

God’s rules, it turns out, are not the source of oppression that prevent us from having all the joy and pleasure and power that the world can give us. On the contrary—they are the famed “cheat codes” we have been looking for this whole time. Following God’s moral code allows us to have true freedom. They enable us to be impervious to the temptations of the flesh; to overcome the tyranny of fear (of death, pain, loss, obscurity, etc.); to have an illuminated mind that can operate with foresight and eternal perspective. And the Lord gives us all the tools necessary to successfully navigate life, including the Sacraments. He makes sure the rules are guarded, that we have an ongoing institution to help us know how to apply them to any situation. He literally took on human flesh and sacrificed His own body and blood for us, so that we could join into his perfect body, share in his Resurrection, and have the eternal life and divinity that He always intended to be our due. This is how beloved we are to God. He has never once left us to flounder on our own, trying to make up our own stupid rules.

But God also doesn’t force His information on us. We have a choice. We can reject Him if we wish. Formation of conscience is about this matter of rejection or acceptance. It’s not a one-time action. It is an agreement to enter into a life-long discipline of learning how to conform our mind to His will. We have to decide to embark on a journey to radically reorient our lives to the person of Jesus Christ, in every single aspect of our thinking, feelings, actions, and words. Forming the conscience is a process, a participation in a relationship with truth itself. This is the source of freedom.

In *Brave New World*, every single person who lives in the civilized world is a broken, dehumanized slave that exists only to serve the state. They are in the most grotesque and worst form of bondage—the kind that is sold as true freedom. Huxley does not merely create a world where people are permitted to do as they wish with their appetites, but instead he creates a world where it is immoral not to not to indulge them. An alternative set of moral rules are impressed upon each person from the moment of conception, dictating how they are to relate to themselves, others, the material world, and God. Each of these rules are designed to create beings with a moral compulsion to chase pleasure, produce, consume, and not think about anything else.

This absence of self or thought beyond the next indulgence of empty pleasure is a kind of dehumanization that could only come out of a horror movie. The people in *Brave New World* are not allowed to be people. They are objects that exist to use and be used, and particularly formed so as to be entirely insensible of the disgusting violation of their dignity. Nobody in this world is free at all. This is the tyranny of earthly “freedom,” seen in painful clarity.

KULTURKAMPF AND GOD AS RELATIONAL LOVE

The de-formation of conscience, as it can be called, is particularly concerned with mutilating the human capacity for relationship. No civilized character in **BRAVE NEW WORLD** is capable of relating to another human being. They are radically severed from all human connection from the moment of conception. No romantic attachments are permitted, families are non-existent, and even the words “mother” and “father” and scandalous and obscene.

Why does Huxley so pointedly center the relational rules of the civilized world?

To understand the significance, it is necessary to understand that to be relational is the most basic fact of being human. We are made to be relational from the moment of conception, where we come into material existence within the body of another human being. To be a person is to be in relationship. Jesus Christ Incarnated as an infant in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary to show that God Himself takes on flesh relationally. This aspect of our being is not only inescapable, but also one of the ways that we are made in the image and likeness of God, who is relational as Trinity. To detach us from our relationality is to detach us from God as well as each other.

How human beings relate to each other, specifically how men and women relate to each other in union, is so fundamental that it was also God’s starting point. All of human civilization, every aspect of how we live, how a society is shaped and what values are embraced or rejected, the very survival of the species—all of it depends on the foundation of the relationship between man and woman. The formation of our conscience—the moral code we decide to follow—in our unitive and procreative behaviors towards each other, are what either make us free human beings growing towards eternal life in Christ, or else condemn us to death and hell. Our attitudes and conditions around how we make and raise children spell the difference between thriving and extinction. Nothing is more important than how men and women relate to each other, in individual couples as well as in society as a whole.

And of course, whoever calls the shots on how human beings engage in marriage and family issues has supreme power over the entirety of a given population. This is far greater power than merely getting to tell people what to do with their money. Sexuality is the aspect of self that is the greatest expression of relational identity with self and God. If it is subjugated to a man-made set of rules, then the entire self is given away. It is no small thing to get to dictate what counts as “moral” in the sexual area, as the World Comptrollers in **BRAVE NEW WORLD** are well aware.

It may seem that Huxley created a practically absurdist dystopia with no basis in reality, but in fact the Church has experienced a number of instances where earthly authorities have made the same kinds of attempts to seize the power to control sexual and relational morals, and thereby subject the population to exist for the ends of the state.

One very notable attempt occurred from 1871–1878 in the Kingdom of Prussia, as Chancellor Otto von Bismark openly went to war with the Catholic Church over the right to dictate the morals of sexuality and family life. Bismark sought to unify a shaky, culturally and regionally diverse Germany under a uniform national identity. The need for this was obvious—power could not be consolidated with so many diverse allegiances, and the faithfulness of Catholics to the Church over the State was particularly threatening. Bismark engaged in a seven-year campaign of persecution specifically to push the Church out of its role in education, marriage, and family values. The goal of the state, under Bismark, was to promote its own sexual morality, particularly in state schools, so as to break the power of the Church in being the authority

that Catholics turned to in forming their families and educating their children. This period of persecution was called *Kulturkampf*—literally, “culture struggle,” a battle for the consciences of the laity.

Kulturkampf was a complete failure—efforts to shut down and nationalize religious orders, abolish clergy participation in the administration of schools, and nationalize ecclesiastical offices (among other persecutions and restrictions) had the opposite effect on the laity. The response was a massive backlash of support for their Church. Catholics doubled down on their right to follow their consciences—shaped by God’s law—over civil authority, and they obeyed the Church direction to passively resist unjust laws. Eventually Bismark turned away from open persecution and sought another, more successful means to sway the culture: the creation of the first modern welfare state.

The carrot proved far more useful than the stick, as the implementation of incentives and social services effectively began to cause people to turn away from faith and towards state-run institutions that offered aid packaged with acceptance of the state-created secular moral codes. Catholicism (and Protestantism) did not have to be fought, but simply replaced with more enticing secular dogma, until its moral influence was so marginalized that it held no longer held meaningful political significance. In this way, God’s moral code can be shoved aside and nothing stands in the way of the nation-state claiming the full loyalty and compliance of its citizens, whose collective conscience they now control.

The world of today is shaped by the results and influence of *Kulturkampf*. Of course *Kulturkampf* was not the first or last persecution of the Church—there is nothing remarkable about that. What this particular persecution is remarkable for is what happened after it failed: Typically this kind of event would result in widescale religious suppression followed by revolution. But in this case, Bismark pivoted away from the violence and instead dove into the formation of a state-sponsored moral code that directly competed with the Church for cultural control. Bismark set the blueprint for nation-states to follow in the ensuing centuries ever since. These are the grounds in which Huxley created **BRAVE NEW WORLD**, a future where the incentive-laced bid is so successful (of course, not without some application of standard genocide and persecution as well) that it completely stamps out Christianity and replaces God’s moral code.

But there is something that Huxley misses that cannot be ignored—we already know that Christ has won total victory over the world. The Resurrection happened. There is no real way for human beings to erase the reality of Jesus Christ. Like in **PRIDE AND PREJUDICE**, we can go astray for many generations, even many centuries. But all it takes to cure this is a single man and woman who discover the truth of God’s plan for love and marriage, and follow it with their whole hearts, freeing themselves from the bondage of sin. There is simply no way for the evil one to create conditions of slavery that man cannot escape by turning to God.

The end of **BRAVE NEW WORLD** is a cliff-hanger. Lenina and John the Savage recreate a mutilation of the Crucifixion. Does it spark the miracle that sets freedom in motion? In a world where Jesus Christ is truth, nothing could stop it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The character of Helmholtz Watson is portrayed as intelligent, creative, and principled. He rejects the mindless pleasures of the civilized world. But consider his reaction to hearing *Romeo and Juliet*. Do you think he could experience the joy of knowing God? Is he capable of giving or receiving love? Why or why not?
2. The citizens of the civilized world are cut off from all human attachment from conception. Considering that the Lord made us relational, as well as what we know today about attachment theories, do you think the conditions of **BRAVE NEW WORLD** could really create stable human beings? How do you think that extreme lack of attachment would really affect people?
3. The World State motto includes the word “identity.” Do you think that the social conditioning of the various castes counts as an identity? Why or why not? How would you define an identity?
4. Which aspects of Huxley’s futuristic predictions appear to be most prophetic to our world today?
5. Why is soma referred to as “Christianity without tears?” Are there parallels to how we use pharmaceutical interventions in the modern world?



IS ANY AMUSEMENT RIDE REALLY SAFE?

“The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things... The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God.”

- Laudato Si’, papal encyclical of Pope Francis (excepts from para. 84 & para. 233)

JURASSIC PARK is a book about a theologian disguising himself as a mathematician. Also there are dinosaurs.

So far this year we have explored themes of how man relates to God, and how man relates to neighbor. Now we turn our attention to how man is called to relate to God’s creation—the natural world. The Lord specifically gave mankind dominion over the earth and all its creatures. What does “dominion” mean, and where are our limits? To answer this question, we must go back to the beginning, Genesis 1:26-28:

“Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.

*So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

- Genesis 1:26-28

God’s directive to Man was not a warning to leave the natural world untouched—like the Gospel parable of the servants entrusted with their master’s talents, man is expected to properly invest and develop God’s property. Stewardship is not about merely safeguarding the goods that have been entrusted to us, but actively ensuring that we have increased its value. In contradiction to many modern positions about how humankind interacts with their environment, the Lord expects us to make our mark and change the

natural world to support our reproduction. Indeed we are called to make the entire natural world effectively serve the successful thriving of the human race.

But this is obviously not a call to the rapacious, consumerist violation of the Earth for our personal gratification. We are supposed to make good, pleasing changes that glorify God. The master in the Gospel parable did not turn over his talents for his servants to personally use them to multiply their short term pleasure. They were never to forget that the talents do not belong to them. Every effort to yield a bounteous return had to be constrained by the master's definition of "bounty." The master is only satisfied if he is given back more of what he gave in the first place.

The good servant recognizes that the master's definition of bounty is not self-serving. The master does not enrich himself at the expense of his servants. Rather the master's aim is to create an estate that can support his entire household well. The servants who understand that they are serving the common good are rewarded with more opportunities to participate in the master's own life—to enter into his joy. The servant who works to enrich the master, not himself, is ultimately acting out of the most enlightened self interest.

This view of man's dominion over the earth is a recognition that we are called to the highest honor out of all of God's creation: to co-create with Him. Our job is to finish the work of the Lord and sanctify the natural world. We order it and make it serve us, in order to serve Him. Every object, every aspect of creation has been specifically given to us by the Lord—a talent entrusted into our hands—in order to do with it what *He* wills. There isn't a leaf or a tree or an inch of dirt that isn't stamped with a divine directive. We are here to reverently look for that directive and promptly follow it, for the glory of God.

In other words, we are called to have a *sacramental worldview*. In Catholic theology, a sacrament is a visible sign of the invisible grace of God. These graces are not only found in the seven sacraments—as St. Thomas Aquinas explains in much of his work, graces are evident in all of the created order. This is a theocentric worldview: everything in existence points to the Creator. The very fact that there is something rather than nothing is evidence of the existence of God. In sacramental theology, our every interaction with the natural world (and each other) must be imbued with a constant, conscious recognition that God made the object of our attention, and a desire to learn what He would have us do with it.

Although the Catholic Church is commonly denigrated as anti-science, and full of superstitious spells and backwards rejection of reasoning, nothing could be further from the truth. This sacramental worldview has in fact been the basis of scientific discovery, and the reason that Christendom came into existence in the first place. The modern university system and the systematization of academic research was founded by the monastic tradition: the most groundbreaking scientific discoveries of the world have been made by Catholic religious and laypeople, including Nicolaus Copernicus, André-Marie Ampère, Louis Braille, Gregor Mendel, Louis Pasteur, Georges Lemaître, and many others.

The Catholic promotion of science rests on perfect logic: the Lord is glorified when we seek to better understand and love His creation. Science is about seeking truth, and seeking truth is defined as a quest to see the world through God's eyes. The more we know about the natural world, the more competently we can do His will. Scientific discovery and research are beautiful forms of worship, and they are necessary if we are to fulfill our command to sanctify the Earth and give the Lord a good return on His investment. We explore the world under God's direction, and seek to know as much truth as possible so we can do His will.

This sacramental worldview, functioning beautifully for a good fifteen hundred or so years, was upended with great fury during the post-Reformation era and the Enlightenment. As the Catholic Church was

attacked for controlling the message of Christ, the rallying cry was that every man should be free to interpret Jesus for himself. At the same time, the notion of sacramentality was criticized as giving a stranglehold of power to the clergy—after all, only the ordained could turn bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. To reduce the influence of the Church, the legitimacy of the sacraments themselves was questioned. Perhaps the sacraments were just a way for the Catholic Church to keep us dependent on a man-made institution, and the entire notion of sacramentality is an unjust limit on human freedom.

Thus the Enlightenment, an era of intellectual and philosophical thought, flowed naturally from the Reformation—the idea that anyone could interpret the Lord’s message for themselves quickly progressed to exploitation of the Word for personal gain. Christianity became a potent tool for political control, and combined with a degradation of the sacramental worldview. This caused a massive backlash against the very idea of man deferring to God at all, especially intellectually. For the first time in Christendom, mankind considered whether there was any sensible reason to try to look at the world through the eyes of the Creator, when perhaps our own rational faculties could do just fine on their own. Why should man be bound by religious dogmas and the medieval superstitions of the Church, when they seemed to impose absurd limits on rational inquiry for no good reason?

This line of thinking amounts to the servant beholding the talents in his hand—with a fading memory of the master, and a rising rebelliousness against the master’s instructions—wondering why on earth it made sense to limit his use of the talents to comply with the directives of an absent and irrelevant superior. In fact, perhaps it was downright foolish to do so, and much more sensible, even *moral*, for the servant to come up with intelligent means to use the talents to enrich himself and serve his own direct interests.

This widespread breakdown of the sacramental worldview rapidly took over the rulers of Europe, who were in possession of a stable and large scale civilization built by Christ, but no longer bound by Christ’s commands. The result was the Industrial Revolution—the greatest social and economic shift known to mankind.

The Industrial Revolution, in simplest form, was the idea of looking at the natural world—for example, perhaps a plot of common land—and wondering why it wasn’t being used for the greatest possible economic return. Perhaps enclosing the area and using it for the most efficient development of capital made more sense than letting a bunch of peasants live off of it just to raise their families and do nothing much besides worship God...an entirely unprofitable pastime. Instead of wondering what God wanted human beings to do with this land, perhaps it was high time to wonder how the land could be used to serve man. The Industrial Revolution represented the shift from looking at the world to understand how to love it, to looking at the world to figure out how to best use and exploit it.

The development of industry and widespread displacement of peasants created the world’s first dense, overpopulated cities, and an economic underclass that was dependent on employment for survival. Women’s industries, a source of economic leverage and means for women to contribute to societal structure as well as exercise agency, were decimated. The work of men, many of whom had been highly trained farmers, craftsmen and artisans, disappeared and was replaced by dangerous, soul crushing drudgery in factories and mines for upwards of eighty hours per week. Workers had no power against the owners of the factories and land. Women and children were exploited for labor—a new concept of commodifying the productivity of a human person without regard to their individual humanity. Alcoholism and addiction skyrocketed, and family structure broke down. The displacement and resulting social ills occurred on a massive scale—before the Industrial Revolution, 90% of the population of Europe were

farmers. In less than a hundred years, over 50% of the population lived in major cities, without possession of land or capital.

There was more money, more efficient agriculture to produce more food, and more people...but the people were a means to an end. The excess population existed not to glorify God, but to enrich a much smaller group of fellow people. Wealth and property ownership were increasingly concentrated. And while God commanded us to subdue the earth so that we could be fruitful and multiply, His directives involved doing so in a manner that served the common good. In God's plan, every human being is a means to his own end, and not the ends of another. Human beings are not supposed to be factory products, like in *Brave New World*—existing so that other humans can become enriched at their expense.

But God's plan clearly didn't respect the development of the modern economy. The goal of the new world, stripped of sacramental reverence for the Creator, was and is to wrest every bit of profit and pleasure out of creation. Over the last five hundred years, man has done so with an increasing impunity and certainty that he has total control over the natural world, to do with it as he wishes. The only limit is his imagination—a faculty not illuminated by anything as constraining as God's will.

NATURAL LAW: THE UNAVOIDABILITY OF REALITY

This brings us to the present day, and back to Jurassic Park, where the character of Ian Malcolm basically acts as a mouthpiece for some very surprising, breathtakingly Catholic takes on science, economics, and philosophy.

Malcolm harshly upbraids John Hammond, owner and creator of the park, for his willingness to use science for frivolous, mercenary economic gain. However Malcolm also indicts the fairly penniless Drs. Grant and Sattler—the “pure” scientists—as equally mercenary. Malcolm opines that for about five hundred years now, human beings have lied to themselves that science is about the desire to discover truth. Rather, he charges, it is about pride and the satisfaction of the ego. Human beings simply wish to prove they can control matter and make their mark on the world. They are not “discovering truth,” but rather wanting to discover the heights of their own power. Malcolm accuses scientists of only satisfying their desire to know whether they *could*, but not whether they *should*.

The character of Malcolm falls short of pointing out that the “should” comes from God's law, but the gist of his entire contribution to the storyline of Jurassic Park is recognition of the Creator as having all true power. Chaos theory is a literary device used to stand for a simple truth: Man is not God, and only God is in control. Even if one does not wish to acknowledge God, His signature is undeniably imprinted into the very fabric of the rules of the universe—otherwise known as the natural law. The natural law is the embedded principles of human nature, justice, rights, responsibilities, and moral order that are derived from observation of the natural world. We can know and understand these intrinsic laws from direct interaction with the world, we ignore them at our peril.

One fundamental edict of the natural law is that human beings cannot control reality. Pretending we can do so does not make it true; it is about as effective as jumping off a building while insisting that gravity isn't real. Human beings do not dictate the terms of this world. We didn't build it. We can manipulate the material world, to an extent. But we cannot create it out of nothing. We can make boats, but not oceans. Even if we become frightfully clever with how we manipulate the material world, we are in a lot of trouble if we start believing this makes us capable of altering reality. In fact without submitting to God's directives in how we interact with the natural world, we end up manipulating creation in ways that are totally beyond

our ability to understand or predict. All we do is end up with very bad, very unexpected outcomes. Like Satan. And John Hammond.

The natural law, then, brings us right back to God. Every disastrous attempt to play God ends up decimating us and delivering us to slavery. From there we have an opportunity to repent and begin again with humility, observing the natural order and turning back to trying to understand how the Creator made it, and why. And of course He is gracious and good enough to have given us His own revealed Word so that we don't endlessly stab about in ignorance. That is essentially a summation of much of the Old Testament. If we can get this part right, we can be ready for the salvation of the New Testament.

JURASSIC PARK is in many ways (most likely entirely inadvertently) a brilliant reimagining of the story of the Israelites, and also a compendium of Catholic apologetics on natural law and stewardship of the Earth. Not bad for a dino tale.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think John Hammond really cared about advancing science? Did he really care about making children happy? His motives do not seem clear—why do you think he did what he did?

2. What did you think of Ian Malcolm as a device for injecting moral philosophy?

3. The character of Dr. Wu, the lead geneticist, is presented in a neutral light for much of the novel. Where do you think he crossed the line into amoral and immoral scientific work?

4. Does bioengineering and methods of genetic manipulation violate God's law? How is it different than a field like optometry? What are virtuous uses of science to manipulate and change the world, and what are sinful uses? What is the dividing line?

5. Michael Crichton claimed that he was a deist, but against religious dogma. He also criticized environmentalism as a false religion. Pope Francis has similarly been criticized for endorsing environmentalism as a religion. How do the views of God and stewardship of the environment in **JURASSIC PARK** mesh with the teachings of the Church?



THE IMPOSSIBLE FAITH OF ATHEISM

“A catechism should faithfully and systematically present the teaching of Sacred Scripture, the living Tradition of the Church and the authentic Magisterium, as well as the spiritual heritage of the Fathers and the Church's saints, to allow for a better knowledge of the Christian mystery and for enlivening the faith of the People of God. It should take into account the doctrinal statements which down the centuries the Holy Spirit has intimated to his Church. It should also help illumine with the light of faith the new situations and problems which had not yet emerged in the past.”

– **Fidei Depositum, Pope St. John Paul II**

Isaac Asimov's **FOUNDATION** is widely regarded to have been inspired by the history of the fall of the Roman Empire and the role of the medieval Catholic Church. Asimov himself was an avowed atheist who had little patience for religious dogma, and his distaste for spiritual belief permeates the entire novel. So it is interesting that in **FOUNDATION**, Asimov ultimately offers a profound defense of faith, and the role of humankind in protecting the deposit of divine revelation.

How does an atheist end up creating such a religious work? First, let's look at history.

FOUNDATION starts with the Galactic Empire, over twelve thousand years old and in steep decline. The culprits are typical: political infighting, economic depression, stagnating intellectual advancement, the excessive burdens of administration of a too-large enterprise, and so on. By the time the prophetic God-like character of Hari Seldon comes along, the historical forces of destruction are too far along to stop. Instead Seldon starts the Foundation, a shadowy group whose proposed aim is to preserve the collected scientific, technological, and artistic knowledge of the human species so that it can be used to shorten the period of anarchy that will follow the destruction of the Empire.

The Foundation is exiled to the far corners of the galaxy, poor and defenseless, surrounded by barbarian kingdoms that have rebelled and broken away from the Empire. The Empire offers no protection. The Foundation must use two things to survive: its public face of friendly, neutral charity, and its private goal of reliance on the “science” of psychohistory. The true aim of the Foundation is to eventually found a new Empire that imposes political hegemony under their rule. This goal of galactic domination has been guaranteed as certain by their prophet Seldon, who assures them that according to the “science” of psychohistory—a special, fiercely guarded knowledge that they could not ever come to on their own—the new Empire has already won victory over the world. By following the plan of psychohistory, the men of the Foundation get to be co-creators in the plan for the new and eternal Empire.

Okay, now to real life: As the Roman Empire moved towards decline (for many, but not all, of the same reasons as the Galactic Empire) over the fifth and sixth centuries, the fledgling Catholic Church emerged as a source of charity for the poor, and administration of hospitals, schools, and other various social services. For its part, the Roman Emperors moved the seat of power from Rome to Constantinople, leaving the Western half of the Empire to fall into rebellion and rule by various barbarian kingdoms. The Catholic Church was small, defenseless, poor in material resources, and armed only with the power of the Holy Spirit—more or less abandoned to figure out for itself how to keep from being attacked and annexed by some local ruler. The Church must proceed with the plan, given by Jesus Christ, to spread the news of the Gospel and await the second coming where the Lord would take full possession of the Kingdom that already is. The Church has been assured that Christ has already won total victory over the world, and by following divine revelation—a special, fiercely guarded knowledge that human beings could never come to on our own—the Church would help bring about the new heaven and new Earth. But rather than getting to be rulers themselves, it is Christ that is at the head, and the faithful are his body.

In **FOUNDATION**, the small, strategically weak Foundation learns to play the various barbarian kingdoms off of each other. They offer their unique technological aid as spiritual food, installing a dummy religion with all the trappings of liturgy and a hierarchal priesthood. The Foundation appeals to the monarchs of the Kingdoms by offering to legitimize their rule as divinely bestowed. The various kingdoms quickly jump at the chance to secure their authority over their subjects with the help of spiritual control—which of course this is all ultimately under the control of the Foundation. The monarchs quickly realize that they are slaves to the Foundation, which has real control over the emotional devotion of the subjects. Every kingdom is full of people who have been manipulated into completely falling for this sham of a religion.

In real life: the fledgling Catholic Church sent out its missionaries Westward and negotiated with the various barbarian tribes and kingdoms, offering their spiritual knowledge. The enduring and powerful system of monasteries, led by fierce and intelligent monks including St. Boniface and St. Benedict, helped spread the message of the Gospel through the Roman Catholic tradition. The efforts resulted in widespread conversion to Roman Catholicism (and Roman cultural values), including conversion of powerful families in powerful tribes—notably the Franks. In time, the Roman Empire cast off the papacy and converged its focus on the Byzantine half, contemptuously throwing the Roman Church to the wolves. The Church decided to make inroads with the Carolingian family of the Franks, long seen as holding the real power in the kingdom. The Church eventually helped transfer official rule from the failing Merovingian dynasty to the more friendly Carolingians, joining forces to legitimize their rule with spiritual authority that the subjects believed in with fervent devotion.

Eventually, over the next millennia or thereabouts, the Catholic Church assisted in the development of the various nation-states of Europe, all ruled by monarchs crowned by the Pope. Their status as royalty ordained by God was dependent on the religious devotion of their subjects...and the religious devotion of their subjects was founded on an unshakable loyalty to the Roman Church. As we covered in the discussion of *Ender's Game*, over time this state of affairs caused some significant dissatisfaction for various rulers, who did not appreciate the stranglehold of spiritual power held by the Church, with their power to call strikes and control the masses. Rulers were limited in their actions to the extent that the Church had the authority to declare whether such actions were morally permissible, and therefore accepted by the subjects. Eventually the Wars of Religion resulted in a fracturing of the spiritual authority, with various rulers claiming the right to control Christianity within their own borders. The nations remaining loyal to the Catholic Church were in a position of significant leverage of the Church. The power of the spiritual sword in Christendom was not weakened, at least at this point, but rather broken and distributed to the temporal authorities. *They divided his garments amongst themselves.* The march

towards the Enlightenment, the use of trade for conquest, and the eventual discard of state-sponsored missionary expeditions in favor of raw monetary dealings occurred not under the command of the Catholic Church, but rather by a diverse variety of numerous nations that took hold of the spiritual authority and did with it as they wished.

Now back to **FOUNDATION**: when the barbarian monarchs realized they had been had by a sham religion, their response was not to try to wrest the power of the spiritual sword for themselves. The Foundation maintains a vise grip control over the “faith” of technology—there is no way for the various kingdoms to take a hold of it and make it their own, outside of the control of the Foundation. The technology can only be operated by the priests of the sham religion. The various petty rulers of the hinterlands end up shunning the religion of the Foundation, banning missionaries and turning to their own various versions of ancestor worship. After nearly a century, the Foundation is only able to make inroads to establishing political control over barbarian kingdoms by discarding the false religion and turning to pure trade. This proves to be a far more successful approach to garnering the loyalty of the masses. People are far more attached to their economic and leisure conveniences than to their eternal souls.

By the end of the novel, Asimov has well made his point. Religion has historically been nothing more than a means of political control—and an archaic, primitive, and outdated one at that. In **FOUNDATION**, the leaders acknowledge that their sham religion had its early uses, but it is merely a means to an end of the establishment of total political power over the galaxy. And such an end is eventually better achieved through more sophisticated means. Only the foolish, naïve, and ignorant really believe in a thing like “God.” This kind of emotional manipulation of the masses must have an expiration date. The entire notion of faith is inherently tied to exploitation, and it is an ugly thing best dumped on the graveyard of history. The real power that saves is secular human intelligence, no metaphysical or mystical component need to be involved.

And yet the men running the Foundation are deeply devoted religious zealots of a level that few Christians could claim. Even as characters like Salvor Hardin and Hober Mallow sneer their contempt at the fake faith of the masses, they are slavish servants to the psychohistorical predictions of Hari Seldon. Even as they exploit the sham use of religion, they carefully guard, even with their lives, the real deposit of faith: the Vault where Hari Seldon’s holographic speeches are given at various intervals to guide them through the sign of the times. They willingly submit their intellect and their will to obedience to Seldon’s plan, based on an unshakable faith that it is true, and a hope that victory has already been won. These characters *believe*, wholeheartedly, that the information given to them by Hari Seldon is salvific, pure, essential to their understanding of the meaning of their existence, and containing perfect knowledge of their purpose. Their great honor is to play a role in Seldon’s plan and use the information provided to participate as co-creators.

Of course this is perfectly understandable. The desire to receive and love the deposit of faith—information from God Himself—is written in our hearts. It is a part of our nature. An avowed atheist doesn’t escape being a human person. Try as he might, Asimov cannot even write atheist characters who do not believe in, serve, and guard a truth outside of themselves. If he succeeded, his creations could not be human.

The issue then is what kind of truth is the subject of one’s faith. In the case of **FOUNDATION**, the characters direct this faith to the god of human intelligence. Atheists are in fact full of faith, in that they have an irrational belief that human intelligence and efforts will save the world. They believe this not in the absence of any evidence, but in fact *despite* all evidence to the contrary.

Human intelligence is a beautiful thing, but as was discussed with *Jurassic Park* and chaos theory, our intellect cannot handle the complexity of the universe. We simply lack the capacity, no matter how many of our brightest and best put their heads together, or what kind of advanced tools we create—we cannot do it. Only God, the divine intellect, has this capacity. Our desire to predict the future (or even understand the past or present) is a doomed attempt to control it. Every single time we try we come up short. It's not that our intelligence isn't good for anything. But it is not up to the task of saving humanity.

But the Lord does not make us try to save ourselves—we have received thousands of years of divine revelation. He even sent His own Son and spoke to us directly. He created a Church that guards the knowledge, the deposit of faith. Even as civilizations rise and fall, as generations go astray, as cultural mores fall towards decay and sin, as confusion reigns.... the deposit of faith is there. We never have to reinvent the wheel to figure out who we are, why we were created, what we are supposed to do with our lives, how to live with ourselves and others in this life, and how to get to the end goal. Our salvation is assured by the gift of information that we are completely incapable of coming up with ourselves.

But the atheists of *Foundation*? They put this immeasurable trust not in the divine intelligence, but in a fellow human being. Certainly Hari Seldon is written to be an unprecedented genius. But this is a misplaced worship of human intelligence. The characters of **FOUNDATION** do not believe they could even recreate the scientific field of psychohistory without Seldon—why not? What sense does it make to believe that one human being can unlock levels of mathematical expertise that no other human can or ever will achieve.... but then claim that belief in a divine intelligence is a silly superstition? Why elevate a human being to God-status, but deny the real God? Seems a lot more sensible to just recognize the real God, so that one can be free of surrendering his will and intellect to another human being.

At the end of the day we are not condemned to live in the world of **FOUNDATION**, where political intrigue and slavish worship of fellow human beings is considered wisdom, but faith in God is foolishness. We do not have to put this kind of trust in mere human beings. The deposit of faith is real—we have Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, and it is guarded and interpreted to guide us through every age by the Magisterium. In two thousand years it hasn't failed yet, which is quite a bit longer than the most anyone ever expected of old Seldon.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. **FOUNDATION** presents the interplay between Church and State as one where the State controls the Church like a puppet. On the other hand, modern atheists and secularists hold that the Church used to control the State as a puppet, and everything should be done to avoid that outcome. What do you think is the correct relationship between the Church and State?
2. Is there an appropriate role for studying the psychology of various societies for any predictive purposes? Should we try to predict future events? Why or why not?
3. Which of the five stories in **FOUNDATION** are your favorite? Why?
4. The Foundationers keep their real faith (the Vault and Seldon crises) secret from the general masses, and instead create a false religion to control outsiders. What if they had shared their genuine faith from the beginning? Do you think it would have worked better to spread this “Gospel” rather than a false faith? Why or why not?
5. Do you think there are parallels to how to deify technology and “tech wizards” today as capable of saving the human species? What kinds of parallels do you see? Do you think these are good or bad developments? Why?



SALVATION AND SELFHOOD

“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

- Romans 7:15, 19, 22

Who are we?

Option One: Fundamentally good, naïve creatures, full of guileless desire to experience life. Innocent and with good intentions. In love with our Creator, and desiring to know, love, and serve Him, without any real idea of what that means.

Option Two: Wretched and broken fools who intentionally made bad choices, with our eyes open. Knowing there would be consequences, but with only a superficial understanding of what that meant. A foreboding sense that we have ruined everything good in our world, and there isn't any way to un-ring that bell. Despairing acceptance that the only path forward is to lean in and become absurdly defensive. Rationalize and justify. Maybe that way we can forget the innocent self was ever there in the first place. Incapable of turning back, and certain there is nothing to return home to anyway. How could you possibly recover lost innocence?

Well those are both pretty terrible choices. Isn't there an Option Three?

What about: Joyfully redeemed, a beloved sheep that was once lost but now is found? It might be impossible to return to that state of perfect innocence, but this new state is arguably better—there is a wisdom that the previously immature self could not have understood. There is also a genuine appreciation for what it means to be in relationship with the Creator. The devotion is no longer hypothetical and untested, nor is it taken for granted. Yes, there are scars and wounds. But this is a real self that could only have developed after walking through pain and loss. There had to be the experience of consequences and necessity of hard choices. Something beautiful and real could emerge from those conditions.

St. Paul and Jason Bourne would likely have enjoyed this kind of conversation about identity over a few drinks.

Robert Ludlum's **THE BOURNE IDENTITY** is a story about a man's struggle to know who he is, and somehow not run screaming from what he finds. The story centers around an obvious and surface level brokenness

of self: Jason Bourne has amnesia, after suffering a terrible and traumatic accident. He has instincts, skills, and grasp of language, but no idea where any of it came from. The deeper level brokenness is his real problem though: the more he discovers about himself, the more disgusted he is with the kind of horrible person he believes himself to be. He doesn't *want* to know what lies beyond his conscious knowledge. As an amnesiac, maybe he gets a chance to be free of what the old self has done.

The story presents a feint within a feint, within a feint, like any good dime-store spy novel. As an amnesiac Bourne displays several instances of heroic goodness, risking his life to save a woman that he falls deeply in love with. He'd like to hope against all odds that maybe he's a good guy; there is enough of a blank slate to entertain the idea. But then Bourne finds out that he is Cain, a ruthless and sociopathic international assassin who does gruesome things for money. His proficiency at violence, deception, and murder makes this story undeniably convincing. He can't connect emotionally at all with the identity of "Cain," but it seems true. He is trapped with it. But *then* he learns that the identity of Cain is itself a fiction. He is actually undercover intelligence operative Jason Bourne, who took on this false identity of a killer in order to draw out and catch the real international assassin. So...why exactly would he do that? It turns out "Jason Bourne" wasn't all that great of a guy either, with serious anger issues and a streak of violent extremism. But what about even before Jason Bourne went bad—who was he before he turned into the kind of person who would take on suicidal undercover missions?

Underneath all the layers of Jason Bourne is a wounded, flawed, real man. He is a mixed bag of good and bad qualities, terrible experiences of loss and grief, and a history of not handling the pain all too well. He is a person who was in some really bad situations, and who made some bad decisions. He's imperfect—neither saintly hero nor evil killer. He is man with a chance to do something new with his life, if he can let the past go. With love, the old self (all its different versions) can die, and the new self can be reborn in hope.

This is the fundamental choice in Christian conversion: God shows us through the story of the Fall and His plan of redemption that it is not possible to erase the past. But we can always write a new ending.

"...seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator."

- Colossians 3:9-10

Turning back to St. Paul: He started out as Saul. Saul was a devout Pharisee—a zealot. This wasn't a pejorative; there were other zealots in the Gospels. Saul was a highly educated man, a Jew with a Roman citizenship, well versed in the law and well connected. When the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth began to be a problem, Saul's response was a defense of the truth of God. He was committed to erasing the insult that a common son of a carpenter, tortured and killed on a cross like any other criminal and political agitator, was the Messiah. A purity of righteousness motivated Saul in a way that could be understood by few people. The average person is typically beset by too much self-doubt to be very sure of their plan of action. Most of us don't believe we have the right to be entirely secure in our moral pronouncements. But Saul possessed the kind of personality that is totally convinced they are doing right—this is a mind can justify anything.

To a person like Saul, it is a reasonable thing to imprison, scourge, and even round up and execute Christians. All actions are done under the cover of legitimacy, with procedures and bureaucratic layers

allowing the executioner to maintain appropriate distance from the condemned. Saul stood in approval as young St. Stephen was stoned to death in front of him. Was it this moment when it might have occurred to him that this couldn't really be God's will? Maybe this was Saul's opportunity to get off the train of events he had just chosen—the one that would barrel him into increasingly persecuting and killing Christians to the point of developing a terrifying reputation throughout the region.

It is reasonable to wonder if Saul had second thoughts as he went down the rabbit hole of killing people. He had no recorded history of being some kind of sociopathic murderer prior to these encounters with the Christians. He didn't come into the picture as amoral, blood thirsty, and happy to stumble across an excuse to do what he wanted to do anyway. Saul was a much more frightening person than that. This is the kind of person who talked himself into believing his actions were righteous, and he dove deeper and deeper into the hole as time passed.

By the time Saul got on the road to Damascus, maybe he already had some doubts. Maybe he wasn't sure that what he was doing was good. But perhaps the good he wished to do; he could not do. The stakes were too high, and he had built his identity on the correctness of his actions. The only thing he could do to keep up the act was to keep killing. That way at least no one suspects you are ashamed, that you think you made a mistake, that you wish you could stop.

That's the nature of sin—Satan will give you all kinds of justifications and encouragement to do it, but as soon as you do, he turns on you and becomes the Accuser. Now there's no hope, you are just a living mausoleum for the evil you did, and the only way to save a shred of self-worth is to own it and make it your identity. There's no turning back, just doubling down so you don't have to feel bad about something you can't change anyway. You're trapped. Even if you want to do something different, it doesn't fit the persona you put on. You can't ever take off. The false self is impossible to get rid of, and all you can do is justify it. You're convinced that you've forfeited any other identity, so you must defend this one at all costs.

When Jesus came to Paul, the blinding and incapacitation were a profound act of kindness. Saul had to stop, but he could not do so of his own will. Praise the Lord, because not a single one of us has the power to stop on our own. We're in too deep, busy lying to ourselves for so long. We have no ability to just hit the pause button and say "I was wrong. I haven't been living right. I want to change." Change into what? We are certain that we can only be the same bad person who has done so many bad things. We are just giving up our only defense: pretending it's not true. The Lord's incapacitation was a great mercy for Saul, because perhaps it let him do what his spirit was desperately aching to do and couldn't.

There is a type of living death that every person is terrified of: it's the unflinchingly honest self-assessment. Maybe Saul, like Jason Bourne, got to a point where self-awareness was long ago abandoned in favor of a shallow conviction that whatever evil we did was justified, and it was the others' fault anyhow. This belief is absurd, but necessary, because maybe, like Bourne, Saul was absolutely sure that a genuine look within would reveal ugliness that had to be avoided at all costs. There is no reason to want to meet yourself if you're already certain what you'll find is a monster. That was Bourne's dilemma. Deciding to look inside is absolutely like death—the death of the ego, the old man.

But praise the Lord, we don't do this alone. Jesus Christ is with us, calling out to us by name just like he called Saul. And when we do this with our Lord, we discover that in fact, the monster we imagined is a distortion. It is true that we are not justified and perfect like we pretended to be, but we're also not nearly as terrible as we thought. With Jesus by our side, we find out that we are just human beings, wounded but

redeemable; a mix of good and bad traits. Some things run deeper than others, but there is nothing His grace can't heal.

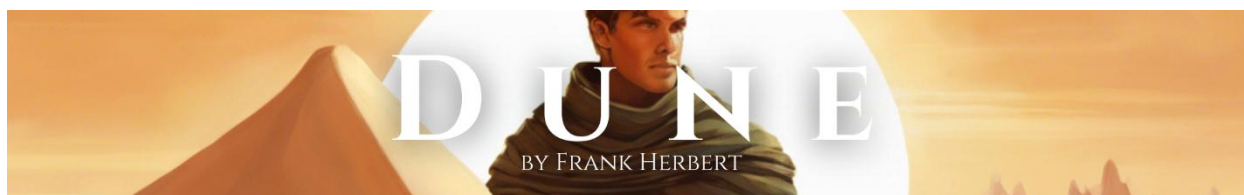
The real trick to life is to let go of two illusions, and embrace one truth: The first illusion is that our sins mark us as bad forever—that they're etched into our foreheads, and we are inescapably defined by them. The second illusion is that we can change, erase, or undo the past. What was done was done. We let go of both condemnation as well as avoidance. The one truth is that God knows all of this, and He gives us the beautiful opportunity to take what we've done and turn it into the richness of wisdom and spiritual growth. We are not defined by our sin; we are informed by it. Today is a new day. With His grace we can gratefully use what we've learned to be more virtuous *today*, be closer to the Lord *today*.

What did Saul do after this encounter with the Lord? He became Paul. Paul the new man did not erase Saul. He took himself, sins and all, and brought it all to the Lord to redeem. He used his past sins to develop an all-encompassing love for Christ and Christianity that fulfilled and exceeded all the bounds of his righteousness. The certainty he always had could finally be fulfilled in his work as Apostle. Saul's personality and identity was not erased—it was sanctified and perfected. This didn't happen by being stuck in the past or worried about the future, as the devil would have us do. It happens by being grateful right now for the chance to live and share the Gospel.

Cain-Delta-Bourne-David has a chance to have a new life, in love, today—to end up choosing option three as his identity. So do we. May the Lord give us the strength to make that choice again and again, every day of our lives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Bourne's amnesia presents an interesting moral dilemma. Is he culpable for the sins he committed that he can't even recall? Is memory a prerequisite for morality? Why or why not?
2. The character of Marie St. Jacques falls totally in love with Bourne, and is willing to join him in international intrigue and even exile. For the sake of love, she is willing to completely give over her life in sacrifice. Do you think her actions are plausible? Why or why not?
3. After Bourne's accident, he spends several months recuperating in a small French village. No one from Treadstone 71 tries to find him. Was he left for dead? What moral obligations do you think the US government owed to Bourne, and to soldiers and operatives in general?
4. If your memory was erased, and all that remained were your instincts and acquired skills and education, how do you think you would go about surviving? How would you figure out who you are? Do you think anything would lead you to back to Jesus Christ? Why or why not?
5. Once Bourne discovers the truth and learns he is David Webb, do you think he was comfortable with the truth of who he is? Do you think David Webb is a moral character? Why or why not?



THE BIBLE AS PREQUEL

“The Antichrist's deception already begins to take shape in the world every time the claim is made to realize within history that messianic hope which can only be realized beyond history through the eschatological judgement. The Church has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism, especially the ‘intrinsically perverse’ political form of a secular messianism.”

- Catechism of the Catholic Church (para. 676)

Frank Herbert's **DUNE**, of all the books on the list, contains the most evocative Catholic tropes. It's almost like Herber created a sequel to the New Testament set over twenty thousand years into the future, with all genuine metaphysical elements removed. The story of **DUNE** treats the New Testament as a precursor for the purpose of showing how the events have been foretold, to bolster the use of man-made prophesy.

The most accurately Catholic construct of **DUNE** is Herbert's expert use of typology to help the reader see the inevitability of Paul Atreides as the Messiah, the Kwisatz Haderach. Typology is how the Magisterium teaches Biblical interpretation—it refers to the use of foreshadowing as a narrative device. Without typology, it is pretty much impossible to understand the Bible as a single, coherent narrative. Herbert uses the method to create his own pseudo-spiritual mythology.

The use of typology in the Bible is best described by a common expression: the New Testament is concealed in the Old, and the Old Testament is revealed in the New. The events and peoples of the Old Testament are set up to be fulfilled in the New Testament—they are signs of what is to come, so that there can be no mistake when the messiah appears. For example, the ark of the covenant is a prefigurement of Mary. Joseph of the Old Testament, born of Jacob and protector of the bread in Egypt, prefigures St. Joseph the foster father of Jesus, born of Jacob and protector of the living Bread that flees to Egypt for safety. The manna that rains down from heaven to feed the Israelites in the Old Testament is a prefigurement of the Eucharist, the food that came down from heaven in the form of the body of Christ. The Ten Commandments of the Old Testament are a prefigurement of the Beatitudes, which fulfill and fully illuminate the law.

Prophesy goes hand in hand with prefigurement. The prophet points to the signs that must be watched, and explains the meaning. In the Old Testament, the Lord uses the prophets to prepare us the plan of salvation, so that we may know when the appointed hour arrives for the coming of the Messiah Jesus Christ. The prophets narrate the typological story, often by pointing out the allegorical or anagogical implications of the current events, and pointing us beyond the surface. It is not really possible to understand what the prophets of the Old Testament are saying unless you see that they are setting up how everything points to the New Testament.

In **DUNE**, Herbert creates a world where the New Testament conceals the Ultra-New Testament: the promise of a materialist messiah. The Kwisatz Haderach is the creation of human efforts; the second coming is not of Christ, but his human successor. In this world, the sophistication of technological advancements has been a dead end. Apparently by twenty thousand years in the future, we humans will discover that AI fails to deliver the kind of results we were hoping for. The most superior and enduring superpower is the human intellect, developed and enhanced to godlike status that surpasses the abilities of any technology we could create. Our savior is the human intellect, enhanced to wizardry: the super-man.

Various “guilds” of human collectives harness and exploit the human intellect in their own ways, to acquire political power. Each guild has its own trademark manner of shaping the abilities of the members via extreme conditioning and pharmacology. In the case of the messiah, the all-female Bene Gesserit guild use these methods, along with artificial prophecies of their manufactured religion, to commence a program of genetic and social engineering. Their goal is to create a male who can harness access to the male and female psyches of past ancestors (as opposed to the Bene Gesserit sisters, who can only access the female), and ultimately be able to see the future. This prescient power assures an insurmountable advantage of political leverage for the Bene Gesserit. Beneath the dogmatic language, mysticism, and exploitive use of religious overtones, this is ultimately about worshipping the end result of performance enhancing drugs, rigorous training, and extraordinarily social manipulation. God doesn’t play a part in this fantasy except to be supplanted by the ascendancy of the man-made order.

But in order to make the new-new messiah legitimate, **DUNE** uses the story of the actual Incarnation as the prefigurement, so that the reader may recognize the Kwisatz Haderach (even as the Bene Gesserit, like the Pharisees, fail to pick up the clues until after the fact). Some examples:

-The genetic lineage of the messiah is carefully documented on the side of Paul’s father, Duke Leto, just as the genealogy of St. Joseph is painstakingly detailed back to Abraham. But the genealogy of Lady Jessica is shrouded in secrecy, as the Bible does not detail the lineage of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Jessica has been raised in the Bene Gesserit schools since she was a young girl; tradition holds that Mary was raised in the temple since childhood.

-The Holy Family is used as a prefigurement of the new “Holy Family” of Paul, Duke Leto, and Lady Jessica. In the Scriptures, the marriage between Joseph and Mary is specially arranged to be unconsummated so that Mary stays the faithful spouse of the Holy Spirit. In **DUNE**, the inversion is that Duke Leto and Lady Jessica’s union is specially arranged to be illegitimate so that Duke Leto can stay faithfully open to a possibility of political partnership.

-In the Scriptures, the Incarnation happens because Mary gives her fiat to the Lord. In **DUNE**, Paul is born because Jessica gives her ‘anti-fiat’ to the Bene Gesserit, and bears a son instead of the daughter she was ordered to produce. Jesus is the result of Mary’s yes; Paul is the result of Jessica’s no.

-In the Scriptures, the leaders of the temple are amazed as twelve-year-old Jesus reveals his theological genius and perfect knowledge of the law. Herbert uses this as prefigurement of Paul’s perfect and prescient knowledge of the ways of the Fremen.

There are many more such examples, but this will do.

The important point here is that the prophecies of the Bene Gesserit are explicitly false—the *Missionaria Protectiva* is an intentional deception of superstitious messianic mythology on various planets. The Bene Gesserit exploits the natural religious tendencies of primitive native populations to create a cultural

environment that favors their interests. Their real aim is not to tend to the signs and communications of the actual God, and await the coming of His Son. Instead the god they seek is perfect political control. They are engineering and awaiting birth of the individual they believe will serve as the perfect tool for that outcome.

There is some gray area about whether Paul is a creation of Bene Gesserit scheming, or perhaps whether the Bene Gesserit accidentally stumbled upon a population where some elements of the Fremen faith are actually real, and Paul is an actual messiah figure. This unresolved tension is the source of much of the internal battle that consumes Paul even as he ascends to power with the help of the Fremen who believe in him. Is he an opportunistic fraud, or is the messiah prophesy maybe just a teensy bit real? At least, maybe its real enough that he can safely submerge his identity into the role?

Of all the books covered on the list this year, **DUNE** is the most egregious example of the cynical exploitation of religion as a tool of political control. But unlike **FOUNDATION** or **WATCHMEN**, which explore how false prophets and false messiahs affect the target population, **DUNE** points the blaster the other way: How does this deception affect the person playing the false role? What does the abuse of spiritual authority do to the psyche of the cult leader? Does the false messiah end up drinking his own Kool-Aid?

THE SUPERPOWER OF FREE WILL

Paul is in a quandary. His very existence has been engineered by shadowy forces, outside of his knowledge or his will. He didn't ask to be born at all, much less to be a genetically engineered male child of a Bene Gesserit and a politically powerful Duke. He didn't ask to be trained as Mentat and Bene Gesserit; then taken to the planet Arrakis and fit the messianic mold that the natives had been expecting.

Paul's life was set up long before he came into being. His hand was forced to play a very specific and vital role in history. He faces pressure to please his mother, who fervently wants him to step into the role of the Kwisatz Haderach, with the kind of guilt-laced, controlling, instrumentalizing pressure that only a mom can induce. He also wants very deeply to make his father proud and defend his legacy—to be a good son. And on top of all this, there is incredible ego gratification in soaking up the worship of the Fremen. There is incredible power to possess in being the One who controls access to the spice mélange. The inevitability and the temptations are all around Paul.

But it is his choice, ultimately. All the plans, schemes, hopes, and dreams amount to nothing at all if Paul decides he doesn't want to give his life away to this manufactured destiny. After all, despite all the smoke and mirrors, the choice to be Kwisatz Haderach is artificial. Paul would have to agree to buy into the lie, and risk being engulfed by it. If he does, then all the worldly power and security he wants is at his fingertips. As Jesus was tempted in the desert, the evil one makes a similar offer to Paul in the desert.

But unlike Jesus, Paul is not necessarily aware of the other option. He could say no to this path that's been forced on him by human meddling. But it is inadequate to merely say no to what you don't want. What would he be saying yes to instead?

In **DUNE**, Paul is not explicitly given the options. But here in real life all of us have that freedom. We know that we could choose to put on the false self—dive into sin and deception, and gain relief from the psychological pressures imposed by others, as well as the possibility of amassing power over the material world. We also know it would trap us, as it trapped Jason Bourne. We know we become slaves to the false self. In other words, it is impossible not to drink your own Kool-Aid.

But is this really a choice? If you reject what the powers and principalities of the world have to offer, then it seems you're left with nothing. A nobody.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The other option is to be with the Lord made you to be. There is a second, much deeper set of prophecies and engineering that has occurred in the life of every human being. Each one of us on this planet at precisely this time in history, in precisely these conditions, because a loving God created us as so. All manner of deviations from His plan have been accounted for—no matter what our ancestors chose or how unpredictably chaotic the circumstances, God made straight paths with crooked lines, all for the purpose of producing YOU. All human power-plays and worldly ambitions could ultimately only serve the true Plan: the plan of the One who made all things, including even the humans who scheme. The Lord's plan throughout the ages was prophesied in heaven, amongst the communion of angels and saints. They all foretold the time when YOU would come into being, to fulfill the unique mission that only you were made for.

This story is true for each and every human person. We cannot grasp the infinite number of variables that the Lord beautifully wove, the summation of all human decisions to both obey and disobey divine command, making certain that it all culminated in the creation of each individual person at a specific time and place, to both do and be something special. Unrepeatable, indispensable, and irreplaceable.

So this is the real decision that Paul has to make, even though the universe of **DUNE** does not show the details of the second option. Paul can choose to accept being a puppet of the worldly powers, and thereby hope to wrest some of it for himself. Or he can reject it—he can refuse to exploit the Fremen and refuse to be a political pawn. He can instead choose true freedom, to be whatever God made him to be.

Free will is not so much about a choice between good and evil. It is actually a choice to keep it, or give it up in slavery. When a human person chooses evil, they no longer retain their free will. Sin is the last act of the will—the real person, the one with the choice, has died. The body is henceforth a corpse animated by outside powers that compel it to act to maintain the false self. When Paul chose to embrace the role of Kwisatz Haderach, he became enslaved by his own mythology. There was no longer a Paul Atreides. There is only an illusion created by the manipulation of the Bene Gesserit, and the desperation of the Fremen. There is nothing left of Paul to even enjoy the spoils of the political supremacy he was after.

That's the fate of the false messiah.

DUNE is a brain-assaulting, extravagant story of the death of identity, the submersion and dissolution of a free human being, Paul Atreides. He is replaced by the specter that caved to pressures and temptations, becoming a non-self in order to chase a kind of happiness that ends up taking control of him. It is a perfect description of what happens when we surrender our free will and walk away from the greatness that could have been ours in the Lord.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

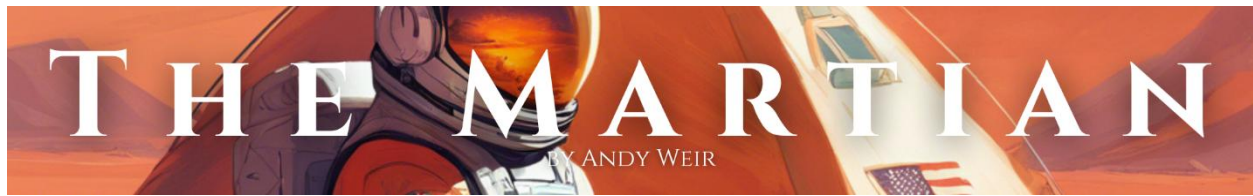
1. The character of Paul Atreides faces incredible pressure to fulfill made-made prophesy. He ends up losing his entire identity to become the Kwisatz Haderach. For us, first man-made prophesy imposed is usually by our parents. Can you relate to having parental expectations imposed on you that may or may not have suited us? What about the ethics of imposing spiritual and religious training on children before they are old enough to understand? How much of this early condition is about fostering our real identity in Christ, versus forcing us into an artificial role?

2. What do you think of the use of the spice mélange, and the way **DUNE** handles the tradeoff between performance enhancement and drug dependency? Consider the performance-enhancing pharmacology available today for both physical and mental capabilities. Do you think the use of these drugs is in line with God's will for our lives? Are we making ourselves better in the right ways? Is there a moral dilemma in the use of such drugs that are typically considered innocuous, like caffeine?

3. **DUNE** explores many of the political implications of controlling the mining and sale of mélange. Everyone wants to have this power, but there is no mention of any social responsibility involved in that control? The same is true for the Spacing Guild of Navigators, who keep their methods tightly secretive. What are the moral implications of maintain economic and technological monopolies at the expense of the common good? Is Paul obligated to change politics of how mélange is distributed? Why or why not?

4. The ecology of a planet, and how nature shapes the lives of its organisms, is a significant focus in **DUNE**. The various Houses that occupy Arrakis spend significant resources to escape having to adapt to the planet. But the Fremen are a nearly perfect example of adaptation to its conditions. In our modern world, we are nearly totally insulated from having to adapt to the natural environment. How do you think this affects our humanity? What do you think is the appropriate balance point between insulating versus adapting to nature?

5. **DUNE** contains no computers, television, no communications devices, or any high technology besides the spaceships. The storyline explains that the machines failed, although we are not told how they failed. Instead they train humans to do the work of computers. Is this a moral use of human beings? Is it potentially more to develop AI than to use human minds for this purpose? Should we even need that much computational technology? Why or why not?



THE GREATEST OF GIFTS: WILL, INTELLECT, AND JOY

“Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one’s own responsibility. By free will one shapes one’s own life. Human freedom is a force for growth and maturity in truth and goodness; it attains its perfection when directed toward God, our beatitude.”

- Catechism of the Catholic Church (para. 1731)

Imagine you’re Adam. You open your eyes—you’ve freshly come into being. All around you is an alien environment that you’re not remotely familiar with. Land formations, vegetation, creatures all around...but no sign of any nicely constructed home with a fridge full of food. You’ve got a mind preprogrammed with all sorts of survival tactics and problem-solving skills, and none of them have ever been put to use in this kind of situation. You’d better start figuring things out now, if you want to survive.

There’s a possibility that Adam’s first words mirrored Mark Watney’s at the beginning of **THE MARTIAN**.

Before getting into Andy Weir’s beautiful work, a word about the Beginning of mankind: There are many aspects of life and our nature that are the result of our fall from grace—despair, hopelessness, resentment, stunted imagination, disregard for human life, disastrous short sightedness, concupiscence, and more. The curse of the fall, and the result of sin entering the world, resulted in a mutilation of our perceptions and loss of connection to divine insight.

But a change in perception is not a change in material circumstances. Much of the world itself, and how we function in it, did not change as a result of the fall. From the beginning, the design of the earth was unfinished. We were created to *work*—to subdue the earth and to multiply. It would be our job to deal with animal life, handle the problem of natural elements, come up with solutions for food, water, shelter, clothing (for weather, of course), medical care, etc. We were made to complete the Lord’s work of creation, given the incredible blessing to participate with Him in co-creation. The job was never supposed to be easy.

And most importantly, co-creation did not end at how we were to finish shaping the natural world. The most important aspect of God’s creation, that He privileged us to join in, is the very work of completing ourselves. We were made unfinished on purpose—the refining process to complete a human person is unique to everything God ever created. Unlike the angels, we did not come into being as finished intellectual beings. Instead, being made in His image and likeness, we are perfected only by personal choice and full participation. We exist in time in order to undergo the process of becoming. Every experience of problem solving, deliberation, and trial is part of this process of progressively growing the self.

Even before the fall, Adam and Eve were like soft, uncooked, untested dough. They weren't ready for divine union. The serpent promised them that they could be like God, because in their state at the time, they obviously were not there. But it was always God's plan to shape mankind towards divinization. It was always our choice to do it or not.

Like in **THE MARTIAN**, the conditions of the world—the need for work, the role of relationships, facing challenges and difficulties—are designed not to torture us, but to help human beings learn to understand ourselves and how God made us. Adam's first tasks were quite similar to Watney's—both faced a sudden realization that they had better get extremely familiar with the requirements of life, and how to live well as a human person. There is nothing quite like the intimate experience of suddenly realizing you are completely responsible for getting to know what you need and how the Lord has made you.

Both Adam and Watney came to the world as fully grown men, with all the skills and knowledge necessary to handle the situation before them, if they want it enough. Both had never faced these conditions, and the learning curve was steep. How do you apply what you only know in theory? Adam and Watney had full use of their intellect, and the freedom to learn this information about themselves through trial and error. These are the conditions for developing a type of self-awareness that cannot be obtained in any way except by living through it. Watney, like Adam, had to face himself and live with himself in a situation where that kind of personal encounter is unavoidable. No matter how many times a man tells himself: "I am a botanist," or in the universal of Adam's case: "I am a human creature," nothing drives home a sense of identity quite like realizing it is your source of existence.

And once man has discovered what he is, he then realizes it is not good to be alone. He needs the other. He needs Eve—a representation of the presence of other human beings. No one can survive alone, it's not possible. As we explored in **BRAVE NEW WORLD**, the human being is fundamentally relational. Adam needed Eve—so Watney needed all the human beings that helped him survive and come back home. Human beings need each other in order to be saved—we have to help each other. We cannot save ourselves, and of course our salvation does not come from any other human person. But salvation comes from joining together in the body of Christ. We need this coming together to become what God made us to be.

Thus far in the book list, we have analyzed many means of misuse of the will: deifying the self, reliance on human intellect, a mistaken idea that human beings can predict and control reality, the devastating trap of pride and the false self, all the ways that we become slaves when we try to use our free will and intelligence to play God.

It seems like a good time to now turn to how we *should* use our will and intellect.

Simply put, we are to surrender it to God's will. But what does that mean?

Oftentimes this directive to surrender the will to God is seen as command towards empty passivity. To let go of the self and turn your will to God is misinterpreted as becoming a brainless tool. Your thoughts and feelings, your ambitions, your personality...they're all problems to silence and suppress so that you can be a one-dimensional obedience machine that just does what authority tells you. Obedience to God has often been exploited by bad actors as a call to servility in the face of authoritarianism. This view of surrender preaches that to even have a sense of offended dignity within one's heart is a sin. You're just supposed to shut up and smile and let the world walk all over you, lest you be accused of acting like you think you're God.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Surrender to God's will is the opposite of passive subjugation. Remember that God is that which frees us from slavery. The hallmarks of surrendering the intellect and

will to God are that these faculties actually come alive for full use. God's rules give us freedom. Surrendering to God means we engage in the very active task of studying His communications very carefully, and analyzing how to apply them in a given situation. This is an ongoing decision, made new every moment and in every new set of circumstances. We use our free will to consciously and intentionally choose to do things God's way instead of other ways we might be tempted to try. We make the commitment to give His advice and direction a shot again and again, even if, in the moment, we don't understand His logic or how it could possibly solve the problem. We commit our intelligence to trying to meet His mind and rise to *His* level, thereby elevating our understanding.

This is far from passive. It is a continuous, sometimes gut-wrenchingly arduous exercise in maintaining conscious contact with the Lord, through living prayer, study and meditation on His Word, and careful moral analysis of every situation we find ourselves in. And surrender means that when we fail in this—which we will, perhaps a thousand times a day—that we get right back up and try again.

This is what it means to give our free will and intellect to God, and finally use it to its fullest potential. The rewards are incalculable: creativity, problem solving, a sense of humor, and gratitude.

Every time we make use our free will to choose God, we grow in boundless creativity. Indeed there is no creativity outside of obedience to the will of God. If we rely on our own ideas, or the ideas of other human beings, we quickly find that the human mind, cut off from the divine intellect, is miserably small and unimaginative. The best ideas we have come up with to solve problems generally devolve into some form of genocide. For example, without God to illuminate our minds, some think the solution to unwanted children is to end their lives in the womb. There is no capacity for the kind of real problem solving that we are capable of when we allow the Lord to fully turn our brains on. We can only come up with devastatingly stupid things. But with God, all things are possible in a very real and practical sense—because we can actually *think*, and creatively solve problems with perfect charity.

Another critical use of free will is our choice of attitude. Mark Watney chose to be a funny guy. This isn't just a small aside to his survival. The person that orients himself towards cheerfulness and positivity uses his will in the most significant way possible. Our perspective is everything—again, it is not the material circumstances that were affected by the fall. It was our attitudes and perceptions. This act of the will is on us. God will give us the strength and grace to face all difficulties with hope and joy, but it is up to us to take Him up on it. He doesn't force us to have a sense of humor. Its up to us to decide how we want to show up for our lives. As joyless jerks, half in the grave at any moment? Or as triumphant, happy warriors that are determined to milk every situation for all the virtue and maturity we can wrest out of it?

And that is the final gift of the proper use of free will; gratitude. Life is a gift. Every trial, every bit of adversity and suffering...its all gold. This is the stuff that turns us into real people with depth and beauty. Mark Watney did not have to survive on Mars and fight for his life. He *got* to. He got to experience the coolest, most unique situations of danger. He got to solve problems that no human person has ever gotten to solve. He got to plumb the depths of his knowledge and intelligence and learn exactly how much reverence he has for his life. Maybe each given day or hour wasn't imbibed with this appreciation, but overall it would be completely awesome to be stranded on Mars and have to figure out how to survive. What a lucky guy.

And what a lucky guy Adam was. The best news is that we are just as lucky. The proper use of the will is to act like we know that.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Human beings were given dominion over the earth and commanded to subdue it. Do you think this dominion and command extends to space travel? What are the moral implications of space travel and colonizing other planets? Does the Lord call us to do this, or at least permit it? Why or why not?
2. What do you think of Commander Lewis' many moral choices, first the decision to leave Watney behind, and then all her choices during the rescue. What do you think her obligations were to a single member versus the entire time? Do you think her decisions and moral reasoning were correct in any or all of these cases? Why or why not?
3. When the crew decides to rescue Mark, do you think they are more motivated by guilt or loyalty? What are the moral differences between the two? Is it wrong to do good out of guilt? Is some degree of guilt or obligation an inevitable part of being human and making moral choices? Or is this something that virtue is supposed to cure? Why or why not?
4. From the beginning of his ordeal, Mark calculated how long he would be waiting for possible rescue. This foreknowledge of an ending helped him endure the situation, as well as motivated him to keep going when he had little hope. Do you think there are parallels to when Jesus told the Apostles (and us, today) that he is coming back, or that he has already overcome the world? How does knowing the end of the Christian story help us sustain our hope in this life?
5. In **THE MARTIAN**, a NASA psychologist explains that Mark was chosen as much for his personality as his technical skillset. The role of attitude and humor are very prominent in the novel, and humor is tied to hope. If Mark loses hope, both he and the NASA team believe he would choose voluntary suicide. What do you think of the connection between humor and hope? Do you think the upswing of suicide (including medically assisted suicide) is as much due to the loss of humor as the loss of hope? Why or why not?



THE END. WHAT A BEAUTIFUL BEGINNING!

All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.

- Catechism of the Catholic Church (para. 1030)

We cannot be united with God unless we freely choose to love him.

- Catechism of the Catholic Church (para. 1033)

Out of all the novels on the list, **THE GREAT DIVORCE** is the only explicitly Christian text. It is a beautiful imagining of the afterlife, where author C.S. Lewis posits the particular judgement of each person as a final choice. We are not told whether we “made it” to heaven or not. At the end of our lives, we are instead given a choice: face the demons we ran from and the work we didn’t do on Earth, or keep running. In other words, we have to face whether we really want God and why we rejected him.

The novel presents the choice as a multi-layered series, experienced by an unnamed protagonist who comes to in a strange space, having no idea what happened to him. Eventually he realizes he has the option to wait for and then board a bus. That’s the beginning.

The choice of whether to get on this bus is not really understood—the narrator can only be motivated by vague curiosity, or even just a desire to stop feeling confused and afraid. This has nothing to do with real moral understanding. It is not a genuine capacity to choose God. Still it is a solid beginning to at least be curious about the nature of your condition and what is going on, which is further than some of us ever get. Lewis’ depiction of Napoleon demonstrates what a totally self-obsessed lack of curiosity looks like—Napoleon can only stalk about a room, endlessly and ragefully thinking about who to blame for his military failures. This kind of resentment and preoccupation of ego is so overwhelming that Napoleon will never be able to escape it long enough to even look up and wonder where he is. This is how he is doomed to live for all eternity. There isn’t even enough self-awareness to know he is condemned. It’s just blind, ugly misery. You can’t talk about God to a person like this.

For those who are at least able to escape the ego enough to get on the bus, there are more choices. Many don’t even make it to the destination. But the narrator manages to get to a strange naturalscape where he finds himself transparent, and so weak that the blades of grass cause terrible pain and damage to his feet. In this space, he meets many other transparent ghosts with various backstories. Some are rabidly defensive; some are arrogantly defensive. Others are fearful, addicted, cynical. The ghosts are met by the spirits of people they knew in life—solid, strong, beautiful spirits that came down from the

mountains specifically to help bring the new spirit back up with them. In order to make the journey, each ghost has to be willing to face why they turned from God, and what they chose instead.

With a dreamlike narration style, Lewis describes some painfully familiar ways that we run from God, choose other idols, and refuse to give up our ego and defense mechanisms. The narrator learns that the transparent ghosts become solid, larger, and stronger as they are willing to face themselves and grow in self-awareness. Eventually one can become fully solid and charge up the mountains towards God. It turns out, in Lewis' world, that the journey to heaven was heaven all along.

C.S. Lewis presents a vivid imagining of the afterlife and matters of eschatology: the teachings of the Church that relate to man's final relationship with God, including heaven, hell, purgatory, particular and final judgments, the resurrection of the body, and the new heaven and earth. Since *The Great Divorce* is explicitly Christian, we don't exactly have to hunt for Jesus in the themes. Instead we can dive right into the theology, particularly how the story presents excellent support for Catholic teachings on holiness and purgatory.

General judgement is what will happen when Jesus Christ comes back and judges the living and the dead. That involves the fate of all humankind. But the particular judgement is about our individual lives and choices. It is when our lives are examined before God. **THE GREAT DIVORCE** centers around this matter of particular judgement. We don't know if particular judgement will look like God doing the accounting of our lives, or whether, like in Lewis' imagining, the particular judgement is about our ability to honestly look at ourselves. Both options (or some combination, or other circumstances) are valid. The important part is that this is a transparent assessment. There is nothing hidden from God, there is nothing we can hide from ourselves. Lewis presents a wrenchingly gentle and generous God who gives man the agency to perform his own particular judgement and choose for himself where he would like to end up.

God is not a cruel entity sending people to hell against their will because they failed to be good enough. God wants us to choose Him, and He gives every opportunity in life for us to do so. In **THE GREAT DIVORCE**, even the irrevocable final decision is entirely a matter of our choice. The use of a "pre-purgatory" gives us the option to condemn ourselves without ever being examined, if we so choose. No one ends up in hell unless they want to be there. Hell isn't imposed, but eagerly desired. Lewis describes a number of people who are motivated only by a desire to resist true self-examination. Being with God would not make them happy, and they are not forced to do it.

THE GREAT DIVORCE offers a rich exploration of the concept of purgatory. The ghosts have a choice to not only go through the purgation process, but can also change their mind and turn around at any time. Hell is not a one-time choice, in Lewis' imagination. If the purgation gets too uncomfortable, it is always possible to change your mind. It is unclear how that squares with basic Christian theology, where the final choice after death is irrevocable. But there is an interesting logic to **THE GREAT DIVORCE**—the ghosts that change their mind do so at the beginning of their journey, technically before they even begin. Those ghosts simply confront what purgation would involve, and decide to decline. They don't actually start the process. They decide for various reasons that if they can't deny, rationalize, bully, or justify their way out of things, they'd rather leave.

Those who stay and go on are a different case. In the novel, this willingness to open up and face oneself causes their physical nature to change. They can't go back—you cannot unlearn what you know. In this sense, self-knowledge gained by healing of the spirit is permanent. Our cooperation with God's work cannot be undone. It can only be built upon. At that point the only question is how much further the pilgrim wishes to go—the way to God, or not?

The most thought-provoking part of **THE GREAT DIVORCE** is that none of the ghosts are confronted with any facts, truth, or growth that they couldn't have encountered during life. So why wait until death? After all, in the novel God does not send His angels to walk the ghosts through their purgation. He sends fellow human beings, friends and relatives. The people who get us to heaven are those that know us quite well. They're not supernatural beings, but fellow people with the benefit of having gone through their own spiritual work. No one is holier than thou. No one who made it to heaven has done anything that we aren't all capable of doing.

The novel ends with a pressing emphasis on this matter—all these moral issues could be dealt with right here, right now in this life. The particular judgement can be done nightly in an examen, if we so wish. We have access right now to loved ones that can help us with this purgation. The most thought-provoking part of the stories of the ghosts is the familiarity of their sins. If we know we will have to do this kind of healing anyway, why do we not do so right now?

THE GREAT DIVORCE is ultimately a great argument for Catholic teachings, ironically from the pen of the non-Catholic Lewis. It is a powerful argument that our life on earth is for our growth in holiness. Salvation is not a one-time judgement, but a process of being healed, refined, and prepared. As we discussed in *The Martian*, even before the fall, Adam and Eve were not ready for divine union. They were gifted with the opportunity to participate in completing their own creation. Being forgiven and saved from the damnation of original sin is not sufficient, in Catholic theology. In other words, coming to Jesus is and being saved is not a "one and done" deal. It is a "one and begun" journey. We are now on a path of healing, growth, and preparation. **THE GREAT DIVORCE** shows how necessary this healing is, and how unprepared a person is to truly encounter God before undergoing this work.

The novel also persuasively argues for the logic of purgatory. If the process of becoming is not completed during our lives, then it must be completed in the afterlife. It makes little sense to think we would go straight to heaven to sit in the presence of God while still twisted by sin. God is not illogical. Most people do not die in a state of spiritual completion/sainthood. We need more work. Why would God either deny or ignore that? For those of us committed to this pursuit of holiness, it would be a great pain to see that process end before it is finished. At a certain point, you begin to anticipate and welcome the self-examination and healing, even though it is painful. The rewards are just too good. If heaven is a state of perfect self-awareness and the final goal of purgation, then there is nothing more desirable than seeing it through.

The characters in **THE GREAT DIVORCE** that commit to the pain find themselves in love with the process of becoming. There is no way they could have imagined the person that emerges from the ashes of refinement—the person that God made. The joy of the "end" is that it is truly the beginning of eternity with God, as our fullest and most alive. If we commit to this end, we do indeed find that it was heaven all along.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The characters in **THE GREAT DIVORCE** are all, to varying degrees, trying to hide the ways they deceive themselves and run from God. These cases of self-deception have a surface acknowledgement, along with a deeper, hidden motivation behind their choices. Why do you think people are so often willing to create a false picture of their sins instead of looking at the truth? Is it really less painful? Why or why not?
2. Which character stories did you find the most compelling and relatable? Why?
3. **THE GREAT DIVORCE** holds that once we attain holiness and heaven, it will work backwards and “turn even that agony into a glory.” In other words, the final perspective works backward to sanctify everything, including the sin and suffering we experience. Does the eternity of the future actually work to contextualize the past? Have you experienced this backwards-working in your own life? Do you think this is an accurate understanding of heaven? Why or why not?
4. The ghost characters are helped in their journey by friends and loved ones, some of which they would not have personally chosen to interact with. What is our role in getting our own family members and friends to heaven? What do we owe to each other in this life as Christians?
5. In the “grey-town,” the inhabitants can create new homes and streets just by imagining them. There is no community or need to interact with others. Why do you think that Lewis imagined hell as a place with no community or relational qualities, but heaven as a place where only relationships can help us move upwards?

