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**"Walking the Path"  
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## Walking the Path

### HAVE YOU CHOSEN A PATH?

This picture might not at first glance look as if it is about journeying, but it portrays a parting of the ways and the necessary choice of which road to take. Spend a little time with it, see how many of its details you can piece together.



The picture, a German print from the early 15th century, evokes those moments when life is poignantly Y-shaped. Paths fork before us (or, in this case, beneath our very feet) and each choice precludes the other; for each way there is a way not taken. The everyday process of choosing one thing over another leaps into dramatic focus as the picture reminds us that there are some choices that will alter our whole trajectory. The decision to go left, or right — or even to stop and do nothing — will give the story of our life a different shape, different characters, perhaps a different ending.

Classical antiquity offered an iconic image of the two ways, depicting the hero Hercules standing in front of a path that divided into two directions. He had to choose between the path of virtue and the path of vice, and his choice for virtue became an emblem of moral education for the youth of Athens and Rome. The letter Y, visible beneath the feet of the young man in this picture, came to symbolize the moment of moral choice, especially for adolescents entering adulthood.

Scripture also admonishes us to choose the right path, and some early Christians embraced the tale of Hercules and the Y-shaped symbol of the forking paths because it seemed to resonate with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. "Enter through the narrow gate," Jesus urged. "For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). The pagan Hercules had to choose between vice and virtue; the Christian also had to choose between two paths, with an eschatological destination at stake. When the Christian stood at the crossroads, the choice was eternal life with God or eternal torment in hell. Guidance was promised for finding the right path: "I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go" (Psalm 23:3 NRSV).

Unlike many figures in such pictures, the young man here does not stand in front of a forked path pondering which way to continue his journey. We see instead a well-dressed young aristocrat in the center of the picture, straddling two tree branches shaped in the form of a Y. This tells us that we should ponder the two paths, but also suggests that this young man is failing at the task of deciding. He wants to have it both ways, to travel the one path without leaving the other. Look at his stance. He has put his left foot on the branch where the devil is standing, and his right foot on the branch where a divine messenger also has a foothold. It is not just his feet that display his indecision.

His posture is S-shaped, showing the pull from both directions. He has an ear for the contradictory lessons of both sides. His face, his right hand, and his lower body are turned toward the godly way; his upper body and his left ear are inclined toward the way of darkness. His left hand goes for the gold, and his heart is where his treasure is. The ample, long sleeve of his garment is shown in full, suggesting its use as a deep pocket into which he can drop the gold that he grabs, so that his right hand will not know what his greedy left hand is doing.

The young man does not stand alone, making up his mind in peace and quiet which path to take — from each direction there is a pull, there are voices calling to him to journey in their direction. Look at the margins of the picture. He is surrounded by three teachers (a devil, an angel, and God) who, judging by their hand gestures, each have a substantial lesson for him. Banners, or text scrolls, fill most of the empty spaces of the woodcut. Today they would be speech bubbles.

The great tempter, Satan, is on the young man's left (our right as we view the picture), promising: "You shall satisfy all the desires of your flesh and live with pleasure in the world," and urging: "If you live according to my will, I will give you this money to own." On his right the young man hears an angel admonishing him: "You shall follow my teachings; you should always turn to God." And God, who looks down from a cloud, pronounces: "[Young] man, turn to me; I will give you the kingdom of heaven."

What is going on in the young man's mind? Despite the lack of urgency in his features, he seems dimly aware of his precarious perch. A prayer scroll hangs down limply from his right hand: "I have [chosen] two paths [at odds with each other]; may God help me so that I'll be able to stand." It is dawning on him that he cannot serve God and mammon, that a house divided cannot stand. The rest of the picture, however, suggests that he might be praying the wrong prayer. A better prayer might have been: "Teach me your way, LORD, that I may rely on your faithfulness" (Psalm 86:11).

Why is the prayer wrong? Take another look at the tree beneath his feet. The viewer sees what he does not — that his need at this point is not to stand but to walk, to start journeying in a definite direction. At the bottom of the tree, death and a devil covered with the flames of hell are already busy sawing at the tree trunk. They are saying: "Day and night we are sneaking up to you; you cannot escape us." According to Matthew 3:10 (and Luke 3:9; 13:7-9), a fruitless tree will be cut down and thrown into the fire. The branch on which

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the young aristocrat's left foot stands is already almost fully cut off — the idea that he can stand there indefinitely is illusory. The other branch is still whole — God's gift of grace is still available, there is still time for repentance, for rejecting a life of greed and self-indulgence and embarking on a life of charity, of doing justice and loving one's neighbor. Soon he will have to choose one journey or the other, or the failure to choose will make the choice for him as his perch collapses.

This woodcut was made to invite 15th century German Christians to meditate on the choices they had made in their pilgrimage through life. It also functioned as a visual sermon preached to secular leaders who were in power. The picture invites the wealthy noblemen to think about their use of money and to ask themselves: "Where do I stand? Do I walk through life with grabbing hands or with giving hands? Do I live a dishonest life before the Lord?" It reminds them that there is still time to repent and change.

How might the picture speak to us as we help students frame the formative life decisions that face them during their student years? We can probably all think of students whose figurative posture resembles that of the young man in the picture, swaying between duty and desire. Perhaps we can think of students who are waiting for life to push them into some perfect calling, when perhaps they simply need to begin walking, to begin using their gifts to honor God and meet the needs of others, so that in the very walking they become pilgrims whose path God can guide. Perhaps we can think of students who want to keep the big questions indefinitely in suspension instead of genuinely seeking a path as they commit themselves to action. Our picture offers a reminder that while the work of education often involves opening up alternatives, expanding the palette of possibilities, it should also lead to points of decision, and the decisions matter profoundly.

At the same time we should beware of loading students' decisions about how to invest their energies with the weight of eternal significance. While the picture does indeed tell us that there are times when we cannot walk in two directions at once, it also locates the full seriousness of such decision-making at a level deeper than decisions about which major to pursue or whether to do extra work on the term paper to avoid a low grade in biology. There might even be times when choosing the kingdom of God means neglecting study for a season to invest time in some more pressing human need. The fundamental decision in view here is to journey towards life or towards death, to seek first

personal affluence and self-indulgence or to seek first the kingdom of God. That decision may be worked out in a host of smaller decisions, but it also relieves many of those smaller decisions of their apparent magnitude. The image can warn against mistaking twists in the path for ultimate decision points. The deepest question is neither “should I study English or Engineering?” nor “which of these majors will best help me get ahead and give me the most comfortable life?” but rather “how can I realistically commit to serving God along either of these paths?” Once the student becomes a pilgrim, then the teaching and learning task comes to include seeking those virtues that both embody the kingdom of God and enable godly learning: learning humility and patience in weighing the words of others, seeking justice and loving mercy as new learning is applied, loving one’s neighbor inside and outside the classroom.

Another caution: we should not walk away from this picture without questioning the direction of our own gaze. It is easy to look at the young man, nod sagely and gossip inwardly about the weaknesses he shares with our students. If only they would commit whole-heartedly, cast off their entanglements, and set their heart on Christian learning. But the picture is not inviting us to judge, but to examine ourselves. At times the ideals that we project onto our students allow us to conveniently overlook our own vacillations and shortcuts in our eagerness that the young should step up and show their commitment. Where are the tensions in our own posture and our perch as we stand before students, offering ourselves as pilgrim-guides? At what points do our own desires for ease, for status, for control, for being listened to, for winning arguments, for being thought of as someone of consequence who knows things, or for career building, come into tension with the kingdom of God, love of neighbor, and service to our students?

#### HARBORS AND HAZARDS

For either God or nature or necessity or our own will or some or all of these in combination have cast us forth into this world as though upon a stormy sea, apparently without purpose or plan . . . And so, how many would know the direction in which they should struggle or the way they should return if a storm, which the foolish regard as unfavorable, did not at times force them unwilling and struggling against it into that land of their great desire while they were wandering in ignorance?

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Everyone journeys, says Augustine, as he embarks on a treatise about the happy life and how to find it. But not everyone journeys in the same manner, and not everyone makes it home. We are “cast . . . forth into this world as though upon a stormy sea, apparently without purpose or plan.” We find ourselves in the world, already on the ship with no clear memory of boarding. We are in motion, the days passing and carrying us further into the future whether we like it or not. We hurtle headlong and then are becalmed, apparently going nowhere. We are regularly perplexed as to the direction we should take. Should we drift with the tides, fly before the wind, or doggedly tack into the face of the gale? Is there some particular shore towards which we should be struggling? Storms come, waves crash. Are they disasters sent to overwhelm us or gracious interventions designed to force us into what will eventually turn out to have been a better course? In the midst of the ocean it’s easy to lose one’s bearings.

We are lost at sea, says Augustine, but we need to regain a fair land that we have lost, the land of “the happy life.” In this land, faith, hope, and love join us to God, and the possession of true wisdom blesses us with perfect peace. God is our origin and ought to be our destination; in the time stretched between the two we find ourselves journeying, seeking, cast upon the sea.

Augustine glimpses three sorts of travelers among the spray. The first type only journeys a short distance from shore, and it requires only a little labor with the oars for these travelers to flee back into the harbor when the waves get rough. Not everyone has to reach the truth through momentous crisis — it’s possible to be more teachable from the start, to stay at least within sight of the lighthouse. These first sailors, once they have reached the harbor, put their efforts into raising beacons “for whomever of their fellow citizens they can,” in the hope that they will be able to help others to find their way. Learners become teachers, pilgrims become guides. Here Augustine evokes a string of biblical texts that speak of Israel as a light to the gentiles, of the wise as shining like stars, and of the church as the light of the world that is to be placed in full view (Isaiah 42:6-7; Daniel 12:3; Matthew 5:14-15). These travelers demonstrate an authentic journey to the truth as they reach out to teach others.

A second group of sailors is not so easily drawn home. They voyage forth, perhaps boldly, perhaps thoughtlessly, striking their own course. They believe that they can navigate the waters by their own lights. They forget that they have a homeland and a destination, thinking that their journey justifies itself. Some travel so far that they forget the shore from which they departed.

Perhaps they lounge lazily below decks, heedless of where the tides carry them. Or perhaps they rejoice in the thrill of the flapping sails that carry them further into the trackless distance. If a wind speeds their progress and appears to blow in an appealing direction, they welcome its push, and “enter the depths of misery elated and rejoicing.” If the wind dies, and life is serene and stable, then “the deceitful calm of pleasure and honors seduces them.” What should we wish for such sailors? Interruption, says Augustine. Perhaps the mild kind, some moderate stress or failure or weariness that pushes them beyond empty ambitions. Turning from their vanities, they may find themselves taking up the books of the wise, not necessarily with determined purpose, but perhaps simply “as if they had nothing else to do.” Even so, they find themselves directed back on course toward truth. For many, this might prove enough. Should more drastic change be needed, however, then we should hope that they might meet “a violent storm and hostile wind which might lead them amid tears and groans to certain and solid joy.” Either way, it is God’s rule over the wind and the waves (and the books and the words), not their own sense of direction or skill at navigating, that pushes them home. Lost at sea, they “wake up” through trials and providential redirections and find themselves in the harbor.

Members of the third group fall between these extremes. They too might have ventured out to sea, tossed by the waves and blown too far to have a clear sight of home. Conscience, however, speaks more insistently; they are more aware that there is a harbor that they must seek, and when signs appear showing the direction in which it lies they set sail. Their journey might be swift and straight, though more often they wander along a circuitous route. Cloudy skies give them few chances to take their bearings. They are distracted by “signs” that turn out to be nothing more than shooting stars. These sailors too might need a storm along the way to push them home. Nevertheless, they are seeking, looking out for the harbor lights.

As Augustine surveys his fellow sailors, ships and books get mixed together. The journey that he has in mind is towards the wisdom that leads to the happy life, and so study and inquiry are pertinent ways of moving the oars. The three kinds of travelers are three kinds of learners — can we discern ourselves and our students in their company? Perhaps we know learners like the first sailors who have never ventured far from faith, who need only a few oar strokes to correct their course, who have a comfortable sense of the truth that grasps



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them. Has this left them complacent, or have they realized that their safety is not to be squandered on themselves? Have they heard the call to teach others?

Learners of the second kind sail aimlessly on through their studies with little apparent sense of why they are learning or where they are headed, focused on pleasure and satisfied with a passing grade and the next experience. Do they need interruption more than they need continued progress? We should be cautious here: Augustine says that these sailors might need God to provide a storm that shatters their complacency, not that we should set out to engineer one. Augustine's personal storm involved pain in his lungs that forced him to give up teaching. Perhaps a better question, then, concerns how we view setbacks and struggles, and how we share with students the realization that they can be markers of hope.

Perhaps many of us are in the third group, knowing that we want wisdom, but finding ourselves easily distracted, easily discouraged, easily disoriented. We know about the *telos*; we can name the kingdom of God as our goal. But the path leading there does not seem straight, we are not always sure which signs to rely on, and we are too prone to follow detours. How do we help one another to grow in discernment and sustain perseverance?

For all these who are brought in any fashion to the land of the happy life there is one huge mountain set in front of the harbor itself. This mountain also creates difficulties for those entering and should be much feared and carefully avoided . . .

There's another complication, Augustine notes. Even with the harbor in sight, it turns out that planted in the ocean before it is a "huge mountain," a navigational hazard greatly to be feared. It shines out like a beacon, "wrapped in deceitful light." Those arriving from sea and even those already in the harbor are tempted to mistake it for the destination and land on its flank in hope of fulfillment there. For those who succumb to the temptation, it "delights them with its height, from which they can look down on the rest." Like those who raised beacons on the shore, these mountaineers begin to teach others from their mountain perch, pointing to the harbor (which is after all close by), offering detailed advice on how to avoid dangerous submerged rocks. They want everyone to know how much work and skill it took to gain their lofty spot, and make sure that newcomers don't think they can easily climb up too and join them on the mountain. Convinced of

their own superiority, “puffed up with pride,” they are happy to point those they regard as simpler than themselves toward the truth. The image of teaching from the mountainside hints at usurpation of divine authority, offering our advice as if it carried divine weight. The mountain represents “the proud pursuit of empty glory that has nothing full and solid within.” It gives the illusion of having arrived somewhere, but “once it has wrapped them in darkness it snatches away from them the shining home which they had scarcely glimpsed.”

There are, then, at least two kinds of teachers in Augustine’s allegory. Some seek wisdom for themselves, aware of their continuing need. They set up beacons for others when they have given themselves to the truth and are living thankfully in it. They can beckon towards the happy life because they can say with honesty that they are living at least on its shores; they are guides who themselves walk the pilgrim trail, not bystanders dispensing tips. They have arrived not just at expertise, but at wisdom.

Others seek the status and superiority that comes with being known by others as one who knows things. They enjoy letting others see how hard it is to achieve what they have achieved, and teach with an implied condescension. They chuckle at their students’ stupidity as they gossip with colleagues. Teaching brings status, the chance to stride onto the podium and tell others what to do, to expose others’ weaknesses while concealing one’s own. These teachers like to give directions, to map hazards and warn the world, but have themselves ceased to journey before reaching the destination. They talk about the truth, but have not yet humbled themselves in living it.

*Do we find ourselves in either of these pictures? Might they call us back to our oars?*

Augustine’s tale of the ocean is filled with the uncertainties of the journey. We glimpse the light, and sometimes the light is a beacon. But sometimes it is just a shooting star, or a reflection from a dangerous rock to be avoided. For stretches of time we labor under cloudy skies, pressing on without clear direction. We meet fair winds and violent storms that threaten to capsize us. Sometimes, from a later vantage point, we realize that the fair winds were our enemies and the storms our friends. We teach and learn. Sometimes those who point to the destination are not themselves headed there, but teaching only words. Some of those sailing aimlessly will find that by grace they have arrived. There is a mystery at the heart of learning.

Each must journey, but we need not journey in isolation. Augustine’s picture is not of lone journeys and arrivals, but of a variety of travelers helping

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and needing help, giving and receiving light, pursuing by whatever means we can find ways of teaching and learning that might lead all of us to the happy life.

### SETTING OUT AND LOOKING OUT

In the last two sections we have pondered a young man perched at the parting of the ways and Augustine's account of a sea voyage toward happiness. Pause a moment to see them side by side. In both cases, the metaphor of journeying engages the whole person. All significant learning has the potential to alter our life's trajectory and destinations; it changes who we are. Journeying requires engagement and exertion, it involves moral decisions, bodily actions as well as cognitive judgment. It places weight both on God's actions and our own. This immersive quality of journeying means that it is never merely a cognitive act. Reading a map can be a mostly cognitive affair, but making a journey requires both knowledge and know-how, both cognition and commitment.

Journeying also requires the willingness to walk down some roads rather than others, accepting that not all possibilities can be left open, that there is a harbor that calls. For both the precarious youth and the Augustinian sailor journeying is not an end in itself, as if the mere fact of being in motion were inherently virtuous. As for Bunyan's pilgrim, the destination matters, and the dangers along the way are dangerous precisely because they threaten the attainment of the destination. In terms of how we get there, however, the two images tell different sides of the story.

The woodcut focuses on the drama of decision. Procrastination leads to destruction, and choices have consequences. The forking path reminds us that there comes a time when we must commit. It can, however, also be a destructive and incomplete image, leaving us with a fearful awareness of our own finitude and fickleness, but with less sense of divine grace. Augustine broadens the picture, showing a variety of ways, some more circuitous than others, of reaching the harbor. Rather than admonishing at the crossroads, God is abroad upon the seas before we begin our journey. God, the running-out-to-meet-him Father, travels alongside disciples on the road to Emmaus and sends Philip to walk alongside the Ethiopian's chariot. Awareness of divine agency and involvement in our journeying is why Christians pray "Guide Me, O Thou Great Redeemer" and "Lead Us Not Into Temptation," joyfully resisting a deist worldview with every word

they sing. As another author puts it, our challenge is not just “choosing the correct fork, but learning to walk with the Savior who can use any road to bring us home,” trusting that “our lives will end up in the right place not because of our good choices, but because of the choice God made to love us. . . God owns all the roads.” And all the tides, winds, and weather systems, and even the books of the wise. Unlike roads, oceans carry ships along, sometimes even against the best efforts of the sailors. Alongside the drama of choosing, where our own efforts and decisions are in view, Augustine offers the image of being buoyed up by the waters and assisted by the winds, where God’s grace sustains and directs the journey.

Augustine imagines the journey not from the perspective of our own determined sallying forth, but in terms of being pulled toward a destination, drawn towards the luminous glory of God. Rather than seeing the forks in the road as a strictly present-tense exercise in weighing costs and benefits, we can begin to see them as exercises in eschatological yearning. Will we allow ourselves to be pulled by a vision of God’s glory? Are we open to being drawn along by a vision of our gifts being purified for kingdom service? Can “I have decided to be a lawyer” become not just “I think God is calling me to be a lawyer,” but “I feel compelled by a vision of God’s justice to study law”? Can “Becoming a teacher seems a sensible plan” become “I sense God’s passion for the beauty of truth and the thriving of children, and it gives me a sense that I need to teach”?

Perhaps both teachers and students need reminders of both perspectives. Decision time challenges our sloth and apathy; the call to trust and hope counters over-anxiety. While we journey, learning along the way, we do so as responsible agents and as grateful recipients of divine grace. Journeying calls us to act, to decide, to commit, to risk, to persevere. Yet even the steps we take, the decisions we make, are themselves made possible by, shaped by God’s agency. To take a journey, we must “set out,” whether by foot or car or plane. But we must also “look out,” to discern God at work. A faithful journey asks what God may be accomplishing today and seeks signs of God already traveling the road. We journey not in despair, but in hope; not in drudgery, but in wonder.

#### DRIVER EDUCATION

Sometimes teaching and learning are quite literally concerned with how we move through the world. Here too our normative images of what it is to jour-

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ney faithfully challenge us to focus on the kind of imagination fostered among our students.

Matt Phelps and Scott Waalkes, two professors at Malone University, designed a capstone course to help students reflect on how they move through the world, both literally and morally. Their course addressed the desires and choices that inform car culture, manifested in North America's love of cars, road trips, and road movies, and looked for ways to imagine hopeful alternatives.

Rather than beginning with critique, the course fostered exploration. It began with an appreciative look at the things we love about cars, and an invitation to students to share their own car stories. The class went on to examine car artifacts, listen to car-themed songs, and watch advertisements and movies alongside reading about the role of the automobile in modern society. Students were led to gradually acknowledge how car culture had shaped their imaginations, habits, and practices, as they confessed on mid-term papers. One student wrote:

We live in a culture that mandates that no second be wasted even while we are driving. . . . I myself totaled my first vehicle because of the cell-phone I was looking at instead of the road.

Another student wrote:

The realization that we are on the roadways with other living, breathing creations of God's own image instead of simply riding besides lifeless metal machines should be a central way of thinking for Christian drivers. It is very possible to be too focused on productivity and efficiency.

The link between cars and the pace of life was explicit in another student's reflection:

The car has . . . provided a means by which haste and hyper-efficiency have driven many people into extremes of task accomplishment that have left them void of the slower-paced relational life that I still see in the Scriptures and my Amish neighbors today.

As the course unfolded, it explored the various ramifications of the role

played by cars in our culture for an array of topics that included suburbanization, church membership, road rage, and environmental sustainability. The group reflected on the impact of car ownership on our sense of self, our relationship to material possessions, our relationships with those around us, and our commitment to the wellbeing of others, including those with whom we share the roads. In what ways does our decision to travel fast, efficiently, and often alone erode our relationships with our neighbors? How far does the status of our ride infiltrate our sense of our own worth and the worth of others? To what degree are we willing to put others at risk for the sake of our own convenience, whether in terms of getting there quicker or multitasking while driving?

As the class journeyed together through the course, the focus on how we journey through the world led to discoveries. A student discovered that staying within the speed limit fostered a greater sense of calm and a more peaceable attitude towards other drivers. Others considered ways of achieving lifestyles that minimized car use. Some time after the course, a student sent the following report.

I just want you to know that it has now been two full months since I gave up my car and decided to bike instead. . . . I use family vehicles every once in a while but I have been biking pretty religiously and it is liberating. One of my favorite things about it is that on my trips, mostly to and from work, I am many times more likely to stop and talk to my neighbors than if I am driving. I passed an old friend one day, who was also biking, and she invited me to have breakfast with her family. I'll see my neighbor . . . sitting in his lawn playing his banjo and I'll just swing in for a bit. There are more instances but there's something about the open air and reduced speed that promotes friendliness and makes it harder to seclude yourself. I seem to always have a little time to stop in. (I stopped to say hello to one of my elderly neighbors as I saw her watering her flowers and then she in turn invited me to a dinner locals were having with a group of Swiss travelers who were in the area. I learned a bunch about my heritage and now I have people in Switzerland who want me to come see them!)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a focus on literal movement through physical and social space became intertwined with meditation on the journey of learning and living. As one student put it, reflecting on the possibility of reducing car use, "I see the need for change and would consider doing this if I feel God calling me to follow this path."

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At another level, the journey together towards insight offered by Phelps and Waalkes invites reflection on the rhythms of the educational journey. When are our courses like quick trips to the mall, just far enough above the speed limit to cover maximum terrain at speed while sustaining the hope of averting arrest or disaster, each participant focused on his or her own bubble, those around us mostly felt as potential obstacles to getting everything done? When are they like slower journeys through a neighborhood, with time taken to pause for conversation, listen to stories, make new connections? At what point does the exhilaration of forward progress turn into the blur of landmarks barely noticed? Or does the patience of slow pedaling turn into dawdling and losing sight of the destination? Is our course conducted on foot, on a bicycle, or in a car, and what concerns might each bring into focus in terms of how we journey together?

### WALKING IN CIRCLES

Each spring when I teach Senior Seminar, I find that students are horrified to discover that they have become increasingly more ignorant each semester they have spent in college. We draw this diagram together. As first-year students, they knew this much:



As sophomores this much:



As juniors this much:



As seniors this much:



They nod their heads in agreement. Then realization dawns. Alas, as their knowledge has increased, so also has the circumference of their ignorance. Every article they have read comes with a list of references to other articles not yet read, and so draws a larger map of what they don't yet know. Each trip to the bookstore uncovers more novels from authors to whom they've just been introduced. Every new field they tackle opens up new vistas beyond, all of which demand to be known. And what they are learning this last semester in college makes them feel less certain of the things they thought they once knew. Some of them feel as if they are moving in circles: coming back to matters once mastered and now forgotten and in need of re-learning, being puzzled again by the same questions, confronting again ideas that now seem both pressing and tedious. As they quickly acknowledge, the remedies for such ignorance can be lethal: bluffing, defending a few positions more loudly, seeking to master an increasingly small body of knowledge, despair, lethargy . . . the list goes on.

Learning to be a pilgrim student can bring some ease to their bodies and minds. Because a pilgrim is always in progress; a pilgrim is never alone. When an insect emerges from its chrysalis, it is called an *imago* — a perfect insect, fully formed, having completed all its metamorphoses. But a pilgrim is not an insect: a pilgrim never completes her metamorphoses. Her *imago* is to be continually formed into the image of Christ. To be a pilgrim is to be still on the way, in the middle of things. As a wise teacher once said, "We don't move toward heaven in one gigantic, decisive step after another. We move in small, repetitive, cumulative patterns — learning to make a habit of what we do well, and repenting, again and again, what we do badly." Pilgrimage, in other words, is a life lesson in revision. And to their great comfort, pilgrims make these small, repetitive patterns in the company of others. My circumference of ignorance bumps up against your circle of knowledge, and in this way we both grow and change and move forward.

To be a pilgrim is not just to move forward in a straight line, but also to enter into a circular motion of journeying forth and returning home, perhaps multiple times. This circularity may sometimes feel tedious, as if we were failing to make progress, yet the deeper movement is a spiral, an old reality caught up and transformed into a new reality. In a culture deeply permeated with ideals of linear progress yet paradoxically enchanted with its ability to multi-task and randomly surf in multiple directions, it is well to remember the contrasting circular rhythm of pilgrim journeying. The pilgrim leaves for Jerusalem each year, worships again at the festival, and returns to the village, enacting a cycle



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that bodily recalls God's continued faithfulness. The prodigal son sets off for a distant country, but in the very failure of his trip and his ignominious return home he finds that neither he nor his home are the same as when he left, that new possibilities for reconciliation are waiting in the village he abandoned with such disdain. Flight becomes pilgrimage; self-confidence is turned into self-knowledge. The disciples travel with Jesus for three years, assured that they are moving up the ladder of their ambitions, only to be scattered at his death. Yet when Jesus calls them back together after his resurrection, they start again, they resume their pilgrimage with the Comforter that Jesus sends.

Pilgrimages are not just about a distant destination; they are also about the hope of returning, of finding one's relationship to home transformed, of finding one's self renewed by the journey, of seeing the familiar with a fresh perspective. We set out for a dimly glimpsed site and in the end, as T. S. Eliot put it, "arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time." My students find this comforting as they recognize, with new urgency, that graduation will inevitably push them a bit more quickly along their pilgrim paths. Their ignorance seems a little less lethal, the fellowship of companions a bit more real, the resolve to persevere a task they are ready to undertake, the promise of home a sure and steady light.

## Walking the Path

### Have You Chosen a Path?

"a German print from the early 15th century" For the source of the image see "Der Jüngling auf dem Lebensbaume," M. Haberditzl, *Die Einblattdrucke des 15. Jahrhunderts*. Bd. 1 Die Holzschnitte, Wien 1920. S. 34. Nr. 168, Tafel CVIII. Copyright: Kolorierter Einblattholzschnitt "Der Jüngling auf dem Lebensbaum" ca 1460. Albertina, Vienna, Inv. DG1930/204. Reproduced by permission. See also Reindert Falkenburg and Joachim Patinir, *Landscape as Image of the Pilgrimage of Life* (Amsterdam: John Benjamin, 1988), p. 77 and Wolfgang Harms, *Homo Viator in Bivio: Studien zur Bildlichkeit des Weges* (München: Fink 1970), p. 68.

"some early Christians embraced the tale" For the role of the Y and its use in art and literature from antiquity to early Christianity up to the 19th century, see Harms, *Homo Viator in Bivio*. Harms gives many examples of similar images in which the person represented is more conventionally standing before two paths. By equating the Y with a tree, artists could merge both the images of the narrow and the wide path and the tree and its fruit from Matthew 11–20. For

Hercules and the two paths, see Erwin Panofsky, *Hercules am Scheidewege und andere antike Bildstoffe in der neueren Kunst* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1997), p. 63. The motif appears elsewhere; compare for instance: "It is said that the way of man's life resembles the letter Y because every man, when he reaches the threshold of manhood and therewith the place where the way forks, hesitates and ponders which direction it were best to take." Lactantius VI, 3 (ca 240 – ca 320), cited in Brigitte Scheer-Schäzler, "Heracles and Bunyan's Pilgrim," *Comparative Literature* 23, no. 3 (1971): 240–54 (p. 242). In the 4–5th century AD Prudentius describes the way of virtue as rocky and steep but leading into the golden mountains; the path of vice begins broad through green and pleasant meadows but ends in morass. (Scheer-Schäzler, "Heracles," fn. 16).

"inclined toward the way of darkness" The branch on the left is labeled "day" (tag), and the opposing branch is labeled "night" (nacht).

"You shall satisfy all the desires . . . money to own." The text on the picture reads (in archaic German), "Du salt deines leibes gelusten han/und mit der werlt in freuden stan/ wiltu nach meyme wiln leben/ so wil ich dir diz gelt czu eygen geben."

"You shall follow my teachings; you should always turn to God." "Du salt folgen meyner lere/ allezeit solt dich czu gote keren."

"[Young] man, turn to me; I will give you the kingdom of heaven." "Mensche kere dich czu mir/ das hymmelreich daz gebe ich dir."

"I have [chosen] two paths [at odds with each other]; may God help me so that I'll be able to stand." "Ich habe zweyer hände wege/hilf got das ich des bestehn phlege."

"Day and night we are sneaking up to you; you cannot escape us." "Wir tag und nacht dich ersleichen/des kanstu uns nicht entweichen."

### **Harbors and Hazards**

"For either God or nature or necessity" The various words from Augustine are cited from Augustine of Hippo, *Trilogy on Faith and Happiness*, trans. Roland J. Teske, SJ, (New York: New City Press, 2010), pp. 23-26. "The Happy Life" is one of Augustine's early works. The passage drawn upon here works with Neoplatonic themes of the soul's return to itself, but the imagery remains evocative

apart from the specific philosophical categories with which it is articulated. We are not concerned here with the particular theories of the soul and of memory that preoccupy Augustine.

### **Setting Out and Looking Out**

"choosing the correct fork . . . God owns all the roads." These words are quoted from Craig Barnes, *Searching for Home: Spirituality of Restless People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003), p. 121, 127.

### **Driver Education**

"Matt and Scott" The example is described at greater length in Matt Phelps and Scott Waalkes, "Educating Desire and Imagination in a 'Faith in the World' Seminar," *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* 16, no. 2 (2012): 195-214. The quotations from students in this section are all drawn from that article.

### **Walking in Circles**

"I" in this section is Susan Felch.

"arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time." These words are from T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding" V, *Four Quartets* (New York: Mariner Books, 1968).