

FEATHER BRICKS



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COVER ART BY C.D. EVERETT



Feather

BRICKS

Logo by
Sarah Fitzmaurice

The Official Newsletter of North Park Theological Seminary's School of Restorative Arts

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CHRISTMAS FACT (?)

#1: ACCORDING TO VARIOUS COMIC BOOKS AND TV SHOWS, SUPERMAN REALLY LOVES CHRISTMAS AND USES HIS POWER OF X-RAY VISION TO PEEK AT HIS PRESENTS. TO STOP THIS, HIS PARENTS WRAP HIS PRESENTS IN LEAD, SOMETHING THAT ANNOYS SUPERMAN TO NO END.





Letter from the Editors



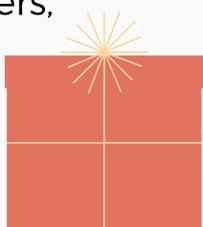
Welcome to this year's Artist's Edition of *Feather Bricks*, of which I am very humbled to serve as co-editor. The Artist's Edition serves to celebrate the innovative, unique, and creative work that so many of us are inspired to produce. In particular I have sought to continue the celebratory recognition of the women who give, sacrifice, and honor God through their dedication to the needs of the least of these among us. A famed Poet once said, "She is more than her hips and her thighs;" to me, she is our strength in times of weakness-breaking glass ceilings and debunking lies. It is the women who have brought calm to our calamity and organization to our disorder. So, from the cover and throughout, may each piece in this issue reflect the value of the women (strong & beautiful) in our lives.

I would also like to thank everyone who makes *Feather Bricks* possible. Your hard work and dedication is not forgotten and is being appreciated with heartfelt thanks. God Bless you all, and may you have a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year!

--C.D. Everett

Dear Students, Writers, Thinkers,

It has been the greatest gift to cross words and paths with you this past year, be it through teaching via



correspondence, meeting in writing conferences in study halls, or even just turning on the Zoom. I am not sure how Prof. Restrepo would grade this, but I claim this issue of *Feather Bricks* as my Artist Tool...and I could not have completed it without you. Write on!
Professor Melissa



CHRISTMAS FACT (?)

#2: MARVEL SUPERHERO WHITE TIGER, BORN IN SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO, COOKS HIS OWN PASTELES WITH A LITTLE EXTRA TARO ROOT. HE ALSO CELEBRATES 3 KINGS DAY ON JANUARY 6TH.



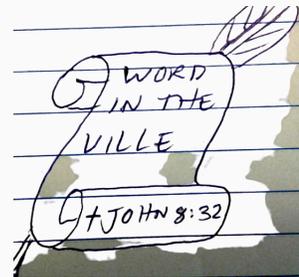
Get to Know your Community

Hello Fellow North Park School of Restorative Arts
Staff, Students, and Community Members,

Due to the Pandemic, location, and distance, our opportunity to build relationships has suffered. Since we continue to learn about how to grow as a community, let's take steps together to build upon our shared foundation. We would like to invite each of you from the Stateville, Logan, and Chicago campus locations to participate in an opportunity to get to know your Restorative Arts family a lot better. Well, how do we do that? That's a great question. We're so glad you asked! We would like to suggest a..."get to know your community program" where each of us writes a short biography to present in future issues of *Feather Bricks*. This would allow each of us to share parts of ourselves that reach beyond the classroom setting.

We would suggest questions that may be asked in basic introductions. For example:

1. Birth Name (also preferred nickname)?
2. Birthday?
3. Do you come from a big family?
4. Do you have children?
5. What are some of your passions?
6. What are your future plans after school or once released from prison?
7. What are three characteristics that best describe yourself?



We would like for us to engage in more acts of community building so we will have context beyond our shared essays, poems, and classroom comments. The goal is to be the community that we need with the ability to bring together the gifts and talents in our community in a more useful way.

Sincerely your Classmates, Steven Ramirez and Thomas Mills



Introducing...

"I am Chicago campus Writing Advisor **Sarah Fitzmaurice**, a senior majoring in math and middle/secondary education. My specialities are ESL, lesson planning, and math writing; my pronouns are she/her/hers. I plan to be a middle school math teacher after graduation. In my free time I love baking. My most recent accomplishment was a french silk pie. I also love singing and playing piano, and I am a part of University Choir. I enjoy working as a letter partner with SRA students and helping with the layout of *Feather Bricks*."

Get to Know your Community

Introducing...

"My name is **Ameerah Brown** but I also go by **AB**. I am an undergrad Writing Advisor on our Chicago campus majoring in Exercise Science, specializing in AMA & APA formats and Creative Writing. My pronouns are she/her/hers. During the school year when I'm not studying or watching YouTube, I spend a lot of time working out, playing video games, and watching anime. After graduation, I hope to go to graduate school in Kinesiology. I really want to do research in health and medicine to combat chronic illnesses such as diabetes and hypertension. I don't like quitting things half-way, I try to stick things out even if I don't like it and just learn from the experience. I've been told that I can be aloof in a good way, whatever that means. Hahaha. Do I come from a big family? Technically yes and no. I don't necessarily keep in great contact with all my family members, and now that I'm older I don't go to as many family functions except for holiday ones. I'm quite passionate about learning and the arts (music, art, writing, etc.)."



"Hello North Park Community, Allow me to share with those of you who don't know me or just know about me with the hope that you will know me a lot better personally. I'm **Steven Ramirez**, 42 years old and the youngest of 13 siblings. I grew up a P/K (Pastor's Kid) with both parents serving in ministry (Pentecostal). I have a beautiful 24-year old daughter who is independent and outspoken. I'm a Christian rededicating my life to the Lord May 28, 2005 and I'm engaged. I enrolled in North Park to educate, cultivate, and prepare the gifts, talents, and calling that God has entrusted me with. I'm in my 3rd year and serve as a Writing Advisor. I am also part of Stateville's choir. Upon my release I plan to work in ministry and barbering to mentor and encourage at-risk youth, especially those without fathers. I would characterize myself as charismatic, optimistic, encouraging, loyal, bold, humorous. I've had a lousy start due to my poor choices, but I'm working hard to change that narrative and finish well. Fun facts: my birthday is on Christmas (Dec. 25), my favorite scriptures are 1 Timothy 1:15-16 and Josuha 1-8. I love music (all genres), sports, traveling, BBQ, and black and white movies. Sincerely in Christ, Steven."



"My name is **Thomas William Mills III**, yeah that's right I'm the 3rd of the name. I was born May 6th, 1973, which makes me 48 years young. For those who have met me, don't allow the amount of gray hair fool you. I began turning gray when I was about 17. I am the oldest of my mother's 5 children. My brother closest to me in age passed at 16 from heart problems. I have three children of my own: a son and 2 daughters. I am a Christian who was baptized at Menard Correctional Center in 1998. In my early years, I knew of God, but I came to know Him on a personal level later in life. I applied to North Park to advance my knowledge and understanding of God while seeking to strengthen and apply my gifts. I enjoy the games of football, basketball, and chess. I am a fan of fantasy fiction, especially Star Wars, and music regardless of genre. I believe my best virtues are compassion and discernment. I'm working to improve my patience and listening skills. My goal after graduation is to connect my personal experiences with my education, then focus my knowledge towards mentorship and counseling. Fun fact-I enjoy watching cooking shows for exposure to different foods and cultures. Be blessed by Being a Blessing!"





Warm Wishes



Happy Holiday Season! from Principal Costabile

Dear All,

Lately I have been giving a lot of thought to the idea of birth pangs; the intense pain an expectant mother feels just before she is about to give birth to new life. In this Advent season, as we await the birth of the Christ-child, may we be reminded that new life is coming. In the midst of these birth pangs of injustice and racism and hatred and violence, the redeemer of the world - the One who will come to one day set everything to right - is coming. One day His Kingdom will reign over all and death will be no more, sickness will be no more, injustice will be no more. May you know the hope and the peace, the love and the joy of Christ in these days as we wait between two advents. With love, warm wishes, and gratitude for each of you - Pastor Libby

Praying that this Christmas season brings you joy and comfort. And may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way!

Best,
Writing Advisor Abby

Greetings and Happy Holidays!

It's been another strange and challenging year - and as I sit through lots of zoom meetings I've kept my sketchbook at hand and have been drawing shells that I've picked up over the years at my dad's house, who prior to his passing, lived on the coast. I love shells because they are tossed around in the ocean for weeks, years even, and when they wash up on the shore their holes or broken edges tell a story, yet they are still beautiful and strong. I hope you all have weathered another rough year and that your beauty and strength still shines. I'm working on mine :)

Warmly, Sarah Ross



Warm Wishes

This season often leaves us sitting in a multitude of emotions and memories. And while remembering it all isn't always easy, it is through remembering that we begin to see how God remembers us. God sits with and sees us in all that we carry. Praying peace and light over this incredible community this season! (& on a less serious note, y'all are the coolest.)

- Lydia Vander Stelt (aka Lyds)

I'm sure you all remember my holiday jokes from last year's Feather Bricks warm wishes section and were really looking forward to it this year.... well friends, the wait is over! Behold 2021's offering of cheesy Christmas jokes (I did not write these but I wish I did):

How do you know when Santa's around?
You can always sense his presents.
How much did Santa's sleigh cost?
Nothing! It was on the house.
Why is New Years Eve in Times Square overrated? Because they drop the ball every year.

Happy Holidays! I'm so grateful to be your classmate. Warmly, Katie Williams



Sending you my warmest holiday wishes, and Merry Christmas to those celebrating Christ's birth. I miss you, but cannot be with you because of Covid and babysitting grandsons who are too young to be vaccinated. You are fervently remembered in my prayers. I look forward to a time of greeting you in person. May you feel a strong sense of God's care in this season. Grace and Peace, Sally

I see Advent this year with greater intensity and anticipation than ever before. Walking up and down in my cell, three paces this way and three paces that way, with my hands in irons and ahead of me an uncertain fate, I have a new and different understanding of God's promise of redemption and release." -Alfred Delp, Jesuit priest who was murdered for opposing Hitler.

Beloved community - it's another Advent that strikes me in the heart. What radicals we are, to believe that God wants to set all things right and bring all people to Godself. What miracle to continue to believe that, to hold the hope of it even as we are waiting. I am waiting with you, expectantly. I am keeping my eyes peeled in the wilderness, preparing the way of the coming Lord. Words fall short. Thank you for sharing this community with me. I hope to see you all soon.

-Sara Woody



Dialogue & Discuss



WRIT5000 “Feather Bricks” Essay by Zahariyel (Alonzo McCorkle)

This essay results from a “WRIT5000: Writing for the Professions” assignment given to our class by Professor Melissa Pavlik. We were asked to write a thesis statement and response to a sample article entitled “Using the Language of Christian Love and Charity: What Liberal Religion Offers Higher Education in Prison” by Atkins et al. My thesis, response, and essay follows.

THESIS: Although I agree with Atkins et al’s argument that religious institutions have much to offer college-in-prison, I cannot accept their claim that Erzen’s critique is only valid for the Southern evangelical-friendly correctional facilities that she studied.

RESPONSE: For most of my 25 years of experience inside prisons in Illinois, I have been housed in Northern Illinois. I’ve spent about 14 years in Stateville Correctional Center. Stateville has always been an evangelical-friendly correctional facility. I have been as critical of the religious ideology of “Personal Transformation” as Erzen. Erzen states, “The faith-based ministries flock to prisons to convert, pray, teach, and proselytize, but they tend to neglect why people end up there in the first place” (Erzen 2017, p.8), which I’ve observed to be true. I’ve listened to several incarcerated individuals ask emotionally motivated and inspiring religious group leaders why they don’t use their influence and congregation to change laws or assist us in changing the problems

that they witness first hand, like Illinois having no substantial parole policy and the Truth in Sentencing laws. These religious group leaders would say, “We can’t get involved in those things. We are here to save your souls and share the word of the Lord.”

Due to President Clinton signing into law the Violent Crime Control Act, prisons have doubled in faith-based ministry flocks. Programs like “Houses of Healing,” “Malachi DADS,” “Freedom from Fear,” “Kairos” and “Purpose, Driven Life” are offered to the prison populations. Their goal is to steer us toward personal transformation. Though some of us experience some form of personal transformation in the form of a broader spiritual understanding with God, we are transformed more so towards becoming life-long members of an evangelical group inside a growing prison industrial complex.

While participating in these religious programs, I along with others have noticed there was no focus on understanding and transforming the systemic continuous bombardment of the conditions unfit for human prosperity. We were led to believe the catalysts were to be forgiven, and we were to take the blame for being prey (Erzen, 2017, p.8). Ninety-nine percent of the programs held here since I’ve been here have been





Dialogue & Discuss



Essay by Zahariyel (Alonzo McCorkle) cont...

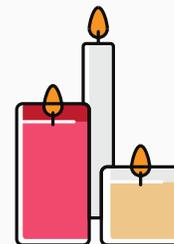
evangelically sponsored and co-signed by the Wardens and Chaplains. No higher educational programs were provided until 2009-2010. Before this period of time, we were responsible for our own educational growth, no matter how intelligent you were. With the coming of North Park, Northwestern, and UWW, there appears to be a new season. But here, things change fast, so I store my nuts for another long winter.

There are a number of things that schools like North Park should be careful to avoid in order to avoid the critiques of Erzen and my own. One of the most important to me is not to buy into the belief that the majority of the incarcerated individuals here willingly chose a life of crime. It is vitally important that you keep in mind that for the majority of the incarcerated individuals, the belief in a criminal lifestyle that leads to escape from an impoverished life was not a “knowing and willing” choice, just as proof that an act was not “knowing and willing” will save an individual from suffering an irreversible waiver of procedural process in a court of law. So should the hearts and minds of those who bask in power, privilege, erudite pedigree and spiritual absolution find the same.

Secondly, North Park et al should abandon the proposed belief that “Prayer” for our souls alone is all that is needed to save us from this “Evil Trap.” As this has been the idea held by the overwhelming majority of the faith-based

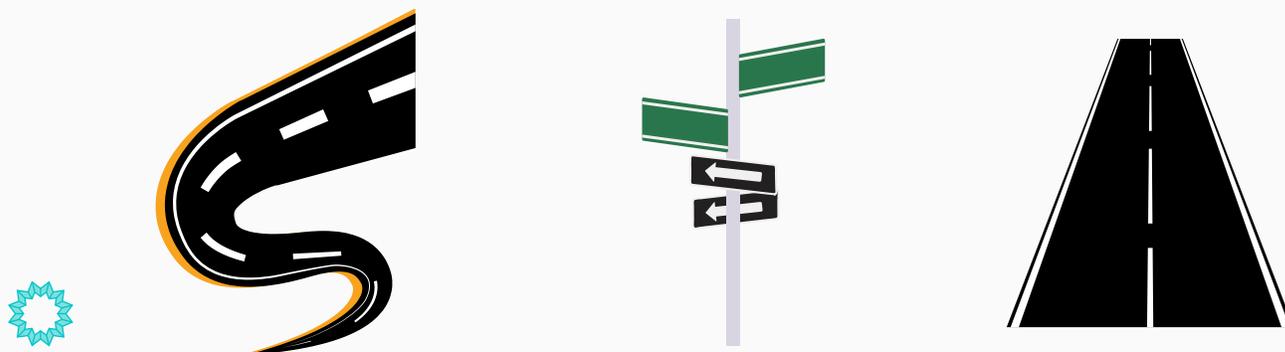
groups who have been coming here for the last 30 years.

In conclusion, I add this closing perspective. The systemic “success” that ensures that social behaviors rooted in criminality will be culturally absorbed are highly effective at creating mental blinders while dangling “Bling” (the proverbial carrot) before our eyes (“Bling”, the Hip Hop cultural term for riches) and leading us docilely into the belief that crime saves. North Park et al have the power to remove these blinders, to enable an army of incarcerated and non-incarcerated minds in order to revolt against systemic hinderances to promote, support, and encourage the freedom of those they have and will educationally and spiritually elevate. North Park et al find themselves at a moral crossroads like that of Peter Parker in the story of Spiderman, who had a choice to stop evil at its origin before having to suffer the painful consequences of doing nothing and becoming forever haunted by the wise words of his uncle Ben: “With Great Power, Comes Great Responsibility” (Marvel Comic’s Story of Spiderman, 1962).



WISDOM BLVD. : MISHUNDA DAVIS-BROWN

Whenever you feel the need, take a trip down Wisdom Blvd. with me.



While cruisin' ahead on Wisdom Blvd., I let down my car windows for some fresh air and notice a bumblebee has entered. Bzz! It lands on my arm and stings me. AAAH! I panic and bump into the car in front of me. The bee then finds its way out and I quickly raise my windows, sure not to let another bee in.



In my life I always had my window down (ears open) allowing bees (negativity) to enter my vehicle (head). Keeping my ears open to everything and anything had me with many bee stings (consequences of sin), which only hurt me. The ear is the door to the mind, and the mind controls the body, so we must guard our ears, being cautious of who and what we decide to listen to. The Bible says in Mark 9:43 "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It's better to enter eternal life with only one hand than to go into the unquenchable fires of hell with two hands." So cut off that negativity by guarding your ears, and whenever you feel the need, take a trip down Wisdom Blvd. with me.

At this time, I would like to thank Benny Rios and Pastor Jeff for taking a ride on the Blvd. and sharing with us. I too felt like Benny and sometimes still do get intimidated or overwhelmed with complicated reading assignments, but no matter what I must still get my thoughts on paper and look at feedback as constructive and helpful on our writing journey. I will surely write on—thanks Benny! I also thank Pastor Jeff for his input regarding cognitive thinking. He asked a significant question: "How does one carry/process trauma that is actively happening while still moving forward as an agent of transformation and good?" I would say a healthy way to process trauma that's actively happening while still moving forward would be to get it out by writing, talking to someone you trust, and praying. Antonio "Slim" Balderas is taking a ride on the Blvd. this issue and also has some ideas, so Read On! --Mishunda Davis-Brown



WISDOM BLVD. : GUEST ANTONIO BALDERAS

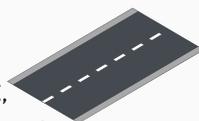
In the last issue of *Feather Bricks*, Pastor Jeff Hunter made a note about the question of trauma. Pastor Jeff pointed out that “it’s one thing to process trauma that has happened in the past, to be able to transform the past trauma and not be stopped by it in our present work for reconciliation and transformative justice. But for many, we are currently experiencing ongoing trauma. The question becomes “how does one experience/carry/process trauma that is actively happening while still moving forward as an agent for transformation and good in the same moment?” On the Blvd. Pastor Jeff juxtaposed how processing trauma and how we deal with it while striving for social, political, and justice reform. The question at hand, then, becomes “What’s all the drama about trauma?” Pastor Jeff has asked our writing center community to respond in kind.



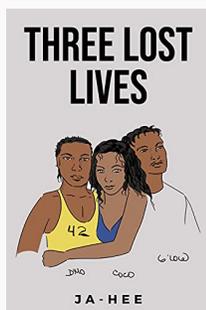
I believe there is no one healing prescription for any form of trauma. In fact, trauma, as well as drama, is a psychological part of all our mental framework and psyche; it makes us who we are. Nevertheless, trauma can be treated and balanced, and even someone incarcerated can find themselves a part of a transformational growth or unit within the confines of a prison or institution. Prisons represent the last vestige of slavery and indigenous servitude, which carry with them an institutional form of trauma brought on because of the mental affliction and cruelty of slavery.

Dr. Joy Degruy writes about America’s legacy of enduring injury and healing over trauma brought about because of over 350 years of slavery, reconstruction, and Jim Crowism in the book *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome*. Correspondingly, drama in Americans’ lives is not something new simply because of all the wars and conflicts that the country is founded on and continues to live with. Relatedly, how we deal with the trauma is something else. Degruy makes a psychological note in passing through her book’s post-traumatic slave syndrome that we must return to and claim our past in order to move towards our future. The teachings in the Bible that relate to Jesus’ suffering can be dramatic in scope for some learning about it (the passion of Christ). The suffering that Jesus endured during his life and his eventual, painful death on the cross is very traumatic. We as humans process life and death differently, and trauma is part of the psychological life and death process.

Moreover, just like Jesus, some of us are subjected to more drama and trauma than others simply because of our social, political, and economic station or position in life. Financial insecurity can cause trauma. Trauma by any other name is simply how one overcomes and deals with the earth’s vicissitudes of life. To be clear, the quality or state of trauma being related to our lives is a natural change and succession beyond our control, and trauma finds its way into any event or situation. Most importantly, I believe trauma is no different than any other affliction that causes clinical depression or conflict. Jesus suffered and died for us on the cross; therefore, it stands to reason that suffering as trauma is unavoidable no matter how much we try to avoid the effects. --Antonio "Slim" Balderas, Voice Of The Poor and Incarcerated, Poet Laureate



BOOK REVIEW



***Three Lost Lives* by Ja-Hee** **(Available on Amazon and anywhere great reads are sold)** **Review by Ryan Wendt**

"Kids today have so much self-hate embedded in them. By the age of fourteen or younger, they lash out. This self-hate has them killing each other. The random act of violence stems from poverty, poor school, curriculum, and lack of jobs."

-Amy Sue Harris (Dennis and Theresa's Mother), from the book *Three Lost Lives* (p.110)

Ja-Hee's book *Three Lost Lives* is a story about Teresa Colleen "Coco" Harris, Dennis "D'mo" Harris, her brother, and Gabriel "G'Low" Upshaw, her boyfriend, and teens who attend Lakewood High School on the west side of Chicago. All their backgrounds were individually shared in some way. Dennis is an honors student and the captain of the basketball team. He has a dream of going to college someday, and so does his sister, Theresa, but with some course corrections. Theresa thinks she knows it all, except having the responsibility she needs. She doesn't take life seriously most of the time. Gabriel, who dated Theresa, and is a former friend of D'Mo and a very talented artist.

At certain points of reading Ja-Hee's book, I felt I was immersed in the story as the reader. Each scene was action-packed, and I felt involved in the drama between Coco, D'Mo, and G'Low. Throughout the story, his imagery captured me, and I found myself engaged in the story as a result. With every chapter, I couldn't anticipate what was to come. This book left me on the edge of my seat!

Reading this book enhanced my cultural awareness of what black and brown culture is like in the city of Chicago. I am grateful for the cultural awareness as a privileged white man. My head, heart, and hands need to be continually made aware, so that I can do my part and act. I have witnessed many black and brown people experience injustice. I once lived next to a high school where the student population was black and brown. One time, after school, I observed officers approach a group of students walking down the street and point both of their guns at them as a joke. From my perspective, what the police officers did was obstruction of justice and shows how broken the justice system is in America.

In conclusion, we cannot ignore the systemic injustices in this country. Many black and brown people continue to fall prey to gun violence. The American justice system fails to see black and brown people as beautiful. Many people of color are victims of the system. Our country needs to change and repent of its overt racism. Racism perpetuates the brokenness of the American justice system. Ja-Hee's book testifies to the brokenness of the American justice system and offers reasons why it must change.

WRITING ADVISOR CORNER

OOTU: Part 7 by Luigi Adamo



When Ootu's gift cube opened and I was able to peer inside, a golden light enveloped me, warming me to my very core. As it did, an understanding that surpasses all comprehension was imported to me. It was an understanding that was so pure, so honest that even now after almost three decades of trying, I find it difficult to articulate. Maybe it is something so true it cannot be properly conveyed by something so corruptible as human language. Or perhaps I'm just not that skilled as a writer, but there must be a deeper reason behind why Ootu rarely communicated through words, but would usually project images, thoughts, and feelings into my mind when he wanted to be truly understood. Although I have never seemed to be up to the challenge of being able to successfully explain exactly what I experienced that day, I will do my best.

It was a sudden "knowing" that just came into my mind, much the same way Ootu's projections had. It was knowledge, and not wisdom. I say this because no application for the information I was given was ever imparted. All at once I just knew. I knew that there was a cosmic, war-like struggle between the two universal forces of Order and Chaos. I have since learned that humanity, in its ignorance, has mislabeled these forces "Good" and "Evil." I can go on and on for pages explaining how the forces of Order and Chaos differ from Good and Evil, but for brevity's sake, let me just put it simply by saying that Good and Evil is a moral concept, morality being itself very subjective to perspective, whereas Order and Chaos are natural phenomena and found universally throughout all of creation.

The understanding that I was given showed me how all of creation is under constant attack by the forces of Chaos, and that it is the purpose of all sentient life to fight against Chaos and bring about Order. Much later in life I learned that scientists confirm the existence of this struggle, but scientists call it the Second Law of Thermodynamics or the Law of Entropy. This law states that all matter will gradually and ultimately decay, descending into disorder or Chaos. It is only by the intervention of an outside intelligent force that this scientific certainty can be held in abeyance. The rub comes in because along with sentience comes free will. Conscious life can choose whether to bring about order or chaos, or both, or neither, as life forms are made of matter and are subject to that same decay described in the Law of Entropy. So, there are those who will work to restore order in the world, lose who will be agents of chaos, and those who will waste the gift of their life in insignificance.

I knew all this, and with knowing came the choice: which one will I be? I chose to be a force for order right then and there. In the moment I made that decision, I felt something become affixed into my mind that was going to remain a core aspect of my personality forever.

I know all of that seems like an awful lot for an 11-year old to take in, but it really wasn't, and only took but a fraction of a second to complete in real time--as fast as the blinking of an eye, but it was my mind that blinked. My eyes remained wide as teacup saucers. After my mind blink was over, that black cube closed, the golden light vanished, and there stood all half a foot of Ootu, beaming with pride.

WRITING ADVISOR CORNER

Stillness and the Bumblebee by Ted B. Gray "Country"

"Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth (Ps.46:10)."

"Have I not commanded thee? Be strong and of good courage, be not afraid, neither be thou damaged: For the Lord thy God is with thee withersoever thou go'est (Joshua 1:9)."

"For the things which I greatly fearest are come upon me, and that which I was afraid come unto me (Job 3:25)."

Over my 56 years of life, many times I have seen nature prove the truth in God's word. The wisdom of his instruction when applied to life greatly enhances our ability to thrive in this life. In this true story I was taught the wisdom of being still and trusting by the simple bumblebee.

During mid 1970's and 80's the rapidly rising cost of borrowed money forced many farms and businesses to fail. Daily bankruptcy was filed across the area, multigenerational businesses were auctioned off to the highest bidders, and family livelihoods changed forever. Into this picture entered my family, at one such auction in the area between Bloomington Normal and Decatur, Illinois. We attended the sale and purchased most of the older farm machinery and barnyard equipment. This was a very large auction; the farm consisted of over 1000 acres along with all of the current and spent equipment used over several generations, plus piles of broken machinery and parts accumulated from years of hard use. At that time, I was 14 years old, and I remember the auction being spread over a picturesque rolling pasture growing lush grasses and purple clover.

The days following the auction were spent dismantling machinery and turning it into 3 feet by 18-inch pieces of foundry ready for Iran. We had loaded the first load on the pickup truck then reloaded it to the semi trailer for delivery to the steel mill to be melted down. Most of the loose piles and the simple-to-dismantle pieces made up the first semi load. The next day, my brother Sabin, who was 24 at the time, and I began to work our way along the rows of plows, discs rotary hose and all other remaining pieces. We still had many pieces to go, from the easily prepared plows and planters to the much more difficult harvest equipment. There was little time to rest and enjoy the tranquility of the pasture with its meandering creek.

The next item up was an old four new tractor* mounted corn picker minus the tractor. Sabin stepped onto it to cut the center mounting bracket with the torch, allowing it to fall apart into two sections. When it hit the ground an explosion of bumblebees filled the air.

*four new tractor mounted corn pickers predated the modern combine and picked the whole corn to be stored in the old corncribs. They mounted directly on a tractor like the saddle on a horse. When not mounted with the corn pickers, the tractor was then used to do other farm work.



WRITING ADVISOR CORNER

Stillness and the Bumblebee by Ted B. Gray "Country" cont...



Being allergic to bees, Sabin stood motionless. I, on the other hand, being the genius I am, took off, like a bullet from a gun, all of the bees in hot pursuit. I must have run 150 yards, my arm swinging wildly at the bees stinging me. I do not believe I hit a single one of them, but they sure brought the fire to me!

Sabin, on the other hand, very slowly and calmly shut off the cutting torch and sauntered away from the corn picker. He went totally unnoticed by the bees, while I was the target of their rage. After the bees had come down, he came over and asked if I needed a shot from his EpiPen. I was confused, I did not even know what an EpiPen was. He explained that he was allergic to bees and if he gets stung, then a shot must be given within 15 minutes. Then within another 15 minutes he had to be transferred to a hospital or he may die.

I told him I was not allergic and that bee stings do not really bother me. Upon examining the stings, he was amazed, saying, "I swell up more than that from a mosquito bite!" He then explained how lucky he was I did not have to drive him to hospital. I kind of laughed, saying, you don't know how lucky,

I had never *driven on a road and didn't know how to drive a stick shift. The only truck we had on site was a stick shift, and it was miles to the nearest hospital. By standing still and trusting in God's protection, Sabin was untouched despite the fact he was the one disturbing the nest of bees. In this both he and the nature proved not only, "be still and know that I am God," (Psalms 46:10), but also, "be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou est." (Joshua 1:9) On the other hand, by showing fear and running I attracted the malice of the bees. This well demonstrated, "the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me." (Job 3:25)

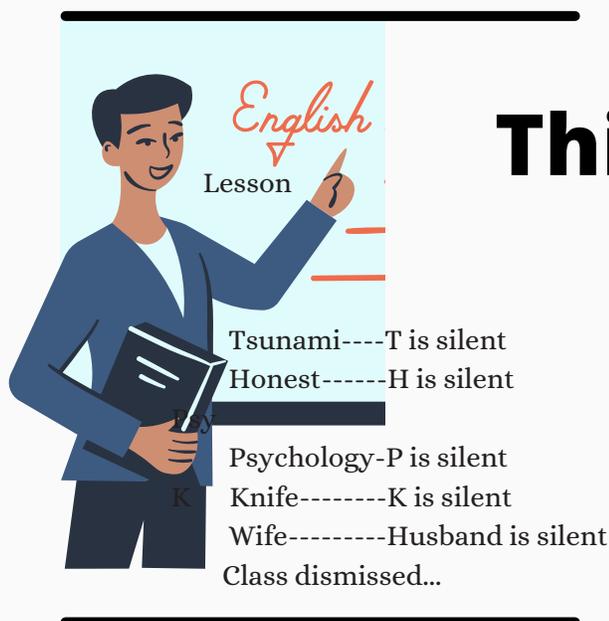
I have often shown weakness instead of showing strength or standing strong in God's grace. By acting in fear or giving up, I empowered the enemy's attacks. Our actions show what we believe is more powerful: the completed work of Christ's sacrifice and his gift of grace to us, or the ability of the enemy to steal all the promises Christ purchased for us, from us. I see this demonstrated in nature. For example, it is said, "Do not run from a predator, for it often triggers an attack. However, If you make yourself large and loud, it will often retreat." The evil one and his minions react the same way. When we stand strong, knowing by Christ's grace we are victorious, the enemy will flee. It is not by our strength but our reliance on his grace and faith in what he has already done for us.

In this fable, I relied on my own strength and was brought low and humbled by something far smaller than me. A simple bumblebee (or several) showed me the error of placing my trust in my own abilities. Sabin, on the other hand, chose the better way: standing still, trusting in God's protection. His faith in the finished work of Christ's grace surrounded him like a shield keeping him from harm. It is by His grace we are saved in all of our distress!

: *At this time, I had never driven anything except a rear wheel steering end loader, and I did not know you needed to slow down much to turn, but that is another story.

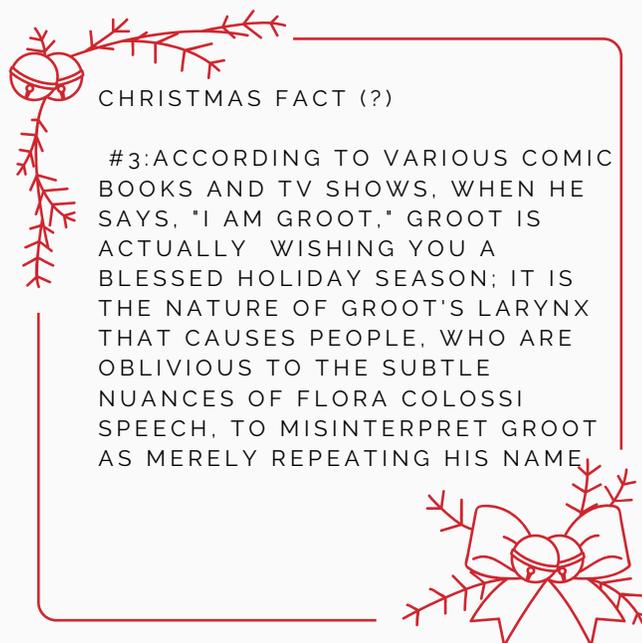
MAXIMS & MEMES WITH MARCOS

What masterpiece in you is still waiting to be revealed? Sometimes all it takes is for us to sit down long enough to be still, to think, and just listen to our hearts. Listen for that still small voice asking you to pick up a pen or a paintbrush and try something new. Visualize with your mind's eye; see the shapes, tones, and colors. Listen to your inside voice flowing like a river of living water. Find your personal freedom this blessed Christmas and New Year season and let the Artist in you work its magic on that canvas or note pad. Create something new and beautiful for the glory of God. It will bless you & others! --Marcos Ramirez



This Issue's Meme

Brought to you by Lonnie Smith



This Issue's Maxims

Brought to you by Antonio Balderas, V.O.T.P.A.I., Marcos Ramirez, and Groot.

(Guess who sent in which...)

1. The shade of a toothpick beats the hot burning sun!
2. Some days you eat the bear, some days the bear eats you!
3. Trauma creates suffering and suffering creates life!
4. Give me social, political, and economic justice or give me death!!!
5. "No snowflake ever falls in the wrong place." --Zen Proverb
6. "I have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night." --Sarah Williams
7. "I am Groot."

THE POETRY AVENUE!

GETHSEMANE (RAP To God) by Ryan Miller

CONTENTS UNDER PRESSURE
 MY PRAYERS A BROKEN RECORD
 FAITH IS FRACTURED RUPTURED SPLINTERED
 EPICENTER FAULT LINE FISSURED
 HAUNTED Im TORMENTED TORTURED
 OVERLOADED PAIN RECEPTORS
 FRAYED SYNAPSES GO HAYWIRE
 NUCLEAR MELTDOWN SYSTEM FAILURE
 CONTENTS UNDER PRESSURE Im-
 PLAGUED BY DESPAIR I-
 TRY TO LEAVE IT ON THE ALTAR
 SAVIOR, LORD WHERE ARE YOU FATHER?
 WHEN ALL I HEAR IS GOSSIP & THE WHISPERS
 OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH PARISHONERS
 ADDING INSULT TO THE INJURED
 CANT HOLD WATER BROKEN CISTERNS
 SURROUNDED BY THESE COBRAS & THESE BOA CONSTRICTORS
 CHAMELEON COLOR CHANGER FINGER POINTER ACCUSERS
 GODZILLA GILA MONSTERS CAIMAN MONITOR LIZARDS
 SABOTEURS CONSPIRATORS & SCAVENGER HATERS
 SLANDERERS BACKSTABBERS & THESE LIAR BETRAYERS
 FIRE BREATHER LUCIFERS REPTILIAN CREATURES
 RATTLERS WHO SLITHER & THEY CIRCLE PERIMETERS
 APEX PREDATORS & CARRION VULTURES

EVERYDAY Im RESSURECTED REANIMATED
 DEFIBRILLATED INTUBATED RESUSCIATED
 ONLY TO BE ASPHYXIATED & SUFFOCATED
 ELIMINATED ERADICATED
 LACERATED MUTILATED DECAPITATED
 w/ DOUBLE EDGES SERRATED EVISCERATED
 LETHALLY INJECTED ELECTROCUTED
 EXECUTED ANNIHILATED
 DRAGON JAWS TALON CLAWS FLAIL GNAW AT MY THOUGHTS
 ACCOSTED Im EXHAUSTED BY THE CONSTANT ASSAULT
 PRAY TO GOD NO RESPONSE & THERE'S NEVER RESULTS
 MY RESOLVE IT DISSOLVES & I WANNA GIVE UP
 MY SOUL CAN'T BE CONSOLED & MY COUNTENANCE FALLS
 CHASM YAWNS & IT DRAWS SUMMONS BECKONS & CALLS
 THERE'S NO BEAUTY FOR THESE ASHES NO GILEAD BALM
 SPIDER CRAWL ASYLUM WALLS-WEBS INSIDE OF MY SKULL

GOD-THIS IS MY GETHSEMANE
 GOLGATHA HILL MY CALVARY
 I PRAY THIS CUP PASS OVER ME
 BEFORE I SINK BELOW BENEATH
 SHEOL IT PULLS ME UNDERNEATH
 THE BUZZARDS CIRCLE HUNGRILY
 LORD, DEMONS AT MY JUGULAR-
 w/CUTLERY-IT'S UGLY



Mindfulness by Martin Lyons

I hate just sitting around all day watching TV
 so everyday I sit at my desk writing these thoughts for me
 This is how I really find inner peace so I can cope
 It's very therapeutic for the mind and drive for my hope

The realest quote ever is the mind being a terrible thing to waste
 As precious that is it's mandatory you keep running it like a race
 Most powerful tool given to you is your ability to think
 Your brain is your strongest muscle exercise it or it will shrink

Of course I took that as good advice words for the wise
 When you come to a place like this sometimes it's a blessing in disguise
 Don't think I'm crazy but here people realize they got talents and gifts
 Once you realize you got potential it gives you that spiritual lift

Another good quote to remember is you got to be silent in order to listen
 Silent and listen have the same letters if you never paid attention
 Just sit back meditate and focus let you and your mind work together
 That's the best ammunition anyone have that can carry you forever.

FORGIVENESS by Yillie (Aryules Bivens)

- *When Your Heart is Hurt
When You are falsely accused
Physically and verbally abused.
- *When you are wrongfully
charged, convicted, and Death eligible.
- *When there is no room for thoughts
of Healing, during your periods of appealing...
- *Remember! Jesus said, "No, not 7 times, but 70
times 7" (Mat.18:22)
Forgive them
- *May I suggest, let go of all mess,
Find the Rest and seek Forgiveness.



With Alex Negron and Acacia Doughty

"The Amplifier" is all about providing a space for writers in any genre to showcase their work so their voices can be heard when they normally wouldn't be able to. It is also for writers to pick up gems when it comes to writing and implement those into their own literary pieces. What we have here is a collaborative work by Acacia and Marcos Ramirez. One thing I learned when it comes to collaboration is that when properly done, collaborators "learn to create and maintain the sort of social contexts, the sort of community life, that foster the kind of conversations we value." This was written by Kenneth Bruffee in an essay on peer tutoring and can be found in *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors*. In a community being held captive, liberation will always be the kind of conversation that is valued. I'm a firm believer that what is true spiritually must be played out earthly, and unless liberation is not facilitated amongst each other physically, then it is a distorted form of liberation. In a world founded on exclusivity, collaborative writing disrupts oppressive constructs and provides the "sort of community life" that breeds inclusivity." --Alex

The Liberator: The Validity of Liberation Theology across Global Contexts and Generations by Acacia Doughty

Liberating power can be found in the ink of literary texts. The reading of these words, followed by a dialogue with them, and then a true embodiment of their meaning, can lead to living in a state of liberation. This state of liberation is holistic and continually unfolding alongside the development of society as well as humanity. This is true of the literary text of the Bible. It is true of the theologians across time and history that interpret its words and embody its meaning. One such theologian states that "Dialogue unfolds not only between texts in scripture but also between scripture and its readers" (Brown 2021). This dialogue requires investment and takes on new conversations in each generation. Brown states: "As Christ is God's Word 'made flesh' (New International Version 2011, Jn. 1:14), so the Bible is God's written Word made fresh by God's Spirit with each new question, for each new generation" (2021).

This paper seeks to reveal the dialogical nature of the scriptures found in the liberation theology tradition.

That dialogue begins within the historical context of Gustavo Gutiérrez (b.1928) and James Cone (1938-2018) as they are considered the founding theologians. Liberation theology's significance within the South American and United States contexts in the 1960-70s will, therefore, be discussed. Within these contexts, it will also be shown that liberation theology brings holistic liberation to the oppressed as it addresses both the realities of economics and race. The importance of dialogue across these contexts will be emphasized with the description of two historical councils. I will then extend liberation theology to our modern context in the form of letter exchanges between myself, an undergraduate theology student, and a graduate theology student currently incarcerated at Stateville Correctional Center. The center of this theology and its liberation lies in the belief of Jesus Christ as Liberator. All of this shows that liberation theology, through its dialogical nature within respective historical contexts,

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accurately depicts the Christ of the Scripture while also bringing holistic liberation to the oppressed.

Dialogue with Economics in South America - 1970s

Gustavo Gutiérrez founded a theology that dialogued with his current Latin American context and brought liberation to those under economic oppression. Various sociological lenses and concepts can assist one in understanding their historical context. Bonino, a historian and researcher, argues that history must be understood through the lens of development and underdevelopment. Applying Bonino's lens often leads to the dismissal of the oppressed as they are just a by-product of a developing society. So, Bonino further argues that those that desire liberation must utilize the lens of domination and dependence (Gathogo 2021). Society is now dependent upon the empowerment of the oppressed to bring liberation from domination. The empowerment of the oppressed first requires the examination of societal ills.

The influence of Marxism philosophy in the Latin American context inspired many to examine the social, political, and specifically economic disparities faced by the poor under capitalistic systems. Gutiérrez, a Peruvian Dominican priest, turned to the social analysis aspect of Marxism because it encouraged reflection on the specific factors of oppression and

class (Oh 2013). While Marxism saw religion as something that "pacifies the poor and justifies the status quo", Gutiérrez saw theology as a "paradigm for reconstructing the unjust social structure" (Oh 2013, pp.136-7). Liberation theology, as articulated by Gutiérrez, empowers the poor and activates Christians to reconstruct unjust systems so that holistic liberation can be attained.

The unjust structure in Gutiérrez's context was the capitalistic economic system. This system was the oppressor so the poor became those who were oppressed. Gutiérrez argues that God's favor rests upon the poor. In fact, he advocates for the theological argument of "God's preferential option for the poor" (Oh 2013, p.141). Scripture, in the Gospel of Matthew, includes a sermon given by Jesus Christ that is often referred to as the Sermon on the Mount or the Beatitudes. The words of this sermon are a succession of blessings both for the poor and the peacemakers. In reference to this, Gutiérrez finds "a gospel expression that is first of all a revelation about who God is: love for all and especially for the outcast and the oppressed" (Oh 2013, p.140). Through this expression, liberation theology has accurately depicted the Christ of the scriptures and those He loves. This love not only compels God into compassion but also compels his believers into action.

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Liberation theology brings confrontation and transformation through the practice of the faith, otherwise known as praxis. Gutiérrez wrote *Teología Liberación Perspectivas* (1971) to articulate that while he does not want to dismiss the classical views of theology that include rational knowledge and faith seeking understanding, he seeks to integrate the “critical reflection on praxis” (#EqualJustice 2021). This reflection urges especially pastors and theologians to wonder: in light of the gospel and what is happening culturally, how do we as Christians respond? Gutiérrez is convinced that to be “engaged theologically means to be engaged in the transformation of the culture” (#EqualJustice 2021).

Transformation of culture will require the barriers of class and the oppression of the poor to be confronted. Theologians in the United States during the 1970s, inspired by the theological praxis of Gutiérrez, strived to bring holistic liberation to the oppressed in their context.

Dialogue with Race in the United States - 1960s

The seeds of a fight for liberation were planted from the moment shackles were clasped onto the enslaved Africans. For generations, the African-American community has endured oppression. The beginnings of that oppression being the institution of slavery that soon morphed into Jim Crow laws, to convict leasing, and to mass incarceration (which will be further

discussed later in this paper). Despite the continual oppression, the seeds of a fight for liberation would be sown. Liberation manifested in the cries for equality and the call for a recognition of human dignity. It manifested in the physical steps of thousands taking the streets. The echoes of African-American cries and the resounding of their footsteps created the atmosphere in which activists such as Malcom X organized and theologians such as James Cone studied. Such an atmosphere compelled many to practice their faith by joining the Civil Rights movement in the 1960-70s.

The Movement called for the building of a just and equal society for people of all races. Malcolm X, a Black activist and later member of the Islamic faith, spoke of this construction and found himself in agreement with Gustavo Gutiérrez. They assert that “building a society means confrontation”(Clasby 1988, p.177). This confrontation required an embodied approach in order for holistic liberation to be attained. Physical protests and acts of resistance were performed by various activist groups. While liberation theologians did not embrace acts of violent resistance, their theology insisted they hold a “sober recognition of the central role that violence plays when a closed system of repression shapes both the oppressor and the oppressed” (Clasby 1988, p.174). Liberation theology understands that growth, rather transformation, of an individual and society is also a dialectical process.

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Malcom X embodied the Hegelian concept of liberation and brought into conversation the dialectical process of transforming one's identity. Hegel was a German philosopher who defined liberation of the oppressed to be a process of reclaiming power in a society. Malcolm X, in wrestling with the anger provoked by constant oppression, sought to reclaim power in order to confront the power structures and the oppressors who perpetuated them. This reclamation was dialectal in that it was an act of resistance through the use of opposing forces (Clasby 1988). Malcolm X did so in small acts at first, such as dressing like the corporate white man and speaking in authoritative manners. In his own reclaimed authority, Malcolm resisted the systems of inequality by creating his own programs that brought distribution of resources to the Black community. So, Malcolm's dialectal transformation that directly confronted oppression falls into alignment with the teachings of liberation theology. Further, it is the transformation of all in society that follows the confrontation that truly resonates with the essence of this theological tradition.

In the building of a just society, both the oppressors and the oppressed are liberated to live in freedom and equality. Theologian James Cone preached specifically to White Christians in the United States on their role in the transformation of their shared society. He revealed that the voice of God in their historical moment was calling with questions such as: Where are your Black

brothers and sisters?; Are you the brother Cain from the Genesis narrative and do you hear the cry of your murdered brother?; If you hear, will you respond? (Union Theological 2016). By uttering such convicting questions, Cone revealed that liberation theology accurately assumes that the blood of Christ is amongst the blood of Black brothers and sisters.

Cone desired for the response of White Christians to be one of empathy and conviction, one that would reconcile relationships but also further the examination of society. He began to examine where systems of oppression intersect. The intersection of race and economics became apparent. Cone states: "We cannot continue to speak against racism without any reference to a radical change in the economic order. I do not think that racism can be eliminated as long as capitalism remains intact" (Vellem 2015, p. 179).

The reality of race in the United States has always been intertwined with economics as slavery was instituted for the benefit of agricultural labor and industry. Therefore, the consequence of this system of oppression has both racial and economical implications. Theologians in the United States context needed to have discussion with their fellow theologians in the South American context. Like the days of old in church history, the time had come to call a council.

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The Councils of 1975 & 1979

Due to the distinctiveness of the United States context and the South American context, theologians came into the discussion with distinct perspectives on oppression. Latin theologians were not sensitive enough to racism and Black theologians were not aware enough of international capitalism (Gathogo 2021). Two councils then ensued to unravel the meaning of each perspective and encourage dialogue; the first was held in the United States context. At the Detroit Conference of Theology in 1975, it was argued that North Americans needed to initiate an evaluation process in which they would assess their reality with more of an economic lens (Gathogo 2021). The second conference was “sponsored by the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Matanzas and the Christian Peace Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean” in 1979 (Gathogo 2021, p.4). The discussion at this 1979 conference was a more unifying conversation as race was acknowledged as part of oppression by Latin theologians (Gathogo 2021, p.4).

Liberation theology, therefore, holds its validity in part to the participation of the theologians in these global councils.

Unification furthered as common ground in the concept of liberation was found. Latin and Black theologians were reminded that they were both striving for transformation in their contexts so that all could live into the reality of true liberation. They also then turned to the very text

where each drew inspiration for liberation and for life. That is the text of the Scripture. Biblical inspiration and interpretation is inherently dialogical, and as stated at the start of this paper, involves the voices of people across global contexts as well as generations. This includes those voices found in the text itself. The voices of the oppressed inhabit the text of the scriptures. Do we hear them and listen? Their voices, alongside theologians across global contexts, are “vital communities of discernment” (Brown 2021). This community is also known as the hermeneutical fellowship and its ultimate focus of interpretation stems from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Goldingay 1982, p.140).

The Liberator

Jesus Christ is accurately depicted by liberation theology as the Liberator. Christology is the study of the life and work of Christ. When theologians of this particular tradition are discussing Christ, they consider the Gospel of Matthew and the text of the Beatitudes. Although it is true that this text reveals Christ to be a peacemaker who bestows blessing upon the oppressed in society, He also holds power that confronts societal structures. In the Gospel of Luke, Christ opens the scroll of Isaiah and reveals himself as the fulfilment of the prophecy it declares. He states: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor...to proclaim

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freedom for the prisoners...to set the oppressed free”(New International Version 2011, Lk. 4:18). All of this brings transformation, and because of his divine nature, brings salvation.

To understand Christ’s salvific work, one must understand a theology on salvation. Soteriology is the study of salvation as it unfolds between God and humanity. According to liberation theology, sin is seen as how humans control one another and their environment to sustain their selfish existence (Clasby 1988). The consequences of this sin are the conditions of oppression. Those who live within these conditions require a Savior who can bring liberation. They require a “liberator who suffers and dies” and further transforms them through the “sealing [of] their new identities by passing through the baptism of his blood” (Clasby 1988, p.183).

This salvific and transformative work occurs on the cross. Jesus Christ was crucified on a cross in an effort to bring humiliation upon the glory He claimed. While Christ embraced both the humbling and the humiliating experience of his crucifixion, others in generations to come embraced the symbol of the cross in a twisted manner. Constantine, a powerful emperor, was one of the first to use the cross as his symbol of victory in battle. Generations later, the Ku Klux Klan in the United States burned the symbol of the cross to enforce white supremacist ideology under the guise of Christian victory. It can be said that “A symbol of love

can become a weapon. The icon of redemption can become an instrument of terror” (Claiborn 2017).

Despite these acts of corrupt power and weaponization of the faith, liberation theologians resisted by clinging to the cross of their Liberator. They held firm that “If the message is not Good News to the poor then it is not the Gospel of Jesus” (Claiborn 2017). Liberation theologians urged Christians to proclaim this accurate interpretation of the gospel and find that the living Liberator was present in their own contexts, wherever those may be across the globe. Further, they insisted that “in the faces of the oppressed, we trace the archetypal features of the suffering servant” (Clasby 1988, p.184). Christ, through his incarnation and crucifixion, became holistically proximate to the oppressed or those crucified in society. Liberation theologians were compelled to find Christ in these individuals and communities to then participate with Him in the cause of liberation. This work for liberation holds true to the teaching of the Scripture as well as to both the embodiment and work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, liberation theology holds validity.

Only of Souls

What if Christ is not the Liberator? What if he does not bring liberation from oppressive systems but comes to save only one’s soul? A Christological understanding of a soul’s individual liberation from sin serves as a cornerstone for the counter

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perspective on the validity of liberation theology.

As previously discussed, a theology on the nature of sin is essential to an understanding of the work of Christ. So, while liberation theology reveals sin to be found in oppressive systems and forms of communal harm, the counterargument perceives sin as the corruption of an individual soul. Those who hold to the latter conviction, critique that while structures should be transformed and addressed because they can be sinful, it is the sin of the man who created them that is of greater importance (#EqualJustice, Costello & Echeverria 2021). The sin of the man or the individual resides in their soul and therefore Christ's sacrifice is required for deliverance. A further understanding of Christ's work is found in the scriptures of the Bible and the nuanced interpretation of such is once again crucial to an embodied understanding.

The well-known verse of John 3:16 reveals the nuance of interpretation that divides liberation theology and those who doubt its validity. The verse states this: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (New International Version 2011, Jn 3:16). It is commonly agreed upon by many theologians that Christ was given as a sacrifice on behalf of humanity and the sins they have committed. Theologians from many backgrounds concur that He is the only way to salvation. However, the latter

However, the latter part of that verse inspires nuanced interpretations. In the interpretive perspective of liberation theologians, "eternal life" entails holistic liberation. One's soul, mind, heart, and body are liberated from the current oppressions as well as saved from their damnation to hell. Others focus on the phrase "shall not perish" by interpreting that one's soul is saved from the flames of hell and salvation comes in the hope of not bearing this eternal punishment. The nuances in the depiction of Christ and his salvific work require interpretation in the form of dialogue.

I concede that even those that doubt the validity of liberation theology give some value to dialogue amongst theologians. Dialogue often involves questioning and discerning the truth of a theological claim. Old Testament scholar John Goldingay states that "even liberation theology needs liberation from its own questions so that it can allow itself to be questioned by scripture. If it refuses this, it may in the end even be doing praxis itself a disservice" (1982, p.141). Indeed, the validity of one's theology must align with Scripture and be diligently tested against such. Embodied understanding, that is the living out of the theology, will hold more integrity if its claims have been proven valid. However, liberation theology has indeed proven to hold a valid depiction of Christ and His holistic liberation.

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Some may go further to not only doubt the validity of liberation theology's theological claims, but its praxis. It can be argued that Jesus was a pacifist so Christians must also be pacifists. They must be non-violent disciples pushing up against the powers of this world but not fighting them (Oh 2013). I concur that Christ is found to be subduing those of the faith who desired to take up arms and utilize violent resistance. Still, Christ was not one to deny the need for confrontation. Structures of corruption and oppression were directly overturned by Christ, such as the rejection of manipulative trade in his house of worship (New International Version 2011, Mk. 11:15-19). All for the sake of transformation of the culture and liberation of all people.

Goldingay then goes on to say that theology is a landscape and there are various vantage points to seeing the whole view: liberation, God's peace, His reign, commitment to Christ, etc. (Goldingay 1982). I agree and call for each vantage point to be explored and discussed in the community. I further urge that validity be given where it is due.

Discussion amongst believers is for refinement so that they may be more unified in their witness. Christians are witnesses to a Liberator who speaks of holistic renewal and healing for all humanity. They must hold to "the assumption that the God of the Bible is the God of the whole man, and that creation, redemption, covenant, and kingdom are matters of body as much as of soul" (ic.

Goldingay 1982, p.135). It is dialogue that actually makes the theology itself holistic.

The Letter Exchanges of Acacia & Marcos

As a fledgling theologian, I have come to depend on dialogue with my peers for discernment as well as the interpretation of Scripture. In the spring of my first year of undergraduate studies at North Park University, I declared my majors to be both in Biblical & Theological Studies and Conflict Transformation Studies. My theology courses were providing a foundational understanding to my faith, but experience with application in my own context was still lacking.

In that same season, I journeyed across the south of the United States as part of a racial reconciliation trip called Sankofa. It was at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice that I had a vision of Christ. This vision was not unusual in the sense that throughout my faith journey I have been comforted and convicted by the tangible presence of Christ. Still, this vision held visceral conviction that significantly transformed the image of the Christ I follow. The memorial was one dedicated to the thousands of lynching victims in the United States. As I neared the end of the guided pathway, I came upon a hill. Resting on that hill, my imaginative eye saw a vision of the cross and my Savior hanging upon it. Without words but only with a strong impression, I heard him state: "I identify with them."

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With an understanding of the necessity of dialogue and the desire to know my Christ deeper through the lens of the oppressed, I turned to my fellow theologians housed at Stateville Correctional Center. I found my hermeneutical fellowship, my community of discernment, in letter exchanges with Marcos Ramirez. Our letters embody and provide proof for the validity of liberation theology.

Marcos Ramirez, as a theologian and individual in custody, has revealed to me an accurate depiction of Christ that aligns with the tradition of liberation theology. Marcos is a graduate student a part of the School of Restorative Arts program in North Park Theological Seminary. The courses required for his restorative justice and ministry degree often coincide with courses I take at the undergraduate level. We both also work as Writing Advisors for our respective campuses and through the letter exchange program have provided feedback for one another's course assigned papers. In these letters, we have discussed the historical theology as taught in our classes but also the modern application for living out this theology now.

We come from different contexts and even generations, yet I have learned more of who Christ is and what a life of faith means through Marcos' witness. He embodies holistic liberation in the ways in which he passionately loves people and calls everyone forth into reconciliation work within their own communities. He also holds a prophetic voice that despite the

barriers of a prison, reaches me in profound ways through the ink of a pen. Christ is in the prison and He speaks to me through Marcos. So, I have found the Liberator in the midst of this dialogical letter exchange with my fellow theologian, Marcos. Still, the validity of liberation theology also requires not only the liberation of soul and mind through discussion, but the physical liberation from imprisonment.

Christ calls not only for the spiritual but also the physical liberation of those crucified in society. Individuals in custody like Marcos would be considered those daily crucified in our society. They are subject to the oppression inflicted by corrupt systems such as the prison industrial system. Holistic liberation for the oppressed and crucified requires freedom from life behind bars. The liberation of Marcos's whole being is essential so I must stand in solidarity even outside letter exchanges. Recently, I had the honor to be present at the clemency hearings for numerous School of Restorative Arts students. Although I spoke no words, my presence stood as a witness to the transformation each has undergone and the immeasurable contribution their voices would continue to add to our society if their bodies were released from the barriers of prison bars.

As any dialogue does, my conversations with Marcos Ramirez will continue. They will ebb and flow as the seasons of life pass, our studies deepen, and our cultural contexts shift. Through our discussions, I

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have become convinced of the validity of liberation theology. More importantly, I have been forever transformed and Marcos stands as a key figure to the development of my faith journey.

Conclusion

Liberation can be found in the literary text of the Bible and can be emboldened by the embodiment of its true meaning. Interpretation of true meaning is discerned through the dialogue of theologians from across generations and contexts. This dialogue is not only necessary for theological interpretation, but also for cultural transformation. Theologians depend on one another for deeper insight into the intersection of systems of oppression. Further, for the places of interruption where theology put into practice brings holistic liberation. The work of bringing such liberation begins with grasping the vision of Christ as the Liberator. Christ's image is then found in those oppressed by society and participation with them in the work of liberation becomes essential. The theological tradition of liberation theology holds to the accurate depiction of Christ as Liberator while also bringing holistic liberation to the oppressed, therefore it holds validity.

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THE ARTISTS' SPACE!



Time to Mourn by Professor Eugenio Restrepo
 "...a time to weep and a time to laugh,
 a time to mourn and a time to dance..."
 (Ecclesiastes 3: 4)

My father Gabriel (92) died last year during one of the highest levels of COVID 19, on July 13, 2020, in Bogota, Colombia. I was not allowed to travel to be at his funeral with my family, which was a very difficult time for me and my siblings who live far from our land. People naturally make appropriate adaptive adjustments to get on with their lives, despite the absence of the one who has left. However, some losses can be more difficult to accept than others and can cause a grieving process that lasts or lasts longer, altering the psychosocial system of the individual. There is no one correct way to grieve, there is no set period after which you can expect to automatically feel better.

One way to overcome my own pain was drawing and writing poetry in the days of confinement. One night, I drew this old man, in a desperate stage, while I was listening to the favorite music that my father loved. The old man depicts myself crying, in distress and sorrow over my own loss, missing my dad, and remembering his fruitful life. After finishing the drawing and making the pertinent adjustments, I felt a relief when I looked at it again and again and traced shadows that in turn were dissipating with the reflection of the light, I felt a sense of relief and I took a step closer in the process of accepting the death of my beloved father. Imagine the love of God the Father when we find ourselves lost and fearful. I meditate on the parable of the lost sheep in the wilderness that was scared for hours, or perhaps days, confused in the darkness of the night and the dangers of predators.

I encouraged my Pastoral Care and Counseling (Cohort 1) students in Stateville, for a class assignment, to create and articulate their own fears, anger, and frustration due to their incarcerated and isolated condition and to express feelings of hope and healing that they have experienced, through drawing, painting, writing, poetry, to help them creatively manage their losses, and anxieties, to face their own past traumas and let them find the light of Christ in their lives.

I am very impressed with what my students have created. I am very proud to have had everyone in my class. I take this opportunity to thank Professor Melissa Pavlik and the Feather Brick editorial team for the excellent work they do in shaping this creative work and Vickie Reddy, for being a channel of blessing through her hard work and approach to the world of students with her constant presence. Thank you for releasing this new volume of Feather Bricks to the Stateville Correctional Center and North Park University community. -Prof Eugenio Restrepo



Dr. Margaret Burroughs and
 Lisa Rae by C.D. Everett



LeBron James by Ryan Miller

THE ARTIST'S SPACE: ARTIST TOOLS



I'm basing my faith around being a follower of Christ and I believe that Jesus lived, died, and was resurrected for the sins of God's children. Jesus is my Lord and Savior. I have given him the image of an African because Jesus is from what was considered the continent Africa. --Brandon Lewis

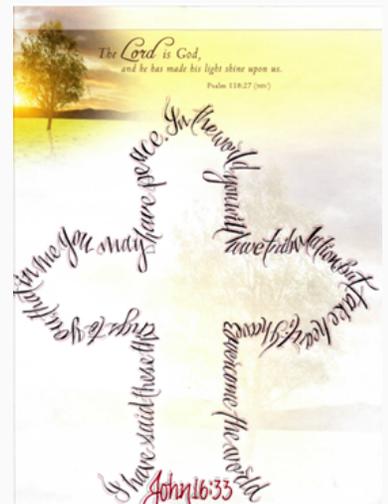
Healed by Howard Keller

Inspired by the passage in Isaiah 53:5. The band-aids that are covering the cross symbolize both the acknowledgement of a harm and the process of healing. For me, it has been through my faith in God that I've found the most healing from my experiences of harm and trauma, specifically the trauma and harm caused by the criminal justice system and prison.



Finally / Bearing Fruit by Rayon Sampson

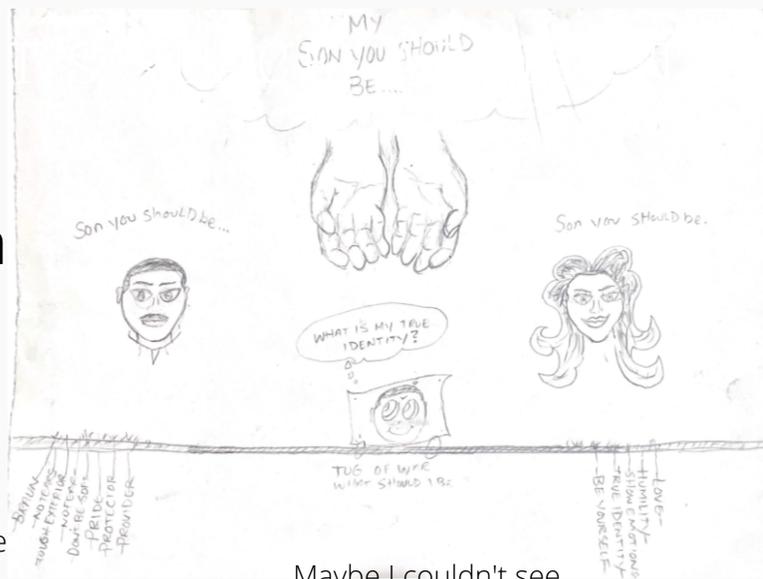
There are many biblical representations of a tree in scripture, mostly representing life in some sort of way. This tree represents my life as being rooted in darkness and sin with no purpose. The constant struggle to find meaning and the ray of light represents the intervention of Christ and the fruit-bearing that is facilitated.



With the words of John 16:33, I wrote in such a way to outline a cross. The words give me relief and shrink the overwhelming sense of defeat that my trials and tribulations produce in my life. --Benny Rios

THE ARTIST'S SPACE: ARTIST TOOLS

Edward L. Brown



*My father says men don't cry
 that emotions make weak
 in this world only the strong survive
 so work with confidence and pride
 *But from an early age I could see
 a difference in our philosophy
 yearning to love and have someone love me
 an emotion of weakness I would have to hide
 so afraid what they would see
 If I revealed the core part of me
 *To live by his philosophy
 I buried myself in a facade
 never allowing anyone to touch or see
 what really lies inside of me
 *What do you see in the mirror of your eyes
 that lurks just beyond your disguise
 at first glance and when things are clearest
 the disgust of protecting a facade
 knowing that you're a fraud
 so afraid to let them see
 the core part of me
 *what is it that you have worked so hard to hide
 afraid that they will see inside
 carrying heavy armour to defend
 leaving yourself without a friend
 all to protect a lie
 isn't that enough to make you cry
 *men don't cry screams the voice within
 the cycle begins yet again
 so afraid to let them see
 that all I want is to love and have someone love me.

Maybe I couldn't see
 what my mom was showing me
 that I didn't have to fear or hide
 who I was deep inside
 *Drop my baggage at the cross
 without considering it a loss
 it is the only way to end the pain
 and live my life not in vain
 *Open my eyes to reality
 allowing everyone to touch and see
 what really lies inside of me
 A man transformed from a false facade
 never again to be a fraud
 never afraid to let them see
 that Jesus Christ reigns in me
 *Now when the voice screams within
 to let the cycle begin yet again
 take mom's advice reject it as a lie
 knowing it's ok to cry
 Especially when I consider me
 the man I used to be
 *All the time my mom could see
 that's not the man I was called to be
 though I shed many tears in fear
 that someone would see what lies deep inside of me
 *Now with age I recognize
 there is no need for a disguise
 for my true identity
 lies in God who created me.

THE ARTIST'S SPACE: ARTIST TOOLS



I explain this art (as unprofessional as it may be) because what it represents seems like something we are all going through. The mountainside is littered with those who haven't been able to make it to every one of our ultimate goals: freedom. The weight I'm pushing upward isn't consistent of one particular struggle, but myriad emotional and spiritual issues that create internal conflict. The red marks depict scars and bruises the journey creates, and even if (when) I finally get the weight atop the mountain, the scars earned will still be present. The steep incline indicates how much more difficult the journey is once one gets closer to accomplishing their goal. Lastly, the white robed glowing figure is the Christ. He is present and his power emanates even as He seems far away. This reality will help me deal with the emotional reactivity because if it's not dealt with, it will negate the effectiveness of my pastoral care. -Marcos Gray

This drawing by Professor Restrepo immediately captured my attention because it expressed how, recently, I felt mentally and spiritually. The scripture that reflects my feelings is from 1 Kings 19:1-18. The picture to me is somewhat of a nexus to what Elijah may have felt when he was on the run from Jezebel and fell asleep under a Broom tree. The tree may have obstructed the full view of the sun shining upon Elijah. For 3 nights and early mornings I stood holding the cell door bars like it is reflected in this picture. I felt like Elijah, hopeless. God spoke to Elijah by telling him to arise and eat. God spoke to me by allowing the sun to penetrate into the cell, and the spirit spoke to me. My testimony is God is able! -John E. Taylor, Jr.



Eshet Chayil

A physically, emotionally, spiritually, mentally, strong woman.

She is clothed in the armor of God.

Hers is a posture of Victory, confident in purpose.

She is vulnerable, learning that she does not always need to hide her weakness.

She is weathered, but not destroyed.

She faces that which would come against her.

She turns her back and releases that which no longer serves her.

And she expectantly looks to the future.

Joy is the weapon she chooses.

And she remains steadfast in standing Strong.

Ain't nothing gonna break her stride.

Ain't nothing gonna take her joy. --Vickie Reddy



* This is a tracing of a drawing by an artist friend of mine, Jessica Le Clerc.

THE ARTISTS' SPACE!

Erased

By Alex Negron

R17084 –
 My face has been erased
 And replaced by this
 Cursed number.
 Millions have been marred
 By this prison industry –
 Blacks
 Browns –
 All of America's least
 We were supposed to watch
 Out for the mark of the beast
 But numbers keep churning
 The population keeps growing –
 Getting devoured at the Criminal
 Justice feast.
 Can someone please pencil
 In my former features?
 I've been dismembered
 Reconfigured –
 To fit the criteria of an
 Evil Creature
 I bleed, I sing
 I laugh, I cry
 My pillow drowns from
 The sorrows late at night.
 Does anybody feel my faceless pain?
 These concrete walls
 These barbed-wires
 Is the only divider that
 Keeps us from being
 The same...



"The art that I like to use is Poetry and Writing, like this one, "Erased," has been very helpful to me when it comes to the trauma I've endured and with my mental wellness. I was raised to always be tough and bottle up my feelings because addressing them didn't solve the problems we were facing as a family. Poetry helps me stare down the traumatic moments and sort them out.

In this poem, I had to fight for my humanity while enduring this dehumanizing environment. Even if no one would acknowledge my humanity--although it is a desperate plea for someone to do so--reminding myself was sufficient enough by expressing it in this poem. It also helps me move past the understanding that I'm incarcerated and my incarceration wouldn't define who I really am.

Being able to write in various genres allows me to pull out those bottled-up feelings of hurt, loneliness, betrayal, and marginalization and face them head-on without being judged or restricted to how much I could share. As long as I have pen and paper, I could freely write it all down.

I have been able to express, through poetry, my most dehumanizing experience, my constant battle with spiritual darkness, losing the love of my life, and why bafflement when it comes to receiving God's grace and saving me. Even when I write fiction or devotionals, poetry seems to find its way within it. There's something about being able to brushstroke the rhythms of humanity through poetry that soothes my ailing soul." -Alex Negron

Mike P.'s Grammar Corner

WITH AN ASSIST FROM SANTA'S HELPER
(AKA RAYON SAMPSON)



The power and the effect of words are indisputable. Words can incite the best and worst in us, as well as inspire or indicate the jovial or melancholy sides of us. Words have the sway to unite a community or to instigate the destruction of a nation. However, more importantly in our context, words are indispensable for those of us who cannot express our creativity with a paintbrush.

So in light of the festive season, I would like to focus on something that can bring out creativity, can be fun, but also should be something that we pay close attention to in our future writings:

pronounced to rhyme with "low" also means a number of people or things arranged in a line.

Homophones are words that are pronounced in the same way as another but are spelt in a different way and have a different meaning. I have frequently encountered this example as a Writing Advisor when one word is mistaken for the other:

"Their," a possessive pronoun meaning of them, or relating to them/themselves

HOmographs, HOmonyms, and HOmophones.

Homographs are words that are spelt the same as another word but have a different meaning and pronunciation. For example, "lead" (pronounced "leed"), is a verb meaning to show the way. "Lead" (pronounced "led") is a noun meaning a type of grayish metal (or for those of us in Stateville "something we drink."

Homonyms are words that have the same spelling and the same pronunciation as another word but a different meaning from it. For example: "row," pronounced to rhyme with "low," means to propel a boat. "Row"

"There," a pronoun meaning at, in, or to that place.

Be on the lookout for homographs, homonyms, and homophones as they can be tricky yet fun. Furthermore, they can be used to inscribe and depict the perfect portrait of literature.



Shout out to the North Park community
 being part of it is proof of what God a do for me
 but truthfully, adversity has my heart getting heavy
 yet I'm prepared for His return; like Vickie, I'm 'Reddy'
 who knows, we could all be face to face wit Him soon
 but it's ironic how, we could see April in June
 I'm a soldier in my savior's platoon
 I just joined the second cohort, preciate yall making some room
 I'm a spiritual insighter, it appears I'm getting wiser
 but Melissa, you can still be my lyrical advisor
 I'm grateful for the fact that I'm breathing
 Sara's not a morning person, maybe Christ'll come back in the evening
 I wonder, if Mary labored a long birth
 if I delayed repentance I couldn't even tell April what that Stallworth
 I'm a Christ representative like Eric Watkins
 as I dissect the tyrannical text
 I can't wait to encounter God like Frances T. Gench
 but if you're a Christ pretender, don't submit to this writing center
 I submit to the will of God, I surrender
 I ain't judging I just hate a pretender
 I'm just voicing my opinion like Andrew McKenna
 Understand Romans, this is people vs. the state
 we saw Jessica Van Denend's paper converse and debate
 if you're wondering what's my angle
 part of the African American Appraisal of the Philemon-Paul triangle
 I know that I could excel
 be a professor of theology and ethics like I followed Michelle
 by the way, the word "ally" can mean what you want it to
 to me it's an acronym for "Almighty Lord Loving You"
 since the devil has an advocate I'm God's accomplice
 on judgment day He'll reiterate what I've accomplished
 all these blessings I don't know what to do wit em
 peace to Marcos, pick one there's two of em
 memes wit Marcos and bars by da Baptist
 Michelle Dodson and Dr. Jules are now a part of our campus
 can't let racism get to me.
 though being a God fearing black convicted felon puts my life in double-jeopardy
 but yet and still, I seek tutelage from Professor Will
 why wallow in the probability of getting killed
 hope Will don't ever retire
 he showed me Christ is not a prophet He's the Savior slash prophetic Messiah
 I see allies of people of color
 but as people of color, we also need to reach for each other
 cuz' I'm sick of seeing my own killing
 lo siento, it's bueno, amor, yo se, TK got me code switching
 I said I'm sorry, it's good, love, and I know
 plus Lyds gave us her perspective of hope
 Apricity means the warmth of the sun in the winter

CLOSING:NORTH PARK COMMUNITY
SPOKEN WORD BY JOHN HALL:
READ OUT LOUD IN THE VOICE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST



March Feather Bricks, am I the only one who remembered?
Look, will you serve God or some mammon?
quoting scripture is synonymous with someone likin shots from the cannon
...if that over ya head
when you catch it you'll look like Thomas when he learned Christ was no longer dead
...let me decipher the text
Steve Ramirez has some ideas he'd like to suggest
Justice and DeCedrick are both conversation shapers
North Park choir and Ryan Miller also entertain us
I don't know Shai Linne, but I've met Cheyenne
Professor Rah is also someone I would call my friend
reppin North Park but this for da poets
salvation is a blessing and being in this program is a bonus
see my body is a temple that I'm tryin to remodel
but the prodigal son in North Park is Michael Pizarro
look, you know forward I march
since the state took my freedom I replaced it with Restorative Arts
cuz Professor Jules told us to mobilize for justice
while Nacho's philosophical with Feather Bricks in his clutches
yeah Luigi keeps a red pen and Nazeeh is a poet
Benny Rios is positive and his actions tend to show it
We know Scholar Scott has a superpower way with words
not to mention Brandon "B" Lewis who can also lay a verse
Benjamin Meyer has degrees from past education
David Denson going home is cause for a celebration
Otha Anderson is a discussion leader
Cheryl Lynn is good people, I could tell from her demeanor, was recently able to meet her
Brother Melvin be preaching the word like David Sutton
Chris Everett is probably off somewhere painting something
Steve Feagin is Sunshine--a positive brother
Alex amplifies as a poet but me and Gordo don't compete with each other
Michael Jones is a Writing Advisor
Marshall Stewart is so much more than just a guy in the choir
We all know tic-tac-toe Thomas with that salt and pepper beard
and Manny keeps it real
Howard Keller pushes a food truck of sweet semi-colons while JP dances along steppers
Carl Smith boasts he's memorized almost all of Paul's letters
and Jamal Bakr's paper on the theology of suicide
was eye-opening but let's remember students who have died

Rusty a.k.a Ronald Rice
made sandcastles with Jesus and would help those who want advice
R.I.P. Big Fella, real name Joseph Wilson
a deep thinking artist who had the skills of a poet in him
shout out to Ro' Zavala, shout out to Richard Turner
shout to Country doing a series of visual sermons
Alann Vega, Robert Maury
Henry Cervantes and Kim Schiller, who showed non-violent ways for resolving conflicts

**CLOSING:NORTH PARK COMMUNITY
SPOKEN WORD BY JOHN HALL:
READ OUT LOUD IN THE VOICE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST**



Vaughn Washington asked would Huck Finn go to heaven or hell
 Ronald Steele is in the choir but don't sing in the cell
 Slim, Poet Laureate, is the Voice of the Poor and Incarcerated
 shot out Eddie Brown and everything Yillie commentated
 James Degorski and Sosa who's smiley and quiet
 John Turpen and James Edwards who notoriously been known to inquire
 Kenneth Key and William J, articulate elders
 Martin Barnes a God fearing helper
 Amotto Jackson always has a smile on his face
 Robert John showed productive ways to occupy our space
 Michael Johnson is part of the WC book club
 and C-MAC has some handwriting that kinda makes mine look dumb
 Larry Luellen is community minded
 so is Johnny Marizetts, known as a useful advisor
 Robert Maury attends study hall with strong determination
 and Elton Williams has very distinct interpretations
 Marcos Gray's very insightful, Tall Mike has several paintings
 Damen Price named Feather Bricks based on Paul's letter to the Galatians
 John Taylor has preaching skills that's clearly his calling
 and Jason Munoz can make a mean cup of coffee
 Raymond Nesbitt is working on a project with Steve Spencer
 Rayon Sampson showed us how to build things together
 Lonnie Smith reads a lot about abolition
 another cohort 1 leader is Michael Simmons
 Willie Spates, George Ross, even Michael Sanders
 I've even heard Todd Smith give insightful answers
 Devon Terrell set a precedent
 Armida Belmonte-Stephens gave us some theology heaven sent
 Dean Dave Kersten also had some thangs workin
 and Yarmale has a name hard to say perfect
 Jamie Thomasson at your service is in cohort 2
 not to mention Brian Willis and a few more too
 yeah Paul and Obed highlight Religions and Cultures
 and Ken Sawyer made sure Church History's given some focus
 Eugenio Restrepo and Rosalyn Bates
 teach Pastoral Care and Counseling, but Principal Costabile cannot be replaced
 Peace, Justice, and Restorative Practices
 are subjects Elizabeth Pierre explores in her classes
 While Michelle Dodson gave insight on Trauma and Healing
 and last spring Hauna Ondrey's class was taught about freedom
 then there's me, John the Baptist, and not the saint they martyred
 In closing, I thought I cap this off with David Carter.

P.S. For those whose monikers do not appear here
 Holla at Melissa to include them in the New Year.

