Welcome to the first edition of Listen!, the Global Education Journal of Gordon College. The name chosen for this journal is, of course, intentional, because it mirrors the attitude we want to take as students of global culture and experience. Several weeks ago, I was sitting in Johannesburg, South Africa planning with my South African colleagues a new opportunity for study abroad. We raised the question; “What is most important for our students to learn in this context?” Almost immediately the answer came back: “What they really need to learn is to listen.” So often within the American academic culture we are trained to come into new situations, and from our background of experience and study, provide immediate answers to complex questions. In study abroad, whether it be in domestic or international settings, what is most important is to listen, to explore with open minds, to test the wisdom of cultural perspectives and understand history. We often liken the experience to a medical theatre in which the experienced doctors are performing surgery while the students are around the outside of the theatre listening in and watching the procedure. What you quickly realize—in both surgery and cultural exchange—is that things are much more complicated and delicate than you at first might have imagined.

Included in this Journal are students who have listened—and reflected—and observed—and been changed. All of these students participated in Global Education programs in the Spring 2006 semester, and responded to an invitation to submit formal papers, creative writing, photographs, or images of original artwork to the GEO for inclusion in this Journal. We intend to continue to make this invitation each semester and produce two volumes per year of reflective work. We want to thank all of those who submitted work. Not all submissions were chosen for inclusion here, but we hope what is included represents the fine work and experience of Gordon students in this program.

Enjoy,
Cliff Hersey
Dean, Global Education
Reflections from Orvieto

Aimee Cole

Picture the dainty fairy tale village of a childhood imagination. Buildings perch on a mountaintop, low stone walls trace the boundaries, flowers spring from the cliff, and people walk the cobbled streets where the sound of teacups and conversation spills out from cafés. Though this could very easily be a town in any fairy tale worth its salt, this is essentially Orvieto, Italy, located between Rome and Florence. I’d been dreaming about living there ever since I helped cater a reunion of Orvieto Semester alumni as a freshman. Standing guard at the coffee creamers, I overheard dozens of interesting conversations about the interaction of art and faith and just how pivotal Orvieto had been to them. I fell instantly in love. I’m only an English Literature major, not an inherently cool art major, but I could still join these people I so admired in this program. Two years later, I sounded as interesting as possible on my application and danced with happiness in my hallway when my acceptance arrived.

Thus, for four months I lived in a stone convent run by three Italian nuns and collected innumerable experiences. Hindsight gave additional meaning to some of these adventures. For instance, a trip the sculpture class took to Rome brought back eventful news that later provided a helpful analogy. “Guess what? One of the girl’s wallets was stolen at McDonald’s.” We’d been warned about pickpockets, but it was still a shock. Such a violation of personal space and property made me pause before even reacting with sympathy for her plight.

I, too, was robbed while in Italy, though I didn’t lose anything tangible. My wallet and camera were securely zipped in my purse and tucked under my arm, but nonetheless I knew precisely the sense of violation that this girl must have felt. You see, soon after arriving in Italy I realized more than ever before that I define myself by my words. As an English major I relish using strange sounding words, shaping interesting sentences and adding to my vocabulary. There, however, I was stripped of my defining characteristic since I didn’t know Italian, and even after an introductory course I wouldn’t be able to interact comfortably due to my slower learning style. My metaphorical wallet was gone and I was left like that girl at a McDonalds in Rome, reeling in shock and disbelief.
We were warned about the dangers of culture shock before departing, but I'd ignored the notion then and continued to do so after my arrival for a time. I figured I couldn’t be negatively affected by Italy because my quality of life had improved. I had three day weekends, only two subjects at a time, class for only three hours a day, excellent cappuccino, and a fairy tale town to call my own. How could I be unsatisfied by this place? But as the first two months passed with a perpetual stomachache and a wilting emotional well being, I had to admit I was not content. Those months were quiet as the slowed pace of daily life gave me even more time to think about my predicament. Venturing into town was intimidating and even talking to my peers was difficult since I felt an oddity among those who were so visibly pleased by everything. I knew I’d survive, but I didn’t want to just scrape by. I’d come to learn, to flourish, to better my perspective of faith and life. Mere survival didn’t seem to epitomize these goals.

Thankfully, I was somewhat distracted from my troubles by my classes. The required Italian Renaissance art history course took trips to see frescos by Giotto, panels by Ghiberti, sculptures by Donatello, the Sistine Chapel by Michelangelo, and dozens of other amazing works of art. Strangely enough, while these were all interesting and important, I found another art form that intrigued me particularly.

In class we learned that street tabernacles were icons usually of Mary and Jesus made of tile, frescos, or ceramics and located on random buildings around Italy. They had several functions: reminders that this neighborhood was under God’s protection, memorials for important events, or visual promptings to be constantly in prayer. I appreciated the explanation, but most of all, I liked the challenge my professor gave me soon after for a project to fill some my intimidating free time: “Go find some street tabernacles in Orvieto. See if you can find more than eight.” A good treasure hunt is irresistible for me and so this became my refuge in otherwise unfamiliar territory. I found solace in purposely exploring Orvieto, marking discoveries on my map and reclaiming some of my confidence during these walks.
More words and confidence returned during the third month, when I began a Renaissance Theater course. We caught our professor’s enthusiasm for the early liturgical plays of the church and later the larger productions of mystery plays starting with Creation and moving to the Last Judgment. We learned that these plays helped people understand their part in God’s story and to experience the humanity of Christ by physically entering into these biblical accounts. Our assignment was to write a script that brought a sculpted panel of the town’s cathedral to life so we could actively understand this artwork. I worked on the prophet panel and spent those four weeks learning that God’s words through the prophets were like a map pointing to Christ, no matter how bizarre the vision. Every day I’d visit the Duomo and stare up at my panel, trying to find the right words for the men with the flowing scrolls. Happily, my own words began to return as I wrote my script.

As visual art and words began to interact in the context of the church, I also came to see the beauty of the formal catholic liturgy connected to this growing understanding. Attending mass at San Giovenale was exhausting due to the language barrier, but I learned to love the rhythm of the service, the sense of community as we corporally recited words, even the cold fingers of the old ladies who would grasp my hands as we “pace”-ed each other while passing the peace. There was reverence, history, and connection as a church that I had rarely experienced in my background. Later, regularly attending the English-speaking Anglican-Episcopalian service heightened my opinion of the higher church and made me curious and appreciative of the catholic tradition.

Furthering this curiosity, I spent the fourth month bravely attempting to write poetry inspired by religious artwork. Here too, came the blending of concepts I’d already pondered as words and visual art collided again. One poem assignment particularly affected me: write an ekphrastic poem about an Orvieto street tabernacle. That afternoon, I took out the trusty map I’d made, traced my steps to a favorite “blue Mary” and stood in front of her gaze to find poetic words. I came upon a phrase that must have been a product of hunting for these street tabernacles for two months, since it was the only phrase that came naturally: “Yarn on a
fingertip.” I liked the image, for it conveyed the tabernacle’s gentle prompting to remember something, but the full significance didn’t strike me then.

The irony of my treasure hunting project struck me while sorting through papers months later. I realized then that I’d found twenty-one street tabernacles without really considering that these icons on the streets were reminders to be faithful, to remember that God is with us, and to be constantly in prayer. I hadn’t recognized my Savior’s gaze amidst my discontent of shifted expectations though I’d gone through the actions of seeking them out. These icons should inspire action, comfort and encourage people in their daily routines to remember God. We’d heard often in our art history class that renaissance art was to be used in worship, and this reverberated for me once more. Art and active worship will now be typified for me by those representations of Mary and Christ found mounted on a garden or storefront wall.

Another visible connection of art and worship came to me during the Laude in Urbis theater production. This amazing play, “La Strada Per Emmaus” integrates medieval mystery plays into the framework of Jesus on the road to Emmaus. His disciples don’t recognize Jesus in their grief so he prods them, singing a rousing and joyful refrain of “Don’t you remember?” He leads as angels with straw wings and combat boots draw the crowd to the Piazza del Duomo where Creation and the Fall is acted out on the steps of the glowing cathedral. The written accounts come to life as we join in Eve’s awe of the shining forbidden fruit, laugh at the stubbornness of Noah’s wife, and stand in disbelief as the angel interrupts our joyous dancing at Isaac’s bar mitzvah to tell Abraham to kill his beloved son. There is barely any separation between actor and audience, between reality and pretend, as lines are blurred and we trod the path of the disciples slow understanding that Christ is not dead, but risen. The spoken language shifts, but the emotion and action provide so much that even as they speak complex Italian, I still understand. I assume the awed look on the Italian woman standing next to me during the spoken English sections means that she too understands. Visual art and words together created this, and leave me both glowing in amazement and contemplating sparkling new thoughts.

So picture again that cliff-top town where the convent stands. Yes, the gelato cones are delicious, the architecture ancient, and everything is truly beautiful. However, that small town isn’t perfect, and neither does it have to be. I’ll remember my frustration and loneliness as part of my time there, as it is honest to do so. I see value in the periods of disconcerting
silence now for losing a part of myself reaffirmed I can never survive on my own. Ironically, just trying to survive provided a foundation for an understanding of art, language and faith that I’d so desperately thought required more happiness to grasp. With this new perspective I was able to cultivate a rejuvenating sense of contented joy. I now see the arts as a language itself, one that overcomes differences and illuminates for me an otherwise unexplored side of active faith.

**Psalm 23 (for Uganda)**

Hannah Powlison

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down to rest under billows of mosquito net. He walks with me under the black-frilled banana trees standing against the blue sky at night, under heavy darkness and blindingly hot sun. He leads me beside the churning river Nile, beside green Lake Victoria, beside shacks and hovels and running children in tattered clothes. He restores my soul when I am weary of thinking about cultural conventions, when I am lonely and miss familiar places and people, when I am broken and feel useless, unable to talk to one more neglected street boy. He leads me down rutted and dusty paths of righteousness, for his name’s sake. Even when I lose all motivation to keep walking in the heat of the day and to initiate true conversations, you are with me, so I have new strength. Your high clouds and beautiful created faces – black and white – they comfort me. You prepare a table before me, even when I feel like matooke, rice, beans and posho are my enemies. You anoint my head with pelting raindrops. I am full to overflowing with joy when I lean out the window of the matatu and smell fields of sugarcane and jungle green breath. Surely goodness and mercy, like birdcalls and culturally-boundless grace, will follow me all my days, in this place and every other.

Amen.

10 February 2006
Hannah Powlison studied in Uganda through the Uganda Studies Program of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. Her photographs accompany these two creative pieces.

**Kigali Memorial Centre, 24 April 2006.**

It was heavy, settling into my soul, shivering my chest like a drumbeat. It was painful as a sharp panga [machete] cutting flesh, like cords whipping my thighs as I turned to run away. It was dark, a dark and ghastly blossom of human rage.

I was overwhelmed and sobered. My head throbbed and my limbs ached. My eyes were hot. I walked in that circle – the never-ending history of hate, the awful imagination of evil. It was a circle of guilt, prejudice and betrayal. A circle hiding all the deepest wrongs in the human heart. The circle inverted upon itself and spiraled in – to an artist’s rendition of hope, at center. Smooth limestone sculptures of families, lovers, friends – reunited. But this flicker was overcast. Shadows fell in heavy lines and when I turned, the faint glow was gone, pressed down by dark. It was like being in the womb of brutality, spun together with ignorance and guilt. It was like drowning in a thick and murky sea; like sitting, cold and alone, in a rainstorm.

I pulled myself up the stairs, through the rooms of children’s faces, names and stories. I walked outside, breathing new air, seeing the mass graves of hundreds and thousands. On every front, I lost my breath, lost another piece of sanity in this insane world.

Another exhibit: a swirling maze of global genocides. The faces and stories were all there. The humans were all there again, in merciless slaughter and soft resistance. The blood and anguish, the deadly superior stereotypes, the innocent. They were there. Colors and faces and dates and guns and names and tears and choking sobs from every direction. Each corner I turned was plastered with new horrors. Blood soaked the walls.

I ran. I didn’t want to, couldn’t see any more.

It was enough for a day, for a lifetime. I swung around corners, the darkness heaving and roiling behind, threatening to swallow me.

Perhaps it would have been better to sit in the bloody dark than trying to believe in some small hope of final light. I was slipping on the cusp of humanity, of God, of existence, of goodness. All were being consumed, I was being consumed by the machetes of the world.

I stumbled into a dim hall and turned away, a new direction. My mind was
staggering under the load of pain, of prickling injustice. I saw a door cracked open, knocked once, pushed it and went in.

It was like heaven hit me in the eye.

There was light, light as I’ve never seen it before. The low sun had broken through clouds and was piercing in the one small upper window in the room.

I stepped inside and closed my eyes. The light was too bright – it even pained me with its purity. The monstrous darkness of my soul saw brightness.

It did not cease to exist, that dark, but, like some microcosm of humanity, was countered by the light. Pain was balanced by healing, hate by love, death by life. Rage met compassion and brutality met graceful concern. Anger and bloodshed were tempered by justice and birth. Rape lost to marriage and destruction to rebuilding.

This balance of pain and joy, of aching and delight – this is the ongoing dance of humanity in which we all take part.

The light shone in the darkness and the darkness had no power to overcome it.
bodleian

soft lead scratches slowly across the page as I lift literary language from the book beside me, trying to engrave these ideas in my mind. Whatever the pencil prints, my thoughts erase.

the discipline of determined diving into dust, dates, facts, and figures doesn't shred my spirit sharply enough.

still! sensation shudders through me! I am not lost completely in the coursework and still! I feel, I laugh, I cry, I hurt, I hate, I love.

(darn)

what author, book, or don will dare to teach me the painful, peaceless art of patience?

-Julie DeJager
Katie Dooley is an International Affairs major who studied in Cyprus through the Global Learning Semester program. Part of her travel took her to Jordan as well. Below is a page from her Journal for March 20, 2006, along with several original photographs.

Jordan, March 20, 2006: …A little while later we headed out from Amman to go to the Dead Sea. There was a lot of traffic headed out there, it was such a nice Friday afternoon, but the ride was fun as usual. The guys are crazy drivers, almost worse than Cypriots, and blaring their Arabic music while winding around and through the city made quite the experience. We got to the Marriott which had “beach front” property, and heavy security. We waited a while outside the ornate gates while Erin gradually got drunk, I chain smoked, and Barkev worked behind the scenes in our favor. Apparently we only got in because of his dad’s connections (he owns Saab in Jordan or something like that) and once again I realized how privileged I am, receiving the same education as the sons and daughters of the wealthy and diplomatic.

From where we waited outside the hotel we could glimpse the Dead Sea. It was beautiful – it looked almost hazy from where we were but I couldn’t tell if it was air quality or just distance. As I distanced myself from both Arabic and American friends, who were proving to be a little too much already, I indulged myself with another cigarette and a realization that intrigued me deeply. I was really struck at how geography defines so much for a person, their entire life and every aspect of it, as I stared out across the sea and at Israel on the opposing shore. Two weeks ago I was so sure I would be able to go visit Katie in Jerusalem until Mohammad translated the Arabic news in his flat for me – more prison riots and breaks across the small nation challenged stability once again. Security finally overcame pride, and he convinced me to use the same money, just a different flight. I would have been just over those mountains.

When we finally did get into the Marriott, everyone paid 15 dinar to use their pools and beaches, but no one even bothered with the pools. It was amazing and unreal, the view looking out at the Dead Sea and the land beyond. The water was a beautiful shade of blue, and the mountains surrounding it, touched by the few clouds in the sky, made you feel as
though you were on a postcard or in a movie. The shore was brief and rocky, the tropical vegetation and trees tenderly cared for by the hotel giving way to manicured sand and rough shore. Salt deposits crusted the rocks in the shallows, caked on from their exposure and telling the history of the Sea’s depth.

At first I was deemed photographer because I had only rolled up my pants and waded in up to my calves. When I finally did get changed and went in (not too warm, but still pretty nice) it was the weirdest sensation of not being able to swim. The salt density is so thick it keeps you afloat: your legs won’t sink enough to give you the opportunity to kick, and the density rolls you naturally onto your back. I was forced to pull myself backwards with my arms if I was to get anywhere. It was pretty fun, though very awkward. Another man there had swam out too far, and a hotel personnel called out to him. I wonder where the national boundaries are over this sea. I pulled my way over to a few of my friends who had stationed themselves a little ways down the shore from the main hotel beach. Man, it’s always 4:20 somewhere for them. While they rolled a joint, I browsed along the edge of the water for small rocks, decorated by layers of sediment and glazed with sea salt. Uncle Nick will love them, I’m sure.

By the time we began gathering our things and group together, the sun had pretty much set, the cooling air making the water feel warmer. The last of the natural light withdrew behind the mountains of Israel, increasingly replaced with city lights in the distance ahead and the hotel’s soft beach lights behind us. I wish my pictures and words could do justice to this place, so rich in history, beauty, politics, and intrigue…

Widening My Widden*: The Noises of Cairo, Egypt

By Amy Spaulding

*Widden is Arabic for ears.

For the first three weeks, they invaded. Attacking my ears, my conversations, my privacy. The noises. Even the closed doors of my urban apartment could not shut out their advances; I was in a war zone pelted by bullets of honks and shouts and hisses. I realized there was truth in all the talk of Middle East violence, for although the rest of my body seemed safe enough, the city of Cairo, Egypt, was constantly bombarding my ears with intense, confusing noise.

But as my semester abroad continued, the noises began
differentiating themselves, each one shuffling forward like a row of soldiers on the first day of boot camp, stating its name and purpose with as much confidence as it could muster. It began when I first recognized the muezzin’s call to prayer, the man’s lone song lofting above the city, reminding me that I was surrounded by a different culture, a foreign religion: “Allaou Akbar! Allaou Akbar! (God is Great! God is Great!)” He sang five times every day. I then noticed the “Ayaaaash” boy bellowing from the street below, inviting Muslims to the freshly baked bread in his cart rather than to prayer every morning. The horns’ meaning evolved too—they were no longer mere racket but became valuable warnings—the turning signals for an expressive people who only drove vehicles with broken headlights. Eventually, I even picked out the tune of “It’s a Small World” droning from the open doors of taxis, the notes comforting me in their familiarity and annoying me in their repetition all at the same time.

And of course, the language. What had once been a jumble of jibberish to me finally grew into a melody all its own. The shopkeeper down the street who winked as he asked, “Ruz bi lebin? (rice pudding?),” already knowing my answer would be, “Aiwa (yes).” My host mother’s whispers to her six-month-old grandson Meedoo: “Halos, halos (enough, enough),” as he whined with discomfort. A code I was only beginning to understand, but one I had to decipher if I wanted to connect with the people of this crowded, crazy city.

And the most beautiful sound? The clattering of silverware and dishes echoing into the streets at 5:25 every evening of Ramadan. The muted laughter, shut behind doors to be shared only in the dining rooms and hearts of family members during the most blessed month of the year. I loved Ramadan noises, especially on days when I could clatter and laugh and eat with my own Muslim host family. And I always loved my Egyptian papa’s dinnertime entertainment:

“You must hear this. Olivia Newton-John has such a beautiful voice, doesn’t she?” He would ask as he played his tape recording of Xanadu, an ‘80’s Olivia Newton-John musical. Olivia’s fuzzy pleadings: “Don’t walk away...all you gotta do is stay” would remind my papa of my imminent departure.

“We will miss you when you leave,” he would tell me, setting down his falafel as he looked me in the eye. “You are part of our family now. You are our favorite American daughter.”

Yes, there was noise in Cairo; there was a lot of noise, but by the end of my four month stay, the noise was no longer noisy to me. I knew after I returned to the United States, my ears would yearn for the screaming water pipes and giggling roommates and hissing cats that they had become accustomed to. I knew I would miss hearing and speaking the glottal stops, the donkey brays, and the Xanadu soundtracks that composed the cacophonous, melodious language of Egypt.
Megan Bielawa – Orvieto – Original Artwork
Kalie Boyce

Moaning for Change

In the spring of 2006, I was given the opportunity to work at a center for malnourished children in Guatemala, an hour outside of Guatemala City. This center nursed extremely malnourished children back to health, and required them to live on-site, away from their parents, in order to administer the proper care to them. Children in the center ranged from 18 months to 10 years of age and all were developmentally and physically behind well fed children of the same age. Often, the children were required to stay at the center for months, even years, for a full recovery. During my time there, I had the opportunity to play with these kids, hold them as they cried, as well as change their cloth diapers. It was an amazing week that stretched us in patience and forced us to examine our own individual lifestyles.

On the day we arrived, a little girl named Mayra arrived. Mayra was indigenous, as are almost all of the children there--she spoke no Spanish, only her native tongue. Mayra was extremely small for a 5 year old, and wore the same clothes that a healthy two-year old girl would wear. We found out that before she arrived at the center she had eaten only rats and tortillas. She ate no rice or beans at the center and cried continuously for the first few days. As she cried, I just held her, rocked her and tried to comfort her in my broken Spanish that she did not even understand. She just kept moaning, “mamo” -- mommy in her native language. I just couldn’t help thinking as I held her for the hours she sobbed that I had somehow helped to create the despair in her young, fragile life. I cannot believe that we as Christians are not supposed to simply pity situations like Mayra’s or send over a few extra dollars when we can spare the cash, even though it does make a difference. Our call is to change the world, to love the world in the way Christ did. And that global change does not just come by fixing the symptoms of the problem, but by addressing the structural issues that create the problem itself. In this case, Mayra was malnourished because her family was too poor to feed her properly. Her family is poor due mostly to the fact that they are indigenous in a land that treats its indigenous people like second-class citizens. Over 65% of the population in Guatemala is indigenous, yet
only 22 families in the entire country, none of which are indigenous, own 93% of all the arable land. So where does Mayra come into this story? Mayra’s story is the story of the millions of poor, sharecroppers whose land has been stolen from them by the government or other corporations who then force them to work the land for pennies. This story runs much deeper than a hungry little girl in Guatemala, but instead it encompasses an entire geopolitical system, a way of life that keeps the poor poor, and the rich very rich. And the fact that I remain silent, and do not fight the unjust system tells me that I too am contributing to the injustice.

There are hundreds of other stories I could have chosen to tell, yet I chose this one because this story encapsulates my whole semester in Central America--learning the history, culture, and ways of the people in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Cuba and Guatemala. Mayra’s situation serves as an opportunity for Christians to model what they, as children of God and citizens of the world must enact. God has called us to love the widow, the poor and the orphan, and that call does imply tangible love in action--feeding a hungry child, caring for the poor, or sending money to a worthy cause, yet it also demands that we become conscious consumers, take an informed, involved stance on foreign and domestic policies and know how they honor or dishonor God’s plan, and most importantly maintain our awareness about what’s happening in the world. This is one of the countless lessons my semester abroad taught me; it opened my worldview so that now, wherever I go, I cannot just see the issues before me, but I see the complexities that comprise the issues, moaning, just as Mayra did, for us to change them.

Luca Signorelli’s Angels

And even here there is a soloist
Who wears the envied soft white satin gown
She reaches all the highest notes so well
God told the other angels not to sing

There is no glory in accompanying
However well they strum their harp or lyre
The other seraphs still must sit below
Contented with their lower cloud platforms

And if a novice player plucks too hard
A gilded string may snap out of its pegs
It takes time for this gold to be restrung
Embarrassing to fix while others play

Yet though one awkward angel may have blushed
Still this song so holy and sanctified
Has filled the arid aurous atmosphere
Some players have to close their humble eyes

Perhaps it is this forced humility
That allows these perfectly formed creatures
To live in choreographed harmony
Knowing their flaws, they perform perfectly

Rachel VanWylen studied in the Gordon in Orvieto program, and wrote this poem in response to viewing Signorelli’s fresco cycle in the Duomo.
A wide range of images meet the eye as one walks into the San Brizio Chapel and gazes upon Luca Signorelli’s frescos of the end times. The damned in torment face the elect receiving their crowns. Authors of classical literature sit enthroned, while characters from their own writing act out a narrative around them. Kings sing in Purgatory while angels silently carry souls across water. The Antichrist preaches, and souls rise up to receive flesh. The space of the chapel vibrates with tension, as eschatological theology is taught in brilliant color and starkly juxtaposed images. This meeting place of extremes, the end times, was a popular subject of study for Renaissance thinkers. Perhaps the most famous of these was Dante. Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, regarded as a great work of literature and theology, was known and revered by Renaissance artists. It is not surprising that Signorelli would look to him as a source of eschatological theology, and it is not doubted that he did. The connections between his work and Dante’s writing are abundant and profound, ranging from the subtle allusion to the literal representation. Ultimately, however, Signorelli’s work is his own. Though Luca Signorelli drew extensively from Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and allowed the theology of the poetry to permeate his paintings, the organization of the major frescos in the chapel was done according to Signorelli’s own interpretation of eschatology.

One of the most obvious links between the work of Luca Signorelli and Dante is the portrait of Dante found in the wainscot. With his characteristic jutting chin, bony nose, and laurels resting in his hair, Dante is easily recognizable. He is shown with two books, one resting open on the table before him and a second through which he is hastily flipping, evidence that he was not only a poet but also a scholar. Along with him are five other portraits of writers, including Virgil and Claudian. These five are all ancient Romans, so Signorelli was honoring Dante with a position among the classical literary geniuses. Signorelli also honored Dante with a position under the *Coronation of the Elect*, showing that this great poet was a Godly man.

Dante’s portrait is surrounded by four monochromatic roundels depicting cantos one through four of his *Purgatorio*. During these four cantos, Dante and Virgil entered Antepurgatory, the place to which apathetic Christians were assigned to stay before entering Purgatory proper. (Christians were considered apathetic if they believed but failed to acquire the three theological virtues: faith, hope, and love.) Each image is faithful to the text and created in a grisaille, so that they appear as bas relief carvings. This grisaille style allows the scenes to appear not only as paintings of poetry, but as paintings of carvings of poetry. Thus, the viewer is further distanced from the scenes, and they appear as mysterious images from the foreign land of Purgatory.

Virgil and Dante first discovered the mystery of that world when they met Cato at the entrance to Antepurgatory. Cato is depicted by Signorelli as an old, bearded figure in the roundel directly underneath Dante’s portrait. He was puzzled by the sight of these robust figures entering Antepurgatory,
because he was accustomed to seeing Shades—the lightweight shadows of dead people. Virgil explained to him that Dante was still alive, saying, “This man has not yet seen his term of days, / Yet in his crazy wickedness he drew / So near it, he had but short breathing-space” (Dante 74). Thus Cato understood that Dante was a pilgrim traveling through Purgatory in order that he might learn how to live on earth. This is a critical concept in both the Divine Comedy and the San Brizio chapel. Both Dante and Signorelli created images of life after death with the hope that people would respond by living more faithfully in the present.

The next roundel around Dante’s portrait depicts Dante and Virgil meeting an angel, a “bird of God” (Dante 82). She was white, beautiful, and her wings functioned as sails, so that she did not even need a boat to carry shades across water into Antepurgatory. In Luca Signorelli’s depiction of her, she appears in front of a mass of these shades, all of whom are puzzled by Dante and Virgil. They note, as Cato did, that the two men are breathing, and have enough substance in their bodies to cast a shadow. The shades, who are no more than shadows themselves, cannot possibly cast a shadow. Interestingly, Signorelli departed from Dante on this point and gave all of his figures, dead and alive, a shadow. This may have a merely aesthetic decision, but it also may be related to Signorelli’s understanding of bodies. As some of his larger frescos show, he did not present the dead as shadowy presences or diaphanous beings draped in white robes; he gave them bodies.

Once Dante and Virgil had explained the nature of their living bodies, they went on to meet the first two groups of shades in Antepurgatory. These are depicted in the remaining two roundels around Dante’s portrait. In the first, there are pictured a group of people who were excommunicated from the church. One of them, a man named Manfred, explained that he would not have been saved if he hadn’t repented at the very end of his life. Even so, he was not permitted to sing hymns as other men in Purgatory, because he was not yet fit to do so. The next group, those who were indolent, also did not sing, but not because they lacked permission. They remained silent, because they were simply too lazy to move their lips. Looking at one, Dante exclaimed “O Good my lord, pray look at this / Bone-lazy lad, content to sit and settle / Like sloth’s own brother taking of his ease!” (Dante 98). This laziness ran in direction opposition to the thing Luca Signorelli and Dante desired. They were using their work to exhort people to practice their faith, boldly and with energy. Failing to act out one’s faith was a significant failure in their eyes. The five classical authors are also encircled by four roundels containing scenes from their own writing. The pictures around Virgil, for example, show a scene from book six of the Aeneid. In this scene, the Sybil shows Aeneas the golden bough he will need in order to enter the underworld. It is appropriate that Signorelli chose this scene, since it contains the same subject matter as Dante’s writing: a living person’s journey through the afterlife (Gilbert 97). This is especially relevant since Dante chose Virgil as his fictive guide through the Purgatorio and Inferno. Signorelli’s allusion to the underworld in the Aeneid, shows that he understood the important role of Virgil in Dante’s work. It also may suggest that his main interest was not Dante but the end times. In fact, several of the other classical authors in the chapel also wrote about people happily traveling through the underworld. Signorelli illustrated (Continued on Page 26)
Guttural Spitballs and Snot Shots
Deborah Teo

To ultimate question: to notice or not to notice? As an idealistic person who dreams someday that the world will be hygienically clean, reality kicked in pretty fast when I took my first walk to Carrefour from Peking University. It was a relatively beautiful day, a little cloudy or maybe it was a polluted haze, whatever it was, almost nothing could dampen my sense of adventure. A few minutes after exiting the campus gate, I was soon at a main intersection. While cautiously jaywalking, I noticed a mother-daughter pair walking near me. At my first glance, they gave me a very good impression; they looked educated and dressed rather well. Then without prior warning, while the mother was still walking, I hear this loud and seemingly endless guttural sound, "KKRRRRR". The mother's mouth then contorts and out shoots the cannon ball. Her daughter's impassive face told me that this was a normal habit. As a witness to this crime scene, I was in shock. How could a respectable woman do such an unbecoming thing? Even though I encountered plenty more spitters before finally arriving at Carrefour, as I had not observed other parts of Beijing, I did not want to make spitting generalizations.

Hoping to be proven wrong, I went deeper into the concentric circles of Beijing expecting that people living closer to the center are more swallowers than spitters. My next observation took place in an area where there is an endless supply foreign diplomats and tourists. On my way back from my internship at the United Nations, I was standing by a tree near an enormous garbage bin, waiting patiently for my bus to come. While standing there, to my utter disgust, I observed many people walking past the tree to cough up their gooey fluids onto the tree's base. In addition, there was also one man who was shooting his spitballs into the garbage bin's tiny slit opening with perfect accuracy. The loud guttural sounds they made especially bothered me.

During our Chinese New Year break, our program took us to visit the ancient walled city of Pingyao. Renowned for the excellent preservation of the city, culture, and people, Pingyao attracts tourists from all over the world.
However, its spirit of preservation has gone a little too far; Pingyao continues to uphold its tradition of spitting and blowing their noses onto the road, or in my terminology, "snotting". While walking through the stone paved streets, I frequently saw phlegm and mucus on the ground. The classical example came when I was walking along the streets and a middle-aged man was approaching me and heading in the opposite direction. We had the full view of his face and hands. Evidently, his nose was really bothering him, so instead of using a tissue, he simply used a finger to close one nostril while blasting air out his other. Out of his nose, came a sticky shot of green mucus. It was absolutely sickening.

As I am from Singapore, naturally I questioned the government's control capabilities. Why not impose heavy fines on the people? However, I have come to realize that although the Chinese government is excellent at passing laws, they are just not as good in implementing their decisions. If the police (who are spitters themselves) were ordered to fine spitters, there wouldn't be enough manpower because of the sheer population size.

I think the cause for the spitting and snotting is the polluted air. When I first arrived in Beijing, I immediately felt the difference. My throat feels awful every time I ride the bus because of the waves of car exhaust emission from the congested roads. I constantly feel the need either to blow my nose or to wear a mask. Although Beijing's air is quite bad, Pingyao's air was even worse. My throat felt raw and scratchy whenever I went out. So even though I sympathize with the Chinese spitting and snotting predicament, I think there are better ways to ease the discomfort; such as using a tissue or a handkerchief. As this habitual practice really gives China a bad image, I think its something the government should look into in its preparation for the 2008 Beijing Olympics.
Below are two papers presented as an assignment for the Gordon in Boston program. The assignment was to frame an “Urban Theology” based on the theories and experiences of the semester.

The Biblical City
Melody Springer

Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.’ Genesis 11:4

The Bible represents God’s truth. Therefore, it is not hard to comprehend the realistic approach the Word of God takes when discussing the city. Cities are places of bad and good, sin and grace, not something to be romanticized. Almost every book of the bible mentions the city. Genesis reveals Cain as the founder of the first city. Lamentations also talks about the city. Ray Bakke states, “Lamentations can be subtitled ‘A Funeral for a City,’ for the entire book is a dirge” (75). Isaiah discusses what a city should look like in all its varied colors, as a judge and as a comforter. “Isaiah was an urban person with a global worldview” and he provides his readers with a theology of the city as well as a theology for the city (Bakke 78). Furthermore, Paul in the New Testament dedicated his life to cities. He traveled between and among cities throughout his entire ministry with his goal being to reach Rome, the city of politics. Philippians and Colossians are two books of the Bible named after cities. In addition, Jesus himself preached in the streets of the cities. He modeled the ideal urban ministry, teaching that we don’t have power, we are power, and we must not abuse it. Bakke is correct in describing the “Jesus gospel” as “a ‘bottom up’ and intimately transforming relationship.”

A New Theology
Jasmine Houlette

As one looks at the world today, they will see that the number of people living in and moving to the city is ever increasing. This is clearly seen in the fact that today over fifty percent of the world’s population reside in cities, when in 1990 it was a mere eight percent (Bakke, 12). The city being a place of diversity, an epicenter of business and economy, and the birth-place of new ideas, all people, whether they live in the city or not, are being affected by things that go on in the city. I believe that with this change needs to come a change of theology, a change of lifestyle for Christians, evangelist or not, so that they may do the work of God of loving and bringing hope to the people in this world in the most effective and Godly way possible.

Cities can be traced back to as far back as the one Cain found after he had become estranged from community with God for killing his brother, Able. The city was founded and named after his son Enoch, in hopes of a “life after death”. He longed to find human community, and built, in hopes of creating a better life for himself, for his son and generations to come (Bakke 40). I believe that this picture of the first city, among others, portrays the biblical and historical understanding of the Bible. The city is a place where there are many issues, yet also hope. A place of refuge and community. You will see this city paralleled later on with the last city, the New Jerusalem. The first city begins with a death, with an empty hope for communion and community, and it ends, in the New Jerusalem with life everlasting.
I just said to Bridget, “I don’t like my memo.” She replied, “Start over.” So I will. I’ll start over just like I have done so many times this semester. I don’t think that I have ever started over so many times in my life. I have never been left at the foot of the cross so many times, wondering where in the world Jesus has brought me and then realizing He has brought me, through his grace, to start over.

I came into this city being so unaware of who I was and unknowingly starting over the process of figuring out who it is that I am. What I mean by that is I didn’t realize what it meant to be white. I didn’t know the implications of attending a Christian college in which I am benefiting from a private education. I didn’t think about what it meant to grow up in the suburbs having everything given to me each step of the way. I also didn’t know that I had always thought that, in being a Christian, I had a somewhat better view of the world.

I could have never been more wrong about my world view and apparently it was time to start over. I was to start over and look at myself and realize who it was that I was becoming. I was to look at myself and realize that who I was becoming wasn’t even close to who I am supposed to be.

Looking at myself meant bringing Jim, the man who sleeps on the corner of Oak and Masonic, dinner every once in a while and seeing his face light up at the sound of a warm meal. It meant facing the reality that race is an issue, an issue that is so much bigger than me. It meant walking up to Sandy on the corner of Sutter and Montgomery and handing her a Nutrigrain bar for lunch one afternoon, not knowing that it would blossom into a friendship that would last the length of the semester. And yet, within all of those experiences throughout the semester, I still had to start over every day.

I had to start over recognizing the brokenness within myself. I had to start over in examining how circumstances within my life have shaped me. I had to start over the way in which I held the idea of being a Christian so high. I had to walk away from holding on so tightly to who I was. I had to start over knowing that I didn’t posses any power in which to change the world and realize that my only job is to show up.

This idea of showing up meant showing up and letting God start to reveal and develop my passions. I had to let go of everything that I thought I knew in my closed off world and let God start over in me.

It is such a liberating thing, starting over. This idea of starting over every day shouldn’t be so new to me, but this semester I found out that life is about constantly starting over. I don’t want someone to read this and think that every day I start from scratch, but I merely take what life has given me, give it to God and let Him start over with it. That is sort of the whole theme behind...
Jesus anyways, isn’t it? He invites us into a relationship of starting over. I guess, before, I didn’t realize that He meant every day.

So I will leave Urban having had each day here change a little bit of who I am. I will leave having started over more times than I can count, and start over yet again. I won’t start from scratch, but I will start over, welcoming every chance that I get to do just that.

Rebecca Kay attended the CCCU’s American Studies Program and submitted these photos.
Art Work: Street Tabernacle
Done with ceramic tiles, behind Palazzo del Capitano del Popolo, in brick wall.

Squares touching sides
touching corners;
fragments,
sections of
detail,
puzzle without grooves.

To a comparing eye
distinct:
blazing
yellow backdrop,
woven
mute
wallpaper design

Limply holding a goblet, she translates
through distracted eyes, extending
beyond
the cracks they seal.
Beyond
the stationary reach her child makes.

Purple & green globes
grip the stem;
when squashed they
splatter,
liquefy
for resurrected swallowing,
set out
by fuzzy spheres of sunset
most true to mouths.
and other succulent treats containing
seeds
inviting
many
to taste, next:
the jug that labels this mosaic’s home.

Jenelle Siegal

Jenelle Siegal attended the Gordon in Orvieto Program - 2006
The ancient historian’s task of analyzing events from which he is now separated by centuries or millennia is complicated by the fact that so little evidence has survived that infamous obliterator, Time. The scarcity of first century sources places the utmost importance upon so comprehensive a work as Tacitus’s *Annals*; as Michael Grant notes, “It is chiefly upon Tacitus that we have to rely for our knowledge of a critical epoch in the history of western civilization.”1 Unfortunately for the ancient historian of the twenty-first century, though, Tacitus and his *Annals* “are open to various indictments”2; the most serious being that he was, in fact, no historian at all. During the height of the “scientific” approach-to-history’s popularity, it was suggested that “we must… divorce the man of letters from the historian” because Tacitus’s primary achievement was as a literary genius; he had failed in historical work.3 Others, however, have hailed him as “the greatest historian that the Roman world produced.”4 Thomas Jefferson called Tacitus “the finest writer in the world without a single exception. His book is a compound of history and morality of which we have no other example.”5 Perhaps Jefferson, in this statement, comes closest to the reality of Tacitus’s work: a compound of history and morality – literature winding together dry events with the literary flair of an artist. “He is not the perfect historian of the Roman Empire (who is?),” notes Norma Miller, “but there is a man behind the book and a mind behind the style.”6 The man behind the *Annals* does not fit neatly into the “perfect historian” box; he is a literary historian7 and his work must be read in light of this – as history shaped by a literary technique.

For the sake of practicality, it is sensible to examine Tacitus’s “literary” and “historical” talents one at a time, and so this study shall begin in this manner. A cautionary preface, though: the categories of “literary” and “historical” are entirely modern ones and such a division would have left Tacitus and his contemporaries downright befuddled. This fact will be particularly relevant later on; for now, it must simply be kept in mind.

Tacitus’s literary “voice” is what first strikes his readers: he moves through the narrative quickly, with dark action and tense power. In a manner neither languid nor lightheartedly lively, the senator trained in oratory “uses all the considerable resources of his vocabulary”8 to sweep his audience into his gloomy interpretation of the first century city of Rome. It is a style “unique in Latin prose,”9 earning him the reputation as both the most difficult as well as the most accomplished Latinist whose works survive today. Into his poignant pessimism, Tacitus is able to insert scathing wit and sarcastic humor. In one instance, he notes that some attributed Drusus’s absence in the capital thus: “He must be fighting or visiting distant countries.’ But,” continues Tacitus, “he was only touring the Canupanian lakes and coasts. So this was the first lesson he learnt from his father – a fine training for the ruler of the world!”10 The author’s scoffing toward the imperial household

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1 Grant, introduction to Tacitus’s *Annals of Imperials Rome*, 10
2 Syme, *Tacitus*, 464
3 Miller, “Style and Content in Tacitus,” in *Tacitus*, 99
4 Mellor, *The Roman Historians*, 76
5 Jefferson, quoted by Mellor, *The Roman Historians*, 76
6 Miller, “Style and Content in Tacitus,” in *Tacitus*, 115
7 *ibid*, 99
8 Woodman, introduction to Tacitus’s *Annals*, xiii
9 Miller, “Style and Content in Tacitus,” in *Tacitus*, 112
10 Tacitus, *Annals*, 147. Please note that references to Tacitus’s *Annals* in this paper will (rather unfortunately) use page numbers of the Penguin English translation rather than traditional book/chapter/line references. This is due to the fact that the version of the *Annals* used to research for this paper (Penguin, 1996, revised ed.) does not give clear markings of book/chapter/line; page numbers are the easiest way to cite this source.

Continued on page 41
Van Wylen...Continued from Page 18)
these portions of their writing and made it clear that he was discussing
Purgatory, not Hell, by depicting them as happy people. By including these
classical depictions of the underworld, Signorelli expanded the discussion of
eschatology to the pagan classical realm and provided narratives with which
Dante’s work could be contrasted.

Still, of all the literary texts influencing the chapel, Dante’s is the
primary one, and scenes from his work are found in roundels outside of his
portrait as well as around it. There are scenes from his work around the
portrait next to him, which shares his space under the blessed. Scholars
disagree concerning the identity of this person, but he is generally assumed to
be a believer, since he is looking up toward the blessed in heaven (Gilbert 96).
The scenes around him illustrate cantos five through eight of the Purgatorio.
Virgil and Dante are still in Antepurgatory during these cantos, and they meet
a variety of apathetic Christians, including the late repentant, and some
negligent rulers.

One of these late repentant men introduced himself to Dante and Virgil
during canto five. His name was Jacopo del Cassero, and during his time on
earth, he was ambushed and left to bleed to death. In the last moment of his
life, as he lay helpless in a pool of blood, he called out to God and believed.
For this reason he was allowed to go to Antepurgatory, but he was moving
through there very slowly since he had been slow to believe when he was on
earth. Jacopo’s request was that Dante might tell his family to pray for him,
since he believed their prayers would hasten his trip through Antepurgatory.
Intercessary prayer is a dominant theme throughout the Purgatorio, and Dante
continually stressed the importance of practicing piety on earth. Indeed, canto
five ends with one female Shade urgently saying, “Remember me that am
called Piety” (Dante 107). Signorelli was also concerned about this piety, and
his depiction of the late repentant shows men in postures of regret, wishing
they had not failed to live faithfully on earth.

The negligent rulers, who appear in canto eight, also failed to live
faithfully on earth. And yet, the passages about them comprise an especially
beautiful portion of the Purgatorio. They may have failed to rule well during
their time on earth, but they sing beautifully in Antepurgatory’s valley of the
princes. Signorelli shows them huddled together under the face of a cliff,
looking up to the angels above them. So beautiful are the melodies drifting up
from this valley that Dante struggles to stay on his feet and almost faints. For
Dante, who was himself an acclaimed poet and the creator of beautifully
musical writing, to be so struck by a song, implies that this music was indeed
extraordinary. It shows once again just how deeply Dante and Signorelli
appreciated the fruits of piety.

The series of roundels which began around Dante’s portrait continues
onto the altar wall, where scenes from cantos nine, ten, and eleven are
illustrated. During these cantos, Dante and Virgil leave Antepurgatory and
enter Purgatory proper. Purgatory proper exists as a steep mountain created
by the land that rushed up out of hell when Satan fell from heaven, but
Antepurgatory is a flat seaside landscape. Thus, as one turns the corner from
the left wall of the chapel to the altar side, one also goes from the flat land of
Antepurgatory to the steep mountainside of Purgatory proper (Gilbert 87). In
this way, the structure of the building follows the structure of the poem, and we can feel the transition up into the mountain with our physical bodies.

Although the Purgatorio has thirty-three cantos, Signorelli does not illustrate any after eleven. As a result, these last three, nine, ten and eleven, become the culmination of the earlier eight. That Signorelli would give them this significant role, suggests that their content is important to the chapel as a whole. It is interesting then, that these cantos are all about pride. Pride was one of the seven deadly sins, and thus it merited a terrace of its own in Purgatory. (Purgatory was built up in seven terraces, each for the purpose of purging a specific sin.) The method devised for purging out pride involved heavy weights attached to the backs of the prideful so that each one appears as “a corbel, holding the weight / of roof or ceiling, carved in human shape” (Dante 112). By weighing the men down, the weights forced them into a posture of humility.

Not only were they in a posture of humility, but they were also forced to look upon images of humble people carved into the stone, including Mary in the annunciation and David dancing before the Lord. Dante describes these carvings as, “pure white marble; on its flawless face/ were carvings that would surely put to shame, not only Polyclete but Nature too (Dante 109). The people were not only looking at images of humble people, but they were also looking at images so well-carved that they made all human artists look inferior to the divine Artist. This must have been a particularly humbling thought for Dante himself, who was had developed excellence in his own art. That he could speak of divine art excelling human art proves he was aware of his own need for humility.

Humility and pride, in fact, are major themes throughout the chapel. They are undoubtedly among the most important themes in the Preaching of the Antichrist. This large fresco, located in the upper left of the chapel, is a dramatic representation of unrestrained pride. The antichrist, a dark, thin, demonic figure, is shown behind a Christ figure, but a quick glance at the Christ figure’s glazed over eyes, proves that his actions are not of himself, but of the Antichrist. To pretend to be Christ must be the most blatant and severe prideful action one could possibly perform. It is not surprising then, that the image inscribed on the Antichrist’s podium is a rearing horse, the symbol for unrestrained pride (Riess 46). This symbol is repeated amidst the Antichrist’s followers, where another horseman sits on the back of a rearing white horse.

In the upper right corner of the Preaching of the Antichrist, there is another image symbolic of the pride that will bring about the Antichrist’s downfall. This image is Solomon’s temple. With its statuesque pillars, the soaring structure is an imposter of the true church – the church of the spirit. It attempts to mimic the church of the spirit in the same way that the Antichrist tries to mimic Christ himself. Antichrist is pictured twice in front of this temple. He is shown once with the barefoot penitents and once in the act of performing a false miracle. This miracle was an act to convince the people that he could raise a man from the dead. The “dead” man was actually one of his followers who played the role of a resurrected person (Riess 44). In pretending to perform this miracle, the Antichrist was not only prideful, but he was also attempting to perform the act that the San Brizio chapel is about: God raising his people to be with him. The inclusion of this scene is relevant,
therefore, to the theme of pride and also to the eschatological question of life after death.

On the far left of the *Preaching of the Antichrist* are two figures who appear detached from the nearby excitement. Their quiet expressions of understanding and insight give them an authoritative air as they look across the fresco at the Antichrist, his men, and those he deceived. These two authoritative figures are Luca Signorelli himself and his fellow artist Fra Angelico. By including the portraits, Signorelli brought himself and his colleague into the art itself, as onlookers who existed within the scene but were able to obtain a larger perspective than the other characters. That Luca would choose to include himself and Fra Angelico in this way is yet another link to the work of Dante, since Dante also included himself and a fellow poet, Virgil, in his *Divine Comedy*. Dante and Virgil existed in the poem as guide and pilgrim, travelers who were able to describe their sights to others, offering wisdom concerning the nature of these mysterious other worlds. By identifying himself with Dante, Signorelli is also taking on this role. With his frescos, he speaks to others of what he has come to understand of eschatology. He has traveled through the Bible, through classical literature, and through Dante’s *Divine Comedy*; and now he tells the story of the end times.

Part of that story takes place in the *Inferno*, Signorelli used imagery from this hellish portion of the comedy for the fresco on the lower right of the altar wall. Here we see a scene from canto three of the *Inferno*, during which the Neutrals, men who were committed neither to God or the devil, chased a large white banner. These men who could not follow one thing on earth, could not do so in hell either. They ran wildly, dizzily, attempting to follow the thin cloth that stood for nothing. This is a critical scene in the *Inferno*, because it showed the necessity of choosing the Truth and following it (McLellan 24). For Dante who was exhorting his audience to a more devout life of faith, this scene was a dramatic warning against faithlessness. Signorelli used the same scene for his altar wall, since he was also exhorting people to practice their faith. With his paintings, he preached the same message Dante preached through poetry.

And yet, despite having used content from Dante’s *Divine Comedy* for much of the chapel, Signorelli did not remain entirely faithful to the text. The fresco of the *Resurrection of the Dead* and fresco of the *Coronation of the Elect* are prime examples of this. Though the righteous are clothed in white robes and bright light in Dante’s *Paradisio*, they are completely unclothed in Signorelli’s images. Though this may seem a small detail, it does show that Signorelli was doing much more than illustrate the scenes from a book. He was working out his own theology of the end times, and using Dante as one of his primary resources. His work was informed by Dante’s writing, but it was not dictated by it. For this reason, he felt comfortable departing from Dante and using Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones as the inspiration for his *Resurrection of the Dead*. Just as Ezekiel wrote “[The] bones came together…I saw the sinews and the flesh come upon them, and the skin cover them, but there was no spirit in them” (Ezekiel 37:7-8), so Signorelli’s figures can be seen, as in time lapse photography, going though the stages of skeleton, emaciated body, and fully formed figure.

Unlike the *Resurrection of the Dead*, the *Coronation of the Elect* seems to follow no specific text, though it was informed by Signorelli’s general
knowledge of Scripture. The sky above is filled with winged angel musicians flying in symmetry. Below them, a line of righteous people process across the scene. Some of them appear as sheep being herded, which may be an allusion to Psalm 23 (Gilbert 80). As in the Resurrection of the Dead, the figures are unclothed and shameless. Perhaps this was an attempt to show that people in heaven will be just as Adam and Eve once were in Eden, naked and shameless. In addition to Genesis and Psalms, many passages in Revelation could also be cited as having had an influence on the subject matter here, but no one passage seems to be the most prominent informer of the piece. Perhaps Signorelli’s own understanding of overarching Biblical themes was the primary source of inspiration for the piece.

Since it is clear that many Biblical and literary texts informed Dante’s work, the question arises of just how he organized the sequence of his frescos. If he had simply painted scenes from Dante’s work and not used other texts as inspiration, he might have copied Dante’s sequence. This, however, is not the case. Signorelli used Dante’s work as a source of profound theology and creativity, but he was not merely illustrating Dante’s work. He was using his paintings to create his own theology of the end times, and in order to do this, he drew wisdom from many texts, primarily that of Dante.

And yet, even if Signorelli’s sequence was his own, it is still important to understand how he developed that sequence. One way of understanding the sequence is to look at the chronological order of the events depicted. If they are seen this way, the Preaching of the Antichrist would be the first scene, followed by the Five Signs, Punishment of the Damned, Resurrection of the Dead, and Last Judgment. This understanding of the sequence feels awkward, however, when one looks at the actual frescos in the space they inhabit. To view them chronologically, one would have to turn one’s head back and forth repeatedly, since the frescos are not lined up this way on the walls. A chronological understanding of the frescos is further confused by the fact that in some texts, the Five Signs (located above the entryway) comes before the Preaching of the Antichrist (Gilbert 118). Clearly, if these frescos are meant to be viewed chronologically, it is not their sequence on the wall of the chapel or any text that organizes them in this way. It would only be possible to view them chronologically if the viewer had previous knowledge of the narrative and could impose his own chronological understanding onto the frescos. This is possible, but unlikely.

One possible explanation for the lack of chronological order in the fresco cycle may lie in the conditions and circumstances surrounding Signorelli’s contract for the frescos. The contract was initially based on just two drawings, those for Preaching of the Antichrist and Resurrection of the Dead, which are positioned at the front of the chapel on facing walls. It was only later that the committee working on the chapel decided on imagery for the entranceway and the other large frescos. They decided that the subject matter for the remaining paintings was to be related to last judgment, but they did not specify what exactly Luca Signorelli was to paint. At this point, it is likely that Signorelli chose scenes based on his own interpretation of the sequence of events, a sequence that could not possible be organized by chronology, since some of the pieces were already out of chronological order.

Though it is impossible to read the mind of a long-deceased Renaissance genius, it is fair to assume that the each of the major frescos is
created in relation to its partner on the facing wall. Since Signorelli actually
designed the frescos as pairs, first the *Preaching of Antichrist* and
*Resurrection of the Dead*, and later the *Coronation of the Elect* and the
*Punishment of the Damned*; it seems logical that each of these paintings exists
in conversation with the painting it faces. And, in fact, as one looks back and
forth between the walls of the chapel, this hypothesis proves true. Each fresco
is related to the one opposing it, and each seems to represent the exact
opposite of the thing depicted on the facing wall. Damnation is the opposite
of being crowned a saint. Souls resurrected and coming back into their bodies,
becoming more fully and truly themselves than they have ever been before, is
the direct opposite of souls deceived by one who is not Christ, and becoming
less truly themselves than ever before. Thus the walls represent extreme
opposites, and in doing so heighten the drama of both heaven and hell. This
drama is further enhanced by the arrangement of adjacent frescos. Though
these are not in as direct opposition as the other pairs, they are arranged so that
the good is juxtaposed with the evil. The Antichrist preaches next to the
coronation; the righteous are resurrected next to the damned.

Given this pattern of juxtaposing starkly different images, which is not
the pattern of the *Divine Comedy*, it seems that Signorelli was developing his
own eschatological theology, separate from that of Dante. This in no way
undermines Dante’s influence on his work. In the same way that a rich
harmony adds sophistication to an old melody, so Signorelli’s San Brizio
chapel is a compliment to the already exquisite work of Dante. Both painter
and poet created work with the goal of inspiring people to greater piety and
humility. Both painter and poet placed themselves as characters within their
work. Both painter and poet thought deeply about the nature of the end times.
Though Signorelli may have departed from Dante’s text at times, the spirit of
his work is very much the same, and without Dante he could not have painted
with the degree of insight that he did. Signorelli had the humility to learn
from a great poet, and because of this he was able to make a profound
statement of his own. Let the kings in Purgatory sing on. Let the saints
receive their crowns. A humble artist has created something beautiful.

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He states, “The bigger the city and the more urbanized we get, the more intentionally personal and local our witness must become” (135). This was the message and life of Christ. Lastly, the book of Revelation teaches “that history will climax in a battle between two titans, the earthly city of Babylon and the heavenly city of Jerusalem” (185). Revelation 20:1-4 states:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

After God’s triumph, He and all of his followers will dwell in a city. The Bible opens and closes in a city.

The biblical city was a product of necessity, just as it is today. Cain created a city out of a need for interaction. He had been banned from God’s presence, so he created a place, arrogantly named after his son Enoch, where he could experience fellowship with other human beings. The biblical city was also needed for protection. Matthew 4 is one of the many places that the city is referred to as being “on a hill.” This was a strategic maneuver to provide the city with a view over its surrounding lands in order to protect them from oncoming enemies. The city as seen from God’s perspective works as a family system. The regional cities are sisters and suburbs are the daughters, with trade-offs of protection and supplies amongst them. In addition, the city was the mother of invention. This included everything from weapons to art, things that destroy and those that rebuild. It was also in an urban setting that foreign missions was invented. Biblical cities were pluralistic and multi-cultured and they reached out to many lands and people. The first large city-center church was Antioch which at the climax of Pentecost brought multi-cultured people over the walls to mix and worship.

The Bible describes four archetype cities. The first is Sodom, full of corruption which results in its destruction. Second is Babylon. This city is plethora of good, bad and indifferent and is oftentimes a good representation of the modern city. Next is Nineveh, the city that repented and was restored. Finally, Jerusalem is the city of God, founded on righteousness, which will one day stand as the spiritual center of the world. These four different cities provide us with models of how cities today can, will and should be. Sadly, however, the modern world is full of Babylons striving to become Jerusalem, a point which they will never reach.

My Urban Theology

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. Matthew 10:5-8

One million people move into a city worldwide each week and it is estimated that by next year, the “world’s population will be divided between rural and urban areas” (“Urban Realities” 7). Christ calls his followers to serve his people and to feed his sheep. Where better a place to do so than the city? It should be clear that as Christians, we have a responsibility to the city simply because of the number of people that dwell within its limits.
However, our responsibility goes deeper into the city. One-third of all city residents live in poverty. Christ lived his life serving the poor and needy. He provides a perfect example of the Christian’s role in an urban setting: we have a commitment to the poverty-stricken, to the oppressed and to those on the margins of society.

Jonathan Alter, writer of the article “The Other America,” which discusses the often ignored, impoverished population of the United States brings to light this sad fact:

After a decade of improvement in the 1990s, poverty in America is actually getting worse... In a nation of nearly 300 million people, the number living below the poverty line ($14,680 for a family of three) recently hit 37 million, up more than a million in a year (42).

He continues by claiming that the poverty rate, which is now at 12.7% is “a controversial measurement, in part because it doesn't include some supplemental programs.” Nevertheless, this lower-than-actuality rate is “the highest in the developed world and more than twice as high as in most other industrialized countries, which all strike a more generous social contract with their weakest citizens” (43). The poor have slipped from public view in this country. The main source of all Americans’ information, the media, avoids discussing the poor, because, simply, the public does not want to hear about it. Therefore, we must first clarify: Who are the poor?

Alter breaks down the demographics stating:

With whites making up 72 percent of the population, the United States contains more poor whites than poor blacks or Hispanics. In fact, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reports that the increase in white poverty in nonurban areas accounts for most of the recent uptick in the poverty rate. But only a little more than 8 percent of American whites are poor, compared with 22 percent of Hispanics and nearly a quarter of all African-Americans (in a country that is 12 percent black) (44).

The initial step towards emulating Christ in an urban setting is learning the truth about those we seek to serve. Modern Americans are often ignorant or biased in their views of the inner-city poor. This mindset must first be altered.

Change your Mindset

But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first. Matthew 19:30

The average, middle-class American, when asked what makes the poor poor would respond with pinpointing personal, racial or cultural hindrances. The truth of the matter is not often taught or considered: The causes of poverty are systematic. Senator Barack Obama brought this fact to light when discussing the poor in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. He boldly stated on the Senate floor:

I hope we realize that the people of New Orleans weren't just abandoned during the hurricane. They were abandoned long ago--to murder and mayhem in the streets, to substandard schools, to dilapidated housing, to inadequate health care, to a pervasive sense of hopelessness (Alter 42).

It is this cycle of less-than-acceptable treatment that perpetuates the cycle of poverty. Those born into poverty usually live their lives in poverty, raise their children in poverty, and those who are able to gain a good education, to make a little money, leave the neighborhoods in which they were born. And thus the cycle continues. In order for Christians to help the poor and fight poverty in the city, we must become educated in the reality of the situation and the roots of such injustice.

“After 40 years of study, the causes of poverty are still being debated. Liberals say the problem is an economic system that's tilted to the rich; conservatives blame a debilitating
culture of poverty. Clearly, it's both—a tangle of financial and personal pain that often goes beyond insufficient resources and lack of training” (Alter 44). One main factor in perpetuating poverty is simple economics. Minimum wage is too low in this country for a person to live off of comfortably. Alter sarcastically, although truthfully, comments, “For the poor, the idea of low-wage jobs' covering the basic expenses of living has become a cruel joke” (44). Another leading cause is geographic isolation. Only five to ten percent of American families live in stable, integrated communities (45). This includes racial, cultural and economic integration. As recently discussed, it is very difficult for the poor to escape impoverished neighborhoods, thus they become isolated from a life of opportunity. One man named Anthony who had lived in the projects of New Orleans his whole life until the Hurricane, is quoted as having said, “Sometimes I wanted to back out, but you can't. I felt like I was incarcerated” (46). The final main factor that maintains the cycle of poverty is the racialized mindset of America. A “racialized society” is one in which racism is not initially very obvious. Most of its majority members would boldly claim that they are not racist and would be offended at the accusation. However, within such a society, “race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships” (Emerson 7). Racial lines are socially constructed where interracial marriages are rare, residential and economics divides are common and where the people are always aware of what race they are interacting with. Nevertheless, these prejudices extend beyond race and into class. No matter what race a person may be, if he or she is homeless, on welfare or lives an impoverished lifestyle, that person will be viewed in a particularly negative manner by the wealthier community. This mindset must be abolished in order to fully understand, help and love those in the world who need it the most. James puts this all into perspective in the second chapter:

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, ‘Here's a good seat for you,’ but say to the poor man, ‘You stand there’ or ‘Sit on the floor by my feet,’ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor...If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!...What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (Verses 1-17).

Without action, without service and love to the poor, without an unbiased mindset, our faith is dead in the eyes of God.

Change your Lifestyle

Jesus answered, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’ Matthew 19:21
Although he is revered for his thoughts and teachings, Jesus Christ was loved by the people for his service. Our transformation into followers of an urban Jesus cannot stop with adjustment of our mindset. The knowledge we gain must go through another alteration and spill out into our lives. We must change our lifestyles to better emulate the being of Christ. This includes giving of our possessions and following Jesus into the midst of poverty and loving His people in close proximity.

Those in middle-class to upper-class America are in the top 1% of the world’s wealthy. We have an overabundance of “necessities” in life. We fill our houses with “stuff” and spend our money on material items while families only a few miles away struggle to keep their heat on, to make sure their children fed and educated, and to maintain happiness within their homes. The easiest way for Christians today to serve the poor is by giving of possessions. In fact, Christ has called us to do so. Luke 11:39-41 reveals the response Jesus gave to the Pharisees when they questioned his not washing before a meal, as is the Jewish tradition:

Then the Lord said to him, ‘Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.’

We are commanded to rid our hearts of greed, purge our minds of the desire to obtain worldly belongings, and destroy that which keeps us clinging to all that we own while many die of simple diseases and hunger. Then, we must give.

However, it is not yet the time to wipe our hands clean, sit back and breathe a sigh of contentedness. Poverty and the fight against it goes beyond finances. Rodolpho Carrasco, in Christianity Today worries “that we are perilously weak at walking alongside the poor, at investing directly into the lives of individuals to give them what they truly need—not what we believe they need or what our policy statements tell us they need. I’ve found that it's relatively easy to raise a voice in protest, but unfathomably hard to invest in a life” (46). He then challenges the reader:

When did you last spend time with a poor person, an at-risk individual, or someone in need? When was the last time you were close to them for an extended period? I ask, because that's what Jesus did. He was close to the poor who needed justice. The Messiah was sent to preach Good News to the poor, to proclaim freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, release for the oppressed, and the arrival of the Jubilee year (Luke 4:18-19). He did this first by becoming incarnate, one of us. He did not commute from heaven in a fiery chariot. ‘The Word became flesh,’ says John, ‘and made his dwelling among us’ (49).

Jesus Christ interacted directly with those whom he served. He formed close relationships with them. He became one of them in order to fully love them. 2nd Corinthians 8:9 says, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” We cannot truly love or serve someone until we understand them and can empathize with them. Furthermore, proximity builds trust with neighbors, especially if a racial divide must be crossed. How are we to serve and assist someone who does not trust us and will not let us into their home? How are we to truly love someone we do not know? How are we to fight against the discrimination and unfairness they face if we do not understand their hardships? When working for justice it is important to be close to the injustice. Carrasco concludes with stating, “Up close, the protest-oriented injustice-fighter may discover that some matters are best settled by a personal intervention, not a new law. The personal-responsibility injustice-
fighter may discover that impersonal systems often devastate the lives of the poor, and that these systems must indeed be protested. In either case, the best way to get closer to doing justice for the poor is, quite simply, to get closer” (49).

Change your Actions

_Give beer to those who are perishing,
wine to those who are in anguish;
let them drink and forget their poverty
and remember their misery no more._

_Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,
for the rights of all who are destitute._

_Speak up and judge fairly;
defend the rights of the poor and needy._ Proverbs 31:6-9

This leads to the final element in what it takes to serve the poor. After our mindset has been adjusted, possessions given, personal interactions increased, and relationships formed, our actions will inevitably be affected. Through the love of Christ and the love we have for those we serve, we will desire to minister to and help our brothers and sisters on a personal, active level just as we see Jesus preaching the gospel to the poor and helping the needy time and time again throughout the New Testament. Matthew 11:4-5 says, “Jesus replied, ‘Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.’”

Even more prevalent and corroding than hunger, sickness and homelessness in impoverished communities is the ever-present lack of confidence and hope. In the book _Poor Support_, David Ellwood laments,

_Families and children in big-city ghettos live in a world without hope or a future._

_They live with deprivation, isolation, concentrated poverty, the departure of jobs, and discrimination. They grow up in an environment in which most people who have had enough success to afford better get out. It is a world of few traditional role models and few apparent mainstream routes to middle-class security. As a result of all this, one finds disturbing, over counterproductive, behavior_” (235).

As Christians and friends we must work to bring hope back into the ghettos. This can be done no other way than through the Word and power of God. It is the Christian’s responsibility to bring Christ’s light shining through us into the darkest depths of the world.

Another essential element, although not as sentimental, that must be brought into impoverished neighborhoods are the basic life skills that many of the poor lack. This predominantly includes the knowledge of how to understand and maintain finances. Politician John Edwards has spent much of his time studying the differences between poor and wealthy America. He states that in order to balance out the classes, “establishing thousands of bank accounts is critical [for people in poverty]” (Alter 45). Carrasco points out that instilling these types of skills may not be the most thrilling or easy task, but “there is no way around these basic life skills if a person is ever to escape poverty.” He continues, “The investment needed is long, sacrificial, and, frankly, tedious. Doing justice by walking alongside people as they develop critical life skills is not exciting. Protesting on Wall Street against globalization is exciting. Getting arrested at the courthouse is exciting. Filling the National Mall with hundreds of thousands of people is exciting. But staying proximate to people as they learn lessons they should have learned years ago? When's the last time you saw that on CNN?” (47).

Assisting individuals is our main priority as Christians, but again, this will not bring about a final solution to the issue of poverty. As discussed earlier, poverty is the result of
structural injustices. In order to break this cycle, these systems must first be broken. In Psalm chapter 72, David to God prays for the king. He knows it is the king and those in authority who are in a position to make changes in the favor of the people:

   Endow the king with your justice, O God,
   the royal son with your righteousness.
   He will judge your people in righteousness,
   your afflicted ones with justice.
   The mountains will bring prosperity to the people,
   the hills the fruit of righteousness.
   He will defend the afflicted among the people
   and save the children of the needy;
   he will crush the oppressor…
   For he will deliver the needy who cry out,
   the afflicted who have no one to help.
   He will take pity on the weak and the needy
   and save the needy from death.
   He will rescue them from oppression and violence,
   for precious is their blood in his sight (Verses 1-4, 12-14).

We must pray for those in power, that they may acknowledge and help the poor, and we must confront the structures and people who bring perpetual injustices upon the oppressed. Ellwood declares, “Surely, we do not want a set of policies for the poor that leaves the working poor insecure, that isolates people who are struggling with legitimate difficulties in the welfare system that begrudgingly offers money to people whom society then judges as unmotivated and irresponsible. We can and must develop a system that tackles the real causes of poverty and reinforces our values of autonomy, work, family, and community” (236).

I, personally, am skeptical of any welfare-based solution to the issue of poverty. Our greatest hope is to understand the real causes of poverty and address them directly. This goes beyond welfare as it stands today and any reform that it may undergo. “The goal ought to be to ensure that everyone who behaves responsibly will avoid poverty and welfare. The big challenges to be tackled involve supporting the working poor, resolving the dual role of single parents, helping people over temporary difficulties, and offering hope to all people that they can get a job if they are willing to work” (237). A discussion on what needs to be done in order to rid America and the world of poverty would require years of research and many pages of a book. Therefore, for time and ignorance’s sake, I will simply list a few of my thoughts on systems that must be fought for or against in order to uphold the rights of the poor and provide them with an escape route: Medical protection for all is a must. Make minimum wage at a rate where working families will not be poor. Adopt a system that will assure child support to single mothers. Convert welfare into a system that provides serious but short-term financial, educational, and social support for people who are experiencing a setback or a transition in life. Then, provide minimum wage jobs to people who have used up their temporary support. Although daunting, the task of structural change must be approached by Christians, for we are called to “speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves” and “defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

My Life

  Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Matthew 20:26-2
If I did not do as I preach, could I be justified in calling myself a Christian? The only title I would deserve would be “hypocrite.” Therefore, I must begin by educating myself on the causes of poverty. Then, I must find ways to have more interaction with the poor. This could include joining volunteer groups, doing social work, or although intimidating and sacrificing, move into the city and live amongst those whom I desire to serve. From there, I would form encouraging and uplifting relationships. I would minter to my neighbors and allow God to do His work through me. I would live my life as Christ did, loving and serving those that society deems as dirty, ignorant or lazy. I would fight the system for laws that would protect the poor and deliver aid. I would uphold their rights as citizens and as God’s people. It is my prayer that I might not allow my fears to hold me from fulfilling the desires of my own heart; the very desires of Christ’s heart that He has instilled in me. It is my prayer that just as Jesus commanded Simon, I might be able to truly love my Savior by feeding His sheep.

~

The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?”

He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Then, feed my sheep.” John 21:17

Houlette...continued from page 20:

One the most well known cities of the Bible is Babel. The story starts

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there….They said to each other, “Come let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and no be scattered over the face of the…earth.

(Gen. 11:1-4 NIV)

These men who built the city had the common goal as Cain; community. They too felt a loss of connection with God. They wanted to “reach the heavens” and become as high as God, wanted their names to be remembered. God saw all of this going on, and because they were trying to become as high as Him, decided to scatter their language so that they could no longer build. They came for unity, yet left in disarray and utter confusion. A city is usually seen as a place of unity and diversity, yet this example shows that without God and without humility, a city, or a nation will be scattered.

The city of Babel is usually contrasted with the event that happened on Pentecost in Acts 2. The disciples were meeting together when the Spirit of the Lord descended upon them, causing them to start speaking in languages they did not know so the diverse people in the city could understand. From these people, missionaries would be sent out to do the work of God.

Another infamous city in the Bible was Sodom. Bakke, in his book A Theology as Big as a City, presents an interesting point. It was not only because of the sexual immorality and sin going on in the city, but also because the poor had been neglected by the wealthy. A city was supposed to be a safe haven for people of all sorts; widows, the poor, children, the sinners, etc. When those in Sodom totally neglected the poor and needy, God saw that they had gone against him and destroyed the city.

In ancient Greece, politics were organized in a polis, a city-state. The polis was where everything happened, and where what happened affected everything outside of the city, much like cities today. One wonders why there is a lack of Christians in the city today, when if the city, quite like an epicenter was changed, then the change would ripple out to far greater distances than can be imagined.
As seen in these early examples, a city was seen as a place of community and refuge, a place where people came searching for hope, a place where life was busy, and diverse, a center point where people can come and unite. Many Biblical cities such as Jericho, had walls built around it for protection. It was said that many times, these walls would create physical barriers between race and class. It was to my surprise that it was the early Christians who tore these walls and restricting barriers down, it was they who encouraged groups in conflict to reconcile and unite.

As seen through the historical and biblical interpretations of the Bible, the city was seen as a place of community, safety and diversity, a place where much of the action in the Bible took place. In his book, Ray Bakke introduces a good point; so much of what individuals are taught today in their theology classes is a rural or outdated theology. With more than half of the world’s population living in the city today, how are we as Christians supposed to reach out to those living in the city if we are not taught proper biblical foundations and teachings that relate to the city? Bakke addresses a need for an urban theology. As he says, “The church must learn how to go up to the urban powerful and down to the urban powerless with equal integrity. (Bakke 14)”

Through studying various texts, and thinking deeply about how best to serve people in this world in a Christ-like manner, I have come up with my own way of applying theology to the urban setting. My take in theology, especially after this semester has definitely become closer to liberation theology than before. God has called us to be in the world but not of it. I am saddened by the fact that so many Christians literally separate themselves from the world, and never once get their hands in the mud let alone see the mud because they choose not to. God has called us to love. Christ did not come into this world to give humanity a list of cans and can’t does. He came to love. He was involved. He got his hands dirty, and reputation soiled. He fought for the rights of the widows and children. He broke the Sabbath to heal an injured man. He was in the world in all the ways he could be, but was not of it.

My “urban theology” is founded in Micah 6:8 “He has shown you, Oh man, what is good. And what the Lord requires of thee? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (NIV).” I believe that the most effective way to love and serve is to do so in humility. Another aspect I believe is necessary in all aspect of life and in our theology is love and mercy, for without love being behind our every actions, what is the point in trying to serve, it would not be real. Another aspect of theology that I find is often missing is the need for justice everywhere. Through my studies as a social work major, and through things I have seen in my life and travels, I am constantly reminded of the need for justice and long to find how I can serve in this way. The last aspect of my application to theology in the urban setting, and to life in general, is a challenge for Christians to be more “real” in the world. I believe we need to be challenge to be real to our selves and to God, and to stop living the “expected life style” set out in front of us unless we are sincere in all of our words, actions and thoughts. In some ways, all of these relate to the other. It is hard to separate them, for, “choose[ing] to stay within the security or a ritual and legal religion unsoiled by proximity to the dust and sweat of real life would be disloyalty to the core gospel of Jesus and refusal to be his church. (Rayan)”

The past two years of my life I have really struggled with those who call themselves Christian. I do not mean to be haughty and hypocritical when I say this, for I too fail, but so much of what I have seen in the Christian realm saddens me. Don’t get me wrong, I love Christ to death and long to live out my life in service to him. Yet it always discourages me when I come to the states and see SO MANY churches compared to what it is back home. In Japan, where the population of Christians is about 0.7%, you are lucky if you have a church in your city. It has broken my heart so many times to see the number of churches in the U.S., especially in the city, and on the side be learning about social injustices, yet not seeing the
majority of churches taking ANY part to help alleviate the injustices around them. It saddens me that so many of these Christians are stressing over small issues such as sending their children to a prestigious private schools and what dress they will wear to the next dance while there are children, in the neighborhood where they attend church who live not even dreaming of what we take granted so easily. I think a key part of this has to do with humility, and reality. It’s so easy to live a privileged life and not see any form of social injustice, except maybe from the comfort of one’s seat they sit in while reading the morning news.

For ministry of any kind, especially in the city where diverse groups of race and class (etc) live, humility is key. Too many times in my life I’ve seen the “white savior” approach to ministry, and from experience as a missionary kid growing up in a missionary kids’ school, know that this approach to ministry is not the most effective. All those I admired and strive to be like have shown some form of humility, sacrificed a lot to serve Christ.

Mother Teresa is a major hero in life. Her life lived out in pure humility and complete sacrifice while loving and serving the poor and the oppressed makes me long to be like her. She put into action her faith as James 2:18 says; “show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.” I love her outlook on life. She had such a reverence and love for God that so many of us today lack. It is because of this humility and realization of God’s powerful character that I believe she was able to be the person that she was. It is because she revered God so much that she saw each and every individual she served as Christ himself that she was able to serve them all with pure love and joy. I feel that there is so much that we as Christians, can learn from her example. I feel that we have forgotten to revere God as she does; that we take him for granted too often and takes him lightly as our friend and savior.

As mentioned earlier, with humility and sacrifice comes the knowledge of love in its most pure and true sense. With the idea of the “white savior” out of the picture, one is able to relate in love, mercy and respect with those who would otherwise be treated in inferior ways. Acting in humility lets you see each person you serve as Christ.

In learning how to love and humble ones self, ones eyes will gradually be opened for the need for justice, reconciliation and liberation. I believe it is our duty as Christians, as people who have been shown amazing love and forgiveness and been given hope, to show others that same love. Christ commands us many times to “love our neighbors”. In the world today where more than half the population lives in a city, and we are in some ways forced to live along side people who are different, I believe that our call is not necessarily to go out into the world, but to minister to your direct neighbor, to fight for the rights of the homeless, the orphaned, the elderly, the sick and the poor around you. It is our duty to be reconciled and then to unite in our fight for the rights of all of mankind, to fight against the construct of society that enforces the injustices, and to do ministry on the streets, to be available to help, and willing to serve.

Overall, I believe it is very important in our faith to be real. Real to our selves and real to God, and to stop living the “expected life style” set out in front of us unless we are sincere in all of our words, actions and thoughts. It’s so easy as a Christian to live out a shallow life of rights and wrongs, goods and evils. I feel like what the world needs to see is true, honest Christians who admit their struggle, who can relate to their neighbors, who don’t just blurt out the Christian answers fed to us from birth but to deeply contemplate on how we act and what we say. I guess this “realness” I’ve talked of is a combination of all the previous things I’ve discussed; humility, genuine love, and a heart for justice. I believe honesty is key in ministry and in life. Too many times we lie to ourselves and let life become a lie. I believe it was Christ’s honesty that attracted so many people to him, his willingness to talk about the downtrodden in society, his willingness to talk of his fear of death, his genuine emotion that he showed people whether it was love or anger, he was real.
In conclusion, I would like to integrate all that I have talked about and apply it to my life, what I have done, and what I will do with what I have learned and struggled with this past semester. To be honest, I feel hesitant in going back to Gordon next semester. I feel like it is what I’m called to do, but in many ways, do not want to return. I have felt so alive in the city, felt more at home than I do at Gordon. I don’t know how I can go back and to my “privileged life” in the suburbs, paying ridiculous amounts for tuition, tuition I could use to go to a cheaper school and use the rest to keep me out of debt and to give to others.

As soon as I graduate, I want to be able to dive into some sort of ministry, yet with student loans, that won’t really be possible. This semester has changed my ideas of ministry. For me, I feel that I have to dive in to ministry and be whole heartedly involved in it; that if I want to minister, I should sacrifice the privileged life I could live, and live among those I work with. I don’t not know where I will end up in life (I could end up anywhere in the world!), who I want to work with, or what I want to do. I guess in some ways, this semester has really humbled me and challenged me to give everything up to God. I do know however, that I want to strive to be all that I mentioned in this paper. I want to serve God in whatever way he calls me to do.

Through my semester in the city, I have learned a lot. I am glad I took the time to do it. I hope that as I head back to Gordon and live in Gedney, I will be able to share what I have learned. On our trip to India, a man we worked with told us about what his organization does. “My friends, we have been called, it is our mission to disturb the comfortable and to comfort the disturbed. (David Salvaraj)” I feel like this is my challenge as I go back to Gordon, to challenge and disturb those who are comfortable in their faith and in their life, and to comfort those who are in need of it. I pray that God will continue to guide me in the way he has for me to go, and that he will show me, a little at a time, what kind of plans he has in store for me.

Works Cited


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The author’s scoffing toward the imperial household echoes across translation. Like many of his senatorial peers, Tacitus was expertly accomplished in the classical art of rhetoric, a skill based in literary finesse and the manipulation of language for a more perfect argument. He chose his words carefully to convey the version of imperial Rome he saw. Instead of attributing “auctoritas” to the emperors’ usage of influence, for example, Tacitus uses the word “potentia,” a subtle choice which gives a more negative connotation to how the emperors operated (“official terminology” knew the power of language as well; it preferred “auctoritas”).¹¹ Noted frequently, too, is Tacitus’s skill in the rhetorical art of speech-writing – for speeches, were, after all, the true exemplars of rhetorical ability. Tacitus, like other ancient historians, inserted speeches into the mouths of his characters (it is generally agreed that these “historical” speeches are the historian’s own words as, for example, it is unlikely that Boudicca’s British speech to her soldiers would have sound quite so like, well, Tacitus), and he did so with flourish. “And then there was Segestes himself,” writes Tacitus to introduce the speech of a heroic German general, “a huge figure, fearlessly aware he had been a good ally. ‘This is not the first day I have been a true friend to Rome,’ he cried…”¹² The speeches attributed to major characters in the Annals, though, are “not simply for rhetorical display.” They are in fact “tools of interpretation,”¹³ written because the author wants to sway readers for (or against!) the viewpoint put in the mouth of the character. Here we begin to see why separating Tacitus the literary artist from Tacitus the historian is a dangerous exercise: Tacitus is using his “literary” rhetoric to interpret history.

The writing of history in Roman times was by nature “built upon narrative… dominated by the character and the vicissitudes of a few individuals”¹⁴ and Roman historians like Tacitus knew the importance of clear structure within narrative. Both in ancient times as well as in modern, “historians cannot help making persons and events more logical than reality,”¹⁵ and if a historian’s primary subject is narrative, he will naturally structure that narrative into the logical frameworks already established by literature. Thus the Annals emphasize patterns and use the form of classical plays or poems to tell their stories. Fitting well with Tacitus’s somber tone, the overall structure of the Annals is that of a series of tragedies, beginning in books one through three with the downfall of the admirable and heroic (but, in good “tragic hero” form, also flawed¹⁶) Germanicus.¹⁷ Tacitus uses parallelism to recall another tragic figure at the end of Germanicus’s story: “Some felt that [Germanicus’] appearance, short life, and manner of death (like its locality) recalled Alexander the Great….”¹⁸

Parallelism is a structural device which allows Tacitus to emphasize both similarities and differences. By making the narratives of Tiberius and Nero to echo one another, Tacitus emphasizes his interpretation that Tiberius was just as evil as the more obviously malevolent Nero – even though Tacitus does admit to some apparently positive aspects of the former

¹¹ Syme, Tacitus, 413
¹² Tacitus, Annals, 65
¹³ Miller, “Style and Content in Tacitus,” in Tacitus, 110
¹⁴ Syme, Tacitus, 445
¹⁵ ibid, 435
¹⁶ …notes Christopher Pelling on Tacitus’s portrayal of Germanicus: “It simply reflects a common ancient insight, whereby a hero’s faults and strengths are closely related and are often even facets of the same basic traits.” Pelling, “Tacitus and Germanicus,” in Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition, 61
¹⁷ Mellor, Tacitus, 119
¹⁸ Tacitus, Annals, 113
Conversely, Tacitus can use parallel but differing accounts of the same story to elucidate his interpretation of a character or event. This “mirror story” tactic is used in books two and three regarding the actions of Piso (in book two) and his trial (in book three). Briefly summarized, Tacitus writes “what really happened” in the narrative of book two and then writes what Tiberius says happened at the trial in book three. Tiberius’s version in book three is slightly different than “what really happened” in book two, ostensibly to make himself look better. Thus Tacitus, through this “mirror story,” portrays the emperor as a man who will lie or twist the truth for the sake of his reputation.

Further utilizing the structure of classical tragic drama, Tacitus uses the popular rumors of different groups in the first century “as a Greek chorus to comment on events.” They may be “merely” rumors, unconfirmed as facts, but they provide theatrical backdrop, highlighting interpretations which Tacitus favors. Notes Ronald Mellor, “On a few occasions, as at the death of Augustus, he uses contradictory rumors as a playwright would split the spectators into a chorus to create a dramatic dialogue.” Occasionally Tacitus will even point out his own literary devices, as when he highlights the irony that the bumbling, socially inept Claudius would one day become emperor: “The more I think about history, ancient or modern, the more ironical all human affairs seem.”

Such quips, witticisms, and personal reflections punctuate the Annals. Tacitus comments on subjects such as “a stepmother’s aversion,” the origins of law, and the cyclical nature of history. His quick wit shows him as a sharp public philosopher (“Honorable rivalry with the past is a fine thing”). Tacitus’s descriptions, though, earn him the title of poet. Domestic scenes and battles alike are colorfully painted in swift strokes of the historian’s pen, framed by artistic conclusions such as, “Finally, at night-fall, the Romans re-entered their camp. They were hungry as ever, and their wounds were worse. But they had their cure, nourishment, restorative, everything in one – victory.”

Tacitus’s Annals, then, fit a modern definition of “good literature.” But can they not still then meet the requirements of “history”? With all his literary finesse, Tacitus does seem to fit at least the most basic definition of a historian: an author, “bound by the authority of his sources,” whose work lays out events in a chronology (accurate to the best of his ability) and relates those events to one another through interpretation. Tacitean scholar Ronald Syme argues that Tacitus’s research skills were commendable even by modern standards, writing, “Cornelius Tacitus does not need to be vindicated for accuracy. He consulted a variety of sources, and he was at pains to establish the truth.” Syme makes the concession, though, that

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19 “The gap between fact and impression is greatest in the first six books of the Annals – not so much because Tiberius is less monstrous than Nero, as because Tacitus includes so much positive material on the earlier emperor’s reign.” Mellor, Tacitus, 43
21 Mellor, Tacitus, 121
22 Tacitus, Annals, 38
23 Mellor, Tacitus, 121
24 Tacitus, Annals, 127
25 ibid, 52
26 “Primitive men had no evil desires. Being blameless and innocent, his life was free of compulsions or penalties. He also needed no rewards; for he was naturally good. Likewise, where no wrong desires existed, fear imposed no prohibitions. But when men ceased to be equal, egotism replaced fellow-feeling and decency succumbed to violence...” Tacitus, Annals, 132
27 ibid, 146
28 ibid, 71
29 Warren, The Past and Its Presenters: An Introduction to Issues in Historiography, 16
“Tacitus is content with a hint, or a typical example.” Nevertheless, other scholars confirm Syme’s argument for Tacitus’s accuracy: writes Michael Grant, a translator of the *Annals*, “…the actual facts which he records are generally accurate – so accurate that they involuntarily contradict his sinister innuendoes…” The trouble about critiquing Tacitus as historical researcher lies in the fact that ancient historians felt no need of compulsively footnoting their sources. He notes his general method of citation, saying, “When the sources are unanimous, I will follow them; when they provide different versions, I will record them with attribution,” but even that “attribution” may be no more specific than the ambiguous “Some say…”

Still, it is clear that Tacitus based his facts on research of primary documentary sources as well as secondary evidence, “even if it is not often apparent in the smooth flow of his narrative.” Tacitus cites his knowledge of the events on the German frontier to “Pliny the elder, the historian of the German campaigns.” He apparently read speeches when they were recorded (instead of only “inventing” them himself), as he writes, “The speech [of Maroboduus] has survived. It emphasizes the king’s power, the ferocity of his subject peoples, Italy’s peril from so near an enemy – and the emperor’s skill in eliminating him.” He even notes that the absence of documentary evidence for something may be a clue to the interpretation of an event: “I cannot discover in histories or official journals,” he says, suggesting much “digging” through such documents, “that Germanicus’s mother Antonia (II) played a prominent part in these happenings, although the names not only of Agrippina, Drusus and Claudius, but all of his other bloodrelations are recorded.”

Like a “good” historian, too, Tacitus is well aware that the point of view of his “witnesses” – documentary or otherwise – plays an important part in their validity. He at least tries to be profitably skeptical, for, as he recognizes, “Contradictory rumors have raged among contemporaries and later generations alike. Important events are obscure. Some believe all manner of hearsay evidence; others twist truth into fiction; and both sorts of error are magnified by time.” Thus even when the evidence fits with his “thesis” or interpretation of an event, he is careful to use such phrases as “I cannot vouch for either version” when multiple accounts are plausible. Tacitus does make it clear, though, when he is particularly wary of a source. Giving multiple explanations for the execution of Semponius Gracchus, he writes, “According to another account the soldiers did not come from Rome, but were sent by the governor of Africa, Nonius Aspernas. This version, however, originated from Tiberius – who hoped (unsuccessfully) to blame the murder on the governor.” Clearly, Tacitus believes Tiberius’s account to be highly suspicious.

Tacitus does more than simply chronicle the “facts” he finds in his sources, and rightly so, for “the historian is, by definition, not only a recorder, but an interpreter.” Some of his statements advancing his theses, wrapped elegantly in rhetoric, may be “reckless and misleading,” but in general “his interpretations are usually better than those of other writers (because he had more knowledge and a keener understanding).” Other ancient historians

30 Syme, *Tacitus*, 378
31 Grant, introduction to Tacitus’s *Annals of Imperial Rome*, 20
32 Tacitus, quoted by Mellor, *The Roman Historians*, 89
33 Mellor, *The Roman Historians*, 88
34 Tacitus, *Annals*, 71
35 *ibid*, 108
36 *ibid*, 120
37 *ibid*, 128
38 *ibid*, 126
39 *ibid*, 63
40 Miller, “Style and Content in Tacitus,” in *Tacitus*, 103
41 Syme, *Tacitus*, 418
writing on the same period of Tacitus, such as Suetonius and Cassius Dio, lack Tacitus’s political insight (learned from personal experience) or diligence in research, leading them to make “queer” historical interpretations. Tacitus may state his interpretations with a furor that causes modern historians – trained to write “cold” history – to wince, but, however speculative, his interpretations follow a logical development and are in-line with his evidence. He has the right of every historian to hypothesize about actions and motive – the “Why” of history – as when he writes about Antonia’s lack of public display of grief for her son: “But it seems to me more plausible that Tiberius and the Augusta, who remained at home, kept her there too, so that the dead man’s grandmother and uncle might seem, by staying indoors, only to be following the mother’s example, and grieving no less than she.”

This is not an example of fiction-writing; it is historical interpretation.

Still, argue Tacitus’s critics, does he not interpret too imaginatively? At the very least, his writing is too loaded with emotionally-laden linguistic propaganda for a “good” historian, is it not? He doesn’t just “let the facts speak for themselves”; he inserts sinister verbage where it is not necessary, saying that Octavian “seduced” the army and “baited” the citizens. Readers are forced into Tacitus’s own thesis from the start, as he calls Tiberius’s first official action a “crime” of “assassination” rather than a simple “execution.” He puts his own words into the mouths of his speech-givers and he suggests emotions of large groups of people for which he has no evidence. How can this be called “history”?

It is in fact true that Tacitus uses his literary artistry to sway his readers to his interpretation. And though there are times when he is hesitant to impose unsupported sentiments upon his characters (for example, “The emperor’s attitude during the trial is difficult to reconstruct.”), emotional hypothesizing is still quite common. These facts, however, do not convincingly convict Tacitus as a worthless or even “bad” historian. At least two things must be noted in his defense. First and foremost, no historian, ancient or modern, can claim to use entirely “objective” language; all language which is used to advance any theory – scientific or historical – is necessarily “weighted” to sway the reader. Tacitus’s writing seems more blatantly loaded than the modern historian, but that is only because the modern historian uses a different kind of rhetoric… but it is still rhetoric, persuasive argument! This is history, though, and not timeline-writing: the historian offers his own account “based on the traces and historians’ interpretations to satisfy the very real need of his society for an explanation of the past which is grounded in reality, even if it cannot claim to communicate the absolute truth.”

Secondly, the charge against Tacitus of over-dramatizing must be dropped because of a sort of statute of limitations: it is a modern charge against an ancient historian who was writing for the standards of his own age and not ours. Though, as a “singularly oratorical task,” the ancients agreed that history must be based in reality, historical writing must also contain (their categorization of) poetry. Cicero, for example, “was convinced that a historian must not only be a scholar; he must be an artist too,” and Quintilian wrote that “history is

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42 ibid, 388
43 Tacitus, Annals, 120
44 ibid, 32
45 ibid, 34
46 …as in the case of Germanicus: Tacitus, Annals, 56-57
47 …as, for example, when he claims, “The year was peaceful abroad. But the capital was nervous, for it anticipated stern measures against the current extravagance, which extended unrestrainedly to every sort of outlay…” Tacitus, Annals, 143
48 ibid, 130
49 Warren, The Past and its Presenters, 30
50 Cicero, quoted by Woodman, introduction to The Annals, xviii
51 Grant, in the Introduction to Tacitus’s Annals, 13
very near to poetry, and may be considered in some sense as poetry in prose.\textsuperscript{52} Thus, though factual and logical, history was meant to be descriptive and, indeed, was “often intended to arouse emotion.”\textsuperscript{53} Tacitus was a historian who intended that his work be read as “history,” but as “history” defined by his contemporaries. His poetic language and interpretations make it awkward or at least cumbersome to put him into a twenty-first-century box labeled “history,” but that same poetry would have made him fit all the more easily into the first-century history box. Thus a snag in the question posed by the title of this essay: by what version of history ought Tacitus be judged? His work is unquestionably “history” by his standards; does that mean we should – or should not – call it “history” now, when the definition of the label has changed?

Keeping this snag in mind, we move to further modern critiques of Tacitus’s work. What of Tacitus’s apparent use of “common knowledge” – which may have actually originated in mere rumor – as a basis for some of his facts? Why doesn’t he defy the traditional understanding of events more often? Ronald Syme has an interesting suggestion on Tacitus’s defense:

\begin{quote}
“Not to Tacitus was it permitted, or to anybody else, to defy, confuse, and explode a century-old tradition supported by the consensus of reputable authorities. The method had not yet been invented… A Roman lacked the will for disbelief as well as the tools and the technique.”\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

Syme’s assertion may sound hollow to modern students who take for granted the ability to question and refute tradition, but it is worth considering. Unlike the Greeks, argues Syme, the Romans intrinsically linked history with tradition and patriotism; the historian’s proper use of tradition was not a fault, but a virtue. Syme’s strongest point is that modern scholars truly have no right to accuse Tacitus of “bad history” because of his reliance on tradition, for our age, “disdainful of Tacitus in its writing of Roman history, often reproduces his defects without the compensating merits: it accepts patterns, of ancient origin or recently devised, and it is unduly deferential to consecrated beliefs.”\textsuperscript{55} How can historians today fault Tacitus for the same crimes which they commit?

So what of Tacitus’s statements which are simply wrong, earning him the nickname in the early Christian era of the most lucid of liars? He states authoritatively that the Jews came from Crete – and this from a man who likely had access to public readings of Josephus! Elsewhere, his knowledge of foreign or colonial affairs and military movements seems sketchy at best. His geography, particularly in his descriptions of Germanicus’s movements across the Rhine, is certainly “vulnerable to criticism.”\textsuperscript{56} Indeed, the only subject on which Tacitus is really reliable is the affairs of the government within the city of Rome and its Imperial family!

In support of Tacitus’s “impressionistic… poetic and pictorial accounts” of military actions such as Boudicca’s rebellion, Norma P. Miller argues that the narrative still “contains the essential facts… the main outline of the action and its issue are in fact perfectly clear.”\textsuperscript{57} But the even more convincing defense for Tacitus is his intent as a historical author. His understanding of the provinces and ethnic groups within the Empire and his grasp of geography is limited and often misguided, but he never claims to be a provincial or

\textsuperscript{52} quoted by Grant, \textit{ibid}, 11 
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{ibid}, 11 
\textsuperscript{54} Syme, \textit{Tacitus}, 397 
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{ibid}, 430 
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{ibid}, 393 
\textsuperscript{57} Miller, “Style and Content in Tacitus,” in \textit{Tacitus}, 108
geographical scholar. As many have noted, Tacitus’s first two words of the *Annals* set forward his main theme: “Urbem Roman,” “The city of Rome.” The *Annals* ought not to be judged as military or broad social history because they are not. They are a political history centered on the figure(s) of the emperor and written by an insightful politician. Even today, no modern historian can claim to write a comprehensive history of every aspect of life within a certain period; such a task is too large, so specialization characterizes the best historical writings.

Is it not accepted, though, that the best histories are objective histories, neutral, devoid of moral assertions? Surely Tacitus must be convicted on the charge of subjectivity and undue moralizing. He makes value judgments based on his nationality, as when he writes that “*Our* cavalry enveloped the enemy’s flanks…” (my emphasis)\(^{58}\) The language is that of a patriot, not of a detached scholar! Interestingly, though, such statements come from a man who knows the danger of bias; he has seen the consequences of historians swayed by personal interest: “The reigns of Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, and Nero were described during their lifetimes in fictitious terms, for fear of the consequences; whereas the accounts written after their deaths were influenced by still raging animosities.”\(^{59}\) Therefore Tacitus claims that he “shall write without indignation or partisanship: in my case the customary incentives are lacking.”\(^{60}\) He is “utterly sincere.”\(^{61}\) Does he actually fulfill this goal?

Again, there are two problems with the accusation against Tacitus for being “biased.” First, even the modern historians who argue that Tacitus is not objective enough admit that no historian can be truly “objective,” he may only strive for objectivity and recognize his own biases. Additionally, the dichotomy between the ancient and the modern is again encountered. Mellor explains that, unlike scholars of the twenty-first century, “the ancients did not regard an ideological belief as a bias,” rather, “bias was a matter of personal grievance or fear or sycophancy.”\(^{62}\) Separated from one another by nearly a century, Tacitus could not have been personally offended by Tiberius, so therefore his conviction of Tiberius’s faults could not be “bias.”

A firm standpoint – or bias – grounded in “moral” conviction was expected of ancient historians. He was, above all, a “moral historian,”\(^{63}\) ultimately judging the morality of his characters’ actions, and this was a characteristic worthy of admiration rather than condemnation in his time. The vehemence of his judgments tend to surprise twenty-first-century readers, but, even today historians are called upon to make moral statements. Few students or scholars of history – devoting their lives to the subject – would agree with Woodman’s superior suggestion that “We are too sophisticated nowadays to believe that lessons can be learned from history.”\(^{64}\) The historian is asked to try to be objective, but as he deals with human actors in a world which may be tragedy or comedy, he is not meant to be neutral. “Neutrality would deny the historian the right to make judgments based upon those hypotheses [which he makes with attempted objectivity]… there are times when judgments are necessary.”\(^{65}\) Though some may object, historians now – like those in times past – are called upon to teach the lessons learned from the past – manifestly a moral endeavor.

The biggest problem with the question, “Ought we read the *Annals* as history or literature?” is one of context: are we defining “history” and “literature” according to the

58 Tacitus, *Annals*, 141
59 *ibid*, 31
60 *ibid*, 32
61 Grant, in the Introduction to Tacitus’s *Annals*, 18
62 Mellor, *Tacitus*, 36
63 *ibid*, 31
64 Woodman, in the Introduction to Tacitus’s *Annals*, xxviii
framework of the twenty-first-century (the perspective of the current readers) or in light of
the original, second-century circumstances (the perspective of the author)? The reason that
some critics have a hard time calling the Annals “history” is that it is primarily “history”
according to a two-thousand-year-old definition of the word.

Still, though, some of the basics of “good” history have survived those years, and
Tacitus can be said, at least, to hold to those: he gives his readers the most accurate facts
about his subject as he can, he attempted “objectivity” (at least in the sense that he felt no
“personal” connections to his subjects), and he made logical interpretative hypotheses about
the connections between his facts. Tacitus was not perfect, but many of his faults are only
“faults” because he has been judged by standards other than those of his contemporary
circumstances. The Annals may be read as any secondary text must be read: as one
historian’s interpretation of events from which basic facts may be gleamed once the reader
understands that historian’s personal biases and circumstances. Going back to the literary
talents of Tacitus set forth at the beginning of this paper, though, it should be noted that the
Annals may also be read as a primary text: first-hand evidence of the author’s circumstances.
From Tacitus’s work, modern historians may further understand the literary merits of
second-century Romans as well as the structure and nature of ancient history. The literature
and history of Tacitus cannot be separated, for “his style is one of his historical tools”66 and
both Tacitus the artist as well as Tacitus the ancient historian must be examined to
understand Tacitus the man.

66 Miller, “Style and Content in Tacitus,” in Tacitus, 112
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