

The Windownesian

Chapter 9

“G” “O” “D”

Year Unknown: God created the world

30 A.D.: Jesus started preaching

33 A.D.: The first churches were founded

2008, in an Intensive Care Unit of a hospital:

Frankly I can't remember anything, I was just three years old in 2008. This was the year I was sent into hospital for acute pneumonia. Strange, I don't remember pain. What do I recall? I was in the air floating, at least I didn't feel myself standing on the floor. And I saw the whole room, from the ceiling. That child lying in the bed was me? A tube linked with some rhymetically loud machine was inserted into the neck and more tubes plucked throughout the body. A tall professional looking uncle was standing by my bed, holding a board, talking to mum and dad with a stern face. What did he mean by “expect the worst”? Mother buried her head into father's chest and wept. Father seemed angry, spitting questions rapidly. Some aunties and uncles who have held me were next to my bed too, some silently looking at me, some were moving their lips, one or two were meddling with some sort of shining thin boxes. And there was my grandmother. She kneeled right next to me on a tall cushion, holding my right hand with both of hers, and she was praying for me to live. According to mother, that was the only time she prayed. I lifted my right hand to take a look, but couldn't feel anything. Suddenly I felt something on my shoulder, something warm and bright. She...She? He? She wore a radiating white dress and had long hair alright. She herself is radiating light. I looked up, there were wings, many wings, two stretched out like birds about to fly, two covering the face, and two covering the body. I stared at her for I forgot how long. Suddenly I heard many voices, men and women, pleaing, shouting, screaming lines such as, “Lord, please, let little Zhuang Man live” “Save Jonathan”. I looked down. Then I turned to that shining being, and pointed at my family and said “mama?” That white figure turned and descended away. Next thing I knew, I was in my hospital bed.

Late November, 2027, Inside a room in Yuen Long Baptist Church:

“Genesis chapter 28 verse 10 to 22 is the story of Jacob,” Tim is leading the bible study for our group's fellowship weekly assembly, “and it is my top 3 most favourite Bible stories. Haven't decided on the other two yet. Anyways. Since Bronze has introduced the

OIA method last time, how about we use this as our structure. O stands for Observation, I is Interpretation and A is Application. Basically, we need to answer what happened, why do things act out like that or what can not-so straightforward things mean, and what does it have to do with us. I want to dish out the message first. That is, a third generation believer experiences God. Now, let's have a good read."

After we read the verses one by one, Tim lays out his notes. "Alright. You may observe, Jacob meets God while escaping from his brother and goes into 'a certain place'. That's it. This is the whole event. But it actually means a lot. First, let's talk about Jacob. Just in case you still don't know him yet, he is the ancestor of the Israel people, and one of the greatest characters in The Bible. This is a story from when he was much younger. He is the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham. Like what God addresses himself as here, verse 13 'the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac'. These two certainly have experienced a lot with God, that God is their God. The Bible doesn't specify, but Jacob sure did hear a lot from his previous generations. Those such as Abraham, who lived long enough to tell Jacob stories such as "God led me out of my home Harran and promised me descendants". And his father Isaac possibly telling him, "your grandfather tied me and almost killed me until we found a goat." These two certainly have experienced a lot with God, that God is their God. But does the same apply to Jacob? Let's look at verse 13 again, what is missing?"

"Oh, the line of 'I am your God.'" Sally answers.

"Yes," Tim replies and continues, "from this line alone we can see who is Jacob. He knows God, his fathers' God. However he hasn't seen God or experienced God. At least at this point, God is not his God, yet. To him, God lives, in stories. Now let's look at the dream he has. Hey Dave, can you read it for us?"

"He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord"

"Thanks David. Now this might need more interpretation. Yes, Jacob sees God and he stands above the staircase. But the image does represent something. Any guesses?"

"Something to do with the staircase?" Meander asks.

"Yes, the staircase! Keep guessing!"

"It links the Earth and Heaven?" Zedekiah says.

"The one in the Tom the cat meme" I say and laugh.

“Well, hahahahaha, perhaps. Not only does he see God, he sees the staircase, the connection between Earth and Heaven. And not just merely a staircase, there are angels walking up and down on it, and God is standing on the top. That is the image. But guess what is the significance of this. Umm...a bit hard. Athena?”

“Oh finally you call me for help. Hmm...That God doesn’t only exist, he and his angels are constantly working. Wow, that actually means a lot.”

“Indeed it is. Remember, Jocab is the descendant of believers, God exists only in stories. No matter how great God is, he is just his fathers’ God. But now God is actually active. His agents are working, and he is standing on top. Think otherwise, why isn’t he sitting like gods should have been? My guess is, it exemplifies that God is overlooking the world too. When I am at work or concentrating on things, I elect to stand too. And that means a lot to Jacob, that God exists beyond tales, real and active. God then promises him three things. Pretty straightforward, spreading descendants, land, and staying with him. But which one do you think is the most important.”

“I would say land,” says Sally, “pretty important if he is going to be blessed with a lot of offspring.”

“I think it is descendants,” I suggest, “he is escaping his brother and doesn’t know if he could live on. That ensures that he can live long.”

“I would say be with him and watch over him wherever he goes,” our muted mentor Bronze expresses, “while the previous two are the same with what God promises Abraham, this is really personal to him and really what he needs right at the moment.”

“I say all correct,” says Tim, “and having seen God and get promises from him, Jacob also has his reaction. That is, I’ll say it myself. First he recognizes that the Lord is in this place, next he sets up the stones to mark this, then he makes vows too. But from his vows, do you think he really trusts in God now?”

“I know why you ask this way,” says David, “it seems to me that now he has dreamt of God, he wants more prove, that God is his God if he gets food and gets home safely. Kinda low tier faith for me.”

“What do you expect, he is Jacob, and the name means ‘grab’. Of course he is going to grab whatever he needs,” says Athena. “Nonetheless, I think it is reasonable that he needs to ensure this is not only a dream, but to ensure God will be with him all the way.”

“Agree, that’s exactly my notes,” Tim responds. “One more thing to note is the pile of stones. I know Jacob uses them as pillows. But excuse me, who uses stones as pillows anyway. I have read a book suggesting that the pile of stone is his defence, is his most

accessible weapon just in case wild animals or people attack him. But after the dream his reliance shifts from that pile of stones to God, and him pouring oil on it symbolises that God is his best subject to rely on. And most importantly for him, as a third generation believer, God no longer stays in stories, but is real and active. The next time when God reveals himself to Jacob's son Joseph, he addresses himself as Jacob's slash Israel's God as well. God is officially Jacob's God."

"Finally I can get to the application. This is an old church now, and many Christians here are more than third generation. I myself am a second gen Christian. My mother brought me church, before I was born. Before I am capable of remembering, I am Christian. I listen to Bible stories too much if I put enough effort I might be able to recite The Bible. Yet God only exists in books. Jacob's story reminds us that, we need to experience God, so that God doesn't just appear in the pages, but also real and active. Now the sharing part. Is God real and active in your life? If yes, why are you sure. And if no, what do you need to see so that God is real and active?"

"How about I share my own story to swiftly end this bible study section," Tim continues, "it's about time anyway, I want dinner. I am a second generation Christian, going to church and hearing Bible stories before I could remember. Yet God seems to only stay in The Bible, or in the church. It was not until my father died when I was eight. Since then mother has taken care of me and my brother. I spent most of my childhood sitting in self-study rooms waiting for mum to pick us up. It was since then I had a strong feeling that I need a strong reliance. At Summer camp when I was promoted from form 1 to form 2, the message was 'God is our reliance'. That was a difficult time, I was stressed and bullied at school. That night I made a really serious prayer. I prayed, 'God, I want to feel happy and relieved. I know I am a sinner and don't deserve it, but God you are the saviour and the guidance of all lives. I invite you, to be the God of my life, and have full control behind all of my decisions. Whenever I go, whatever I will be facing, you are my God.' Did things get better after that? Well, I changed schools and learning still sucks. But slowly I learnt to enjoy things, I love what I was doing. I have genuine friends whom I keep in contact with. [Elbow punches David. David: "you did become more cheerful than the time you first came.] After graduating from secondary school I applied for universities. My expectation was high, yet I didn't get what I wanted. In those days I pray to God, with anger and tears. But soon I again learned to enjoy what I have and it was fun. All that, I experience God and acknowledge that he is God, and he is real and living. Now I am hungry, how about I make a prayer, and we go to eat."

I have been to church since I was young too, why isn't my God as real as his? I don't know. I make a prayer, a really short prayer when Tim is praying. "God, I want to experience you, I want you to be my God."

Monday noon I return to dormitory. After eating lunch, I have an hour or two before the lesson. So I decide to draft my paper first. It's an Ecology paper, the second last paper I have left. At this point of university life, I have already learnt to finish papers early so that I have time for exam revision and reviewing my work before submitting. Everything is ready, my notes, a fully charged laptop. Except...

"Hey Bobby," I turn to my roommate, "can you open the windows?"

"I have the ability to," says the windownesian who always keeps the windows shut, "but I don't have the will to do it. I am not used to this Earth's atmosphere yet and too much oxygen makes me sick. You know that."

"I know, but I am writing up a paper and really need some fresh air."

"I suggest you go to the study room."

"I can't, there are people discussing presentation. You know what, fine, I will just turn on my desktop fan to pretend I get enough air."

"I agree with that action," says Bobby.

I turn on my fan, and facing my drafted outline which is about to turn into passages, I bow down my head, cross my fingers and mumble myself, "Our father in Heaven, I am writing papers now. God if you allow, give me wisdom, give me a scholarly mind, give me concentration so that I can get through this. Amen."

When I am finished, my other roommate Alex McSheen is standing next to me.

"What are you doing," he asks.

"Praying."

"It works?"

"It works for me. You should try it sometime," I recommend my roommate.

"And who is he?" Alex asks.

"Who's who?" I have started typing my paper.

"Our father in Heaven'. I have a father who created me. But who is this father?"

"Your so-called father," Bobby says to Alex, "is Doctor Epoch who managed to merge robots into human flesh and therefore created you. Biologically he is not your father." (Alex's real identity please refer to Chapter 1 "AI-EX" and Chapter 7 "Worth the Upgrade?")

“Says the lifeform who came out of the Chug-a-lug. Is that your father too?” Alex exclaims. (Bobby’s origin please see Chapter 2 “There is One Imposter Among Us” and Chapter 3 “It Comes From Above”)

“This father in Heaven is a bit different,” I respond to them, “I can explain the concept of God to you guys later but not now, I need to at least finish the Literature Review.”

“Jonathan, what is this God to you?” Alex asks.

“Are you going to die not knowing it now?” I am reading some quotes on the screen.

“I am going to annoy you to death if you don’t talk about it,” jests the AI.

“Fine.” I let go of my computer and turn to these guys, “but first, I really want to know, what is God to you.”

“I have searched the internet, but I get nothing, or way too much I find it hard to tell,” says Alex.

“So much for having an advanced brain,” Bobby comments. (Alex has inserted a brain chip in Chapter 7.)

“Nah, just, do you have a God?” I ask McSheen.

“If God is the one who created us and has authority over us, then my father is my God. But I still can’t understand all the religion about worshipping God. I respect my father but I’ll never do this.”

“Then how about you, Tataraka. Do you have a God?” I address Bobby.

“Let me remind you of one thing, Mr Wills, I am also a technology but from another planet. In fact, I haven’t even SEEN my own planet. I just landed here for several 30 days and still not knowing most of this world. How would I have the concept of God, or whatever it is.”

“Right. But will you die?” I ask them.

“I am made out of human flesh,” says Alex, “eventually it will rot. I don’t know, I need to ask my father. Since I have inserted an electronic brain, and it keeps most of my memory and, in humans’ word, consciousness intact, theoretically I won’t die.”

“I don’t even know what is dying,” says Bobby. “But if it means your body is no longer functioning, then I am already dead. I cannot breathe too much of this world’s air you know.”

“Well, perhaps I am barking up the wrong tree to talk about death and God,” I say.

“What does that mean?” Alex and Bobby speak at the same time.

“You are not a dog, you don’t bark,” Alex laughs.

“And there are no trees here,” observes Bobby.

“It is a human expression. Well...fine. I will just tell you about my God. But since I am a Christian, I can only tell you about the Christian God. It is, quite specific to humans. In the beginning, God created the world, and the first humans known as Adam and Eve. Back in those days humans lived well in the Garden of Eden with God and death didn’t exist. God only had one order, don’t eat from the fruits from the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil or else we will die. But Adam and Eve disobeyed the order and ate the fruit. From that moment on sin alongside death entered the world and all things evil existed. Sin not only brought chaos to the world, but also separated us from God. God doesn’t want us to be separated from him, so he sent his son Jesus Christ to die for us on the cross, and his blood cleanses our sin so that we can establish a relationship with God. Through Jesus’ blood we can enter heaven, the eternal world, God’s world after we die. And that’s more or less the whole thing about God I know.”

After a bit of silence, Alex asks, “Wait, if God has control over everything, why did he let people sin?”

“If God gave orders not to eat from the tree,” asks Bobby, “why does such a tree exist in the first place?”

“If people didn’t sin, Jesus doesn’t have to die in the first place,” says Alex.

“Good questions,” I respond, “I have been guessing these too. God’s way is always higher than ours and he knows the right explanation for these. But now, lesson. See you later. I have GE course.”

In the late evening, I return to the stuffy room again. Just as I unpack my things, Alex enters the room.

“Hey, how’s your paper,” he greets me right away.

“Against all odds and you guys, I am still able to almost fulfil my progress for today.”

“So you are finished?” he asks

“Nah, I shall move on to the text analysis tonight. Better draft it a-sap”

“A-sap?” seems that the AI hasn’t learnt this phrase.

“Short for As soon as possible.”

“Can I show you something before you continue?”

“Is it academic?”

“Look at what I have just read today? ‘The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas’.”

“Stephen Weninger?”

“What?”

“I mean, is it one of Doctor Stephen Weninger’s Eng skill class reading?”

“Yes, quite difficult to read. I like the story.”

“Yea, make no sense, compels you tho,” I respond.

“It is. It talks about an utopia, nice world of Omelas where all things good happens. But behind all the wholesomeness residents of Omelas are told that there is a child locked in a miserable condition. And all that utopia, is built on the suffering of the child or else Omelas will not be what it is. Some cannot bear the message and walk away.”

“Right.”

“I think it is implying Christianity.”

“What?” That conclusion shocks me, “well is that what Weninger told you?”

“No, it is entirely my thought. Think about it Jonathan, there are a lot of good things in your religion like Heaven . But in order to get it, someone must die and die painfully just for that.”

“On the surface it looks like that,” I tell the AI, “but the whole reasoning is that mankind sin first, so that we cannot connect with God ourselves, but only through Christ’s blood alone. Things are more than what you think.”

“Is that what you are told? Have you ever considered that all are just an ideology? Like a cult.”

“A cult?”

“Yes, Christianity might just be a cult. I have been searching on that and it feels like a cult. Jonathan, humans are easily driven by culture and ideologies, versions of stories to believe in certain ideas and perform certain things.”

“Tell me more about it.”

“Christianity is an alien death cult, Jonathan.”

“Alien, you mean like Bobby?” I speak of the roommate who is not here.

“I don’t know, just aliens. You know, an alien death cult is a religious group that wants you to believe that one day the aliens will come to Earth and take the members of the cult to a better place. And in order to get there they’ll have to commit mass suicide. Now that, God is not actually Earthling, and you Christians actually believe in God and a better afterlife, you are an alien cult.”

“God is an alien alright, I’ll give you that. I mean I agree,” I reply, “we call life forms outside Earth extraterrestrial beings. And God is technically that. Well, not entirely, he had once taken the form of a human and lived among us. Also we do believe in a better place, that is called Heaven, God’s world without sin and all things are possibly just what God intended

our world to be. But we don't do mass suicide. Most religions are just used to guide people to goodness, with no intention to harm them."

"In a cult, there is an icon of worship."

"If it is anything else I say nothing. But our God created the world and us. He is the king of kings. If we don't worship him, who else do we worship?"

"You believe in that, because there is a chance that you are told this way. In a cult, there is always reading materials for their followers to read, to brainwash them with that reading material."

"You read a lot of papers as an undergrad, I don't see you viewing that as an ideology. But yes, we have a must-read book, it is called The Bible. Read it before you argue."

"Okay. But there is one thing you Christians always do that is regularly offer money to the church you go to. One thing alien death cults always do is to get followers to give their money and profit out of them."

"Yes, we do that. But it is not exactly an order, no one demands us to do it."

"But it is really likely that you started it when you were young and had been manipulated since you were young. This is what cults do, to target children. And heck, in some cases, an alien death cult would isolate them from their family to better indoctrinate them."

"That's where Christianity is different. Yes, we agree to educate kids from a young age. But we don't isolate them from the family. We encourage families to educate kids using Bible teachings both in the household and in church. In fact, many Christians believe when they are old."

"A trick that most cults use, is to overload people with compliments and make them feel special. It is emotional manipulation."

"It is called support. Yes, we may sometimes overload people with compliments and make them feel special, but that is with the intention of care and support, not manipulation. You know what, rather than arguing with me here, why don't you reserve a Saturday with me so that I can show you how things actually work?"

"No, not this week. I have papers to work on too."

"I will take that as a promise then," I tell Alex, "but later, I want to finish this paper tonight."

A few days later it is Friday night. We are visiting Athena's family for dinner. Just the four of us, Athena, Meander, Zedekiah and I, visiting one of our families as a tradition among ourselves.

"Are you sure these are enough for all seven of us?" Meander asks checking the groceries.

"Should be fine," Athena says, "Apollo returned to London and Bacchus won't eat with us."

"He left? When?" Zedekiah screams in shock.

"Some weeks ago," says Athena, "forgot to tell you. What, you miss him?"

"Nah, I just. He owes me a ticket to *A MidSummer Night's Dream*."

"What? Why watch drama anyway? Why didn't he invite me?" I ask.

"He told me last time that drama in theatre is an extraordinary experience. Jon, if you hadn't been rushing to the female toilet, he would have invited you too."

"That was me in Meander's body. Why do I even explain. I hate your watches." (his weird experience please read chapter 6 "50% of Our Population".)

"Hush, we are there," Athena rings the bell, "umm, these shoes. It can't be, he..."

A tall chubby man answers the door.

"Father!"

"Cheuk Wei," she and her father embrace Britishly, "who are your friends."

"Dad they are Jonathan, Meander, and..."

"Zedekiah right? I have read Athena's blog."

"Nice to meet you Professor Leung."

"Please, just call me Uncle Jupiter. Don't just stand there, come in. I have prepared a whole cow!"

"Oh God," Athena exclaims as she steps into the house, "is mum... Oh my God!" There are two things which may shock her, an entire ducking cow, a calf to be exact, not yet flayed, lies on the table. Another thing? Her younger brother Bacchus is drunk and placing his head and chest on the cow.

"Jup, how many times do I have to tell you, we are not young anymore," Aunt Juno is walking out of her room, "we cannot eat...oh, you are here? We have hope then. Umm...Jup, how are you going to cook it, we don't have a backyard here."

"I'll have my ways my dear." Then he goes to Bacchus and smacks him, "awake junior, help your old man lift this beast."

He moves his head, and places a hand on the cow, “Oh Fursonia, where did you get your smell. I love.” And he kisses it, and buries his head into it. Shall I also note that he is lying on the cattle’s butt.

“Uncle,” Zedekiah steps forward, “I can help.”

“I can too,” I put away the fruits I am holding, “where should this thing be?”

“The kitchen boys, the kitchen.”

One or two hours later, Uncle is serving beef on the table. We have a great discussion on many things and I even got ideas for some of my papers. That is until Bacchus emerges from his bedroom, clearly have been drinking.

“Cheuk Ho,” his father summons him, “who is she?”

“Who is who?”

“Fursonia.”

“Oh Fursonia. She is so wild, so hairy, so...”

“Oh com’on,” Athena sighs, “not this again”

“Son!” Uncle Jupiter Leung is on his feet, “You are not doing this anymore. Drunk, no. Playing on women, no. Constantly having one-night stand and walk away, no.”

“Because what, father? Because that way I cannot shine well, or because I disgrace you.”

“Cheuk Ho,” his mother says, “you are a Christian remember.”

“Oh mum I still am.”

“Then act like one,” his father growls, “and you are not.”

“Dad, if God doesn’t want us to sin, doesn’t want us to get drunk, doesn’t want us to have lust, why does he give wine? Why does he make us have sexual drive? Why does he create us this way? Answer me father!”

“You are a difficult one to handle. But son, things were all good when God created the world. It is since Adam and Eve sinned, all things bad enter the world and...”

“Bla bla bla theories. Doesn’t work on me dad. Besides, ever wonder why only humans have these kinds of ideas? Animals mate freely with whoever they want and that is how they pass on with their genes. It’s natural. And nature has no Bible.”

“You are not animals. You are human. I am saying...” Uncle Jup is about to lecture Bacchus.

“Dad, do animals have God?”

Uncle Jupiter wants to say something, but he shuts his lips tight.

“Then you should not have to care,” Bacchus grabs a bottle and walks away.

“You have turned soft, Jup,” Aunt Juno says to him.

“A few years ago I could still deal with him. But now he has gone too far. Only God may deal with him.”

We are all silent for a few moments.

“So, Jonathan Wills, you have talked about biosemiotics. Funny how it is now a prominent trend and there are actually more ways than you have just suggested.”

“Uncle, I thought you don’t want to be talking after this.”

“I cannot let that brat spoil the discussion don’t I.”

After the dinner Uncle Jupiter grabs Zedekiah and I to wash the dishes despite our complaints. Usually when we have dinner together, the girls cook and the boys do the dishes. The thing is, we have helped uncle to dissect and cook one fourth of a cow. But he insists that it is a gentleman’s way to let the ladies of the house rest and chat when other ladies visit.

“And you know why we should do this?” Uncle Jupiter asks us. “Close the door Zedekiah. In the ancient days, married women stayed in the household when their husbands worked outside. It was rare for women to visit each other. Usually when they had a reunion, it was most likely festivals but shame they were just assigned housework. Therefore, if you are going to be a responsible man, let women have their chatting and you do the housework.”

“But uncle,” Zedekiah says, “it’s not ancient time. It’s 2027 already.”

“Do you want to join outside?” Uncle points at the chattering girls in the living room.

“You’re right,” I respond, “but how do we deal with all these,” I stare at the pile of raw beef all over the place.

“Just place them in that bucket, I will sundry them later. You know, since Mongols, ancient Mongols are so used to herding, they know their animals. They know how to make good use of a beast. They sundry the bladder of a cow and all its meat, and pack all the beef into one bladder and there is practically infinite food. It is still amazing, everytime you try to eat an animal whole, you see nature’s wonder. It is then we appreciate the design of God.”

“I thought Athena said you are a professor,” Zedekiah passes him a plate.

“And not a butcher?” I add when wetting a bowl.

“Don’t be so straightforward Jon.” If our hands were not wet and covered in soap, he would have slapped me.

“Well,” uncle says wiping a plate dry, “you need to know a bit of everything to write quality papers. A lot of my ideas actually come from preparing dinners from whole animals.

This is how humans should be eating. Our technology is our own tool of survival and we develop weapons to hunt. But when eating, I insist on using bare hands and eat them whole in their original shape if possible so that we show common ground to the animals.”

“Uncle,” I ask, passing Zedekiah an oily tray, “Bacchus says that the concept of God only applies to humans. Is that what you agree on?”

“From time to time this boy becomes more and more difficult to deal with, because what he suggests can be quite possible,” he says when arranging the plates and bowls, “but we cannot tell, we are not animals. You are human, how about you tell me why do you believe?”

“I have been going to church since I was young. I listen to great stories and have great times in fellowships. I know no other ways,” I say, leaving the water pouring.

“At least you have known a lot. But what about you Zedekiah? Athena always says that your faith is a choice.”

“She is right,” says Zedekiah, “I dunno, perhaps because I like how churches work. And perhaps because churches are not ruled by any powerful individual, but a community led by God. I especially love Baptist churches. Members have monthly meetings and get to vote on things. Church leaders are not just making decisions, they have the obligation to hear from the people they serve. Feels like the government should be like that too.”

“But uncle, what do you think about churches? Why do you believe?” I ask.

“Should there really be an exact reason? Faith, religion, is actually irrational for good reasons. We are praising a God we cannot see, yet being so devoted, God is a huge part of our lives. More than how churches work, I am more concerned about my relationship with God. Churches, no matter how ideal they might be, or how different they might be, they shall be about the gospel, the Christ, and those who believe. Some churches might just be too carried away by many earthly concerns. Such as how to sustain it as an organisation. Not wrong, really practical. But I have been to many churches in my life and appreciate those who truly follow God’s teachings, be a community under God and care for the people inside and outside it.”

“Okay, now the stove. It will be too tough. Let me handle it. Now get out, out of my kitchen!” Mr Leung turfs us out.

It is Saturday night and the gathering of the James fellowship. This week, we have movie appreciation hosted by Simone and Athena. The film is an Indian famous movie *Peekay*, one of those timeless classics featuring Aamir Khan. To sum up, it’s about the alien

Peekay's journey on Earth and his discussion on religion and gods as a whole. It is hilarious, all until Simone stopped in the middle and caused some disappointed Oos.

"Alright, we need to move on to the discussion part," says Simone, "but if you are really interested, we didn't watch the first part, it is basically just romance and some storytelling of how Peekay learnt to speak. And the later part is...just search them yourselves. And by the way, the name 'peekay' means 'are you drunk', just in case you are wondering."

"And here are some suggested questions for you to discuss," Athena is pointing at the powerpoint, "Which part of the movie do you enjoy the most or remember the most? And, with this, does it change your way of viewing religion and even God in some ways? It is quite focused on religion so we have a lot to talk about. Frankly, with it possibly offending so many religions, I actually wonder if it is banned in India. Anyways, get into your groups and talk about these."

"So, significant scenes eh," Zedekiah says after we get into a circle, "The condom." He gets us laughing and Athena playfully smacks him from behind, "Oh c'mon Zed, be serious. Tho, I had a good laugh at that scene too. I mean, strawberry flavoured.[Giggles]"

David clears his throat, "I actually find the one where Peekay demonstrates religion when he wipes some red paint on a stone, throws a few coins, and people would automatically give money and make wishes. He even makes a comparison between a tea seller and religion from a business perspective, stating that the tea seller needs cost to make tea, give effort to sell them and still people would just walk by. In religion, you only need to invest a bit and the big buck keeps rolling in, and people respect you. I dunno, it sounds to me that religion is just making profit in sophisticated ways. I dunno."

"I understand why," Tim responds, "to others it looks like we are profiting. Well, somehow we are. In the time of the old testament, Levites as the priests among all the Israel tribes didn't get their land, because God is their property. They are dedicated to religious duties and get paid out of it. It sounds the same to many religions. It is hard to really judge if Peekay's view is appropriate or not."

"I am much more intrigued by another part in the movie," Bronze expresses via his Think Pad, "that is, Peekay claims that religion is somehow fashion, different dress codes for different faiths. I mean, it may not apply to Christians because we are more or less free to wear whatever we want within a reasonable limit. But to many, there is. And judging by the female protagonist's father's reaction, certain religions take it seriously."

"Fashion is already the least serious topic," I comment, "what strikes me the most is the montage when Peekay tries each and every ritual. Those such as offering milk or bathing

by the river, rolls on the ground and in one case, deliberately scars himself with knives. Looks stupid to be honest. Like how Peekay comments, ‘what god would reply to you only when you roll on the ground. The self-hurting is even scarier when you know some religions would do mass suicide. Most infamous case is the Heaven Gate incident. Scary. Now thinking about it, how many of so-called Christian things are just make up and would be stupid in another context? And, do gods really need those rituals?’

“I have watched the movie before so I tell you, Peekay makes a lot of sense,” Tim says, “God will not demand such many rituals. But in some religions there are people claiming we need rituals to connect to God. Catholics for example, same God as ours, I think, claim that we need to confess to the Fathers of the church instead of talking to God on our own. There’s a reason we separate ourselves from them. Peekay even says this when he debates on a TV show, ‘there are only two Gods. One that created the world and one that you made to profit out of us.’ In some ways, I think he makes sense.”

“You remind me of one scene as well,” Simone says, “after trying all the rituals, Peekay goes to a deity factory, idol factory full of crafted hands and feets, and desperately pleads to the statues to listen to him, anyone will do fine. Kind of an emotional scene to me. And in fact, so many religions are so made up, we may forget what god we are worshipping.”

“For the time being, I want to do a conclusion now,” says Athena. “Um guys,” she walks to the middle, “I can hear a lot of good talk and sure we have more to say about it. But time’s kinda out so let me leave a few words. In the movie, we see a lot of reflections between religion and God which are worth discussing. I want to talk about religion and faith. Religion, faith, they sound like two connected things. Well yes, faith in God and religion can be related to one another, but sometimes I view them as two separated words. Faith, it is a personal relationship with God through knowledge and experience and more. It is the individual's journey of finding God and believing in God. Religion on the other hand, I define it as the collective actions of worshipping God. It is formed collectively, filled with events and rituals governed by men. But since all men are sinners, and churches are formed by men, some religious practises can be questionable. I mean some are good, but not all are good. Us Christianity, has no moral ground to stand on, we have done many evil things in history such as the infamous religious Crusades. But in the end, why do we still believe in our God? Because our God is very unique in a way that he loves us and dies for us. None other religion can tell you that. And Christianity, at least in this church according to what I know, is more than just a religion, but believers supporting each other and gaining strengths in this community. This matters to me.”

On Sunday afternoon, after we have dismissed all the kids at Sunshine Daycare Centre where Zedekiah and Athena work in, we head home together. To reach the MTR station adjacent to the centre, we need to cross several traffic lights. In the middle of one zebra crossing, a crying (for whatever reason) 4 year old boy walks slowly to catch up with his mother who is attending to her other kids who have crossed the road. A huge truck is speeding towards the crossroad and the luminous figure turns from blinking green to red. The large car bonnet blocks the driver's view and clearly the driver can't see the child who can't walk fast enough before the truck reaches there as the lorry has no sign of stopping. Athena notices the situation first and shouts as loud as she can to alert the truck driver. We follow her scream. But it is too late. I rush in and grab the kid. I get into the safety island just in time as the crate freighter storms wind right behind me. As I put down the kid I hear car horn and see a family car with a mainland car licence dashing a bit too left from the designated main road towards me. It attempts to break and with a screech of tires it bumps onto the safety island and hits me. It's too late to dodge. In intuition I place my arms next to my head and I feel a striking force crushing my wrist and setting me flying for two or three metres until I crushland on my left side. Suddenly I feel myself bleeding from my arm and I feel my inside scrambled. Soon I can't feel. I can't see. I can still hear crying and running footsteps.

“Jon Jon Jon Jon Jon,” It is Meander's worried voice.

“Whoa Me-an,” Zedekiah yells, “don't touch him. We don't know how severe it is.”

“Can't you at least check on him?” Meander yells, “you're a medic, Zed.”

“Car crash can cause internal damage which might be worse if I touch him.”

“Zed's right. I'm calling him an ambulance,” says Athena, “do you have Aunt Kitty's contact...”

Soon the voices all fade out and the world is pitch darkness.

When I am awake, I am in a hospital bed, wrapped and tied. Mother is sitting next to my bed with father standing next to her.

“Ma?”

“Oh Zhuang Man you finally awake,” my mum reaches out her hands to hold mine, but she quickly holds back. “Sam,” she summons my father, “God answered my prayer, our son is alive.”

“Welcome to Earth my boy,” that's my father.

“Ba, ma. How serious am I?”

“You have been in a coma for several hours,” Zedekiah reports, “well you have shattered your left arm, broken your knee and ankle, also your disc bone.”

“This...ouch ouch ouch,” I try to raise my bandaged left arm but it hurts. So I point at my left arm instead, “you mean THIS bone?”

“DIS-K bone!” Zedekiah growls “well at least your sense of humour is not shattered. I’ll have to compliment you. You know to cover your head when you fly and crash onto the ground. That, [he points at my left arm] would have been your skull.”

“Well then what exactly happened?” I ask.

“To put it simply, you saved a kid from an advancing truck,” says Athena, “but then a car滑 right didn’t manage to break in time and hit you.”

“That bastard!” My dad holds his fist tight.

“Sam, that is not intentional. And he survives! I am telling the sister group. Such great news!” my mother cheers.

Meanwhile Meander enters with aunt Daisy.

“Zed, Ath, is he...oh thank God he alive,” Meander looks relieved.

“I’m here to take shift Kitty,” Meander’s mother greets my mother, “but good news he is fine.”

“Yes Daisy. But now that he is awake, I...”

“You look terrible, Kitty,” my father tells her, “you have been here for a long time. You need to sleep, you need to eat. Thanks Daisy.”

“No problem,” says aunt Daisy, “I better tell Janet about this news too. She took the first shift and is now really worried. Jonathan, smile!” She takes a picture with her phone.

“Mum will take care of you,” says Meander.

“Don’t worry, I won’t bother you to rest and do my things here. But if you need to call nurse or need some water I can help you,” her mother says.

“I can’t,” Meander says, “I am just here to lead her the way, can’t stay here all night. I have papers to finish.”

“Speaking of papers,” I ask, “can you bring me my laptop the next time you visit?”

“Oh I have one,” Aunt Daisy displays her computer, “I bring this here so that I can do some programming work.”

“Jon, you only have one paper left,” says Zedekiah, “don’t be in a rush, get healed.”

“Don’t listen to him,” says Athena, “lazy friends only slow you down. Here, I have your holophone. But Zed is right, there is no lesson for this week, most courses have reading

weeks as the final lesson. You have plenty of time. Now that you are proven alive, I need to sleep. Come Zed, we take uncle and auntie to the train station, and we head to your dorm.”

“Yea, I can handle myself well. Bye guys, bye mum, bye dad.”

“Hey what do you mean my dorm,” Zed gabs with Athena as they walk away, “I am not here for the night, which means my roommates are going to rock n roll all night long. I am not sleeping there!”

I turn on my holophone and check if I have messages. 200+ chats in my fellowship group updating my situation and praying for me.

“Auntie, I want to go to the toilet.”

Aunt Daisy puts away her programming work and slowly she adjusts the hospital bed, cautiously grabs me by my side. I tilt myself to land on the ground, and let her be my left leg. As slow as a tortoise I crutch to the hospital’s toilet. Each step kills. By the door I signal her I can do it myself. She opens a door for me and I lay my hand on a handle, close the door and do my things. Doctor has done a scan for me. My waist and ankle are injured. I don’t need an X-ray to tell, I can feel the crushing pain whenever I move. What’s more severe is my arm. The joint is shattered leaving my left hand motionless. What’s connecting my arm with my shoulder are weak bones and the bandage. It takes time to keep myself clean using only my right hand. As I come out again, Aunt Daisy straightens me as I walk.

“Auntie, I am sorry, I feel like bothering you.”

“Don’t be, Zhuang Man, I am more than glad to be here. Besides, you are just saving me from staring at the screen for too long and reminding me that I shall get some water too. You are going to heal soon.”

“But aunt Daisy, why are you so certain?”

“You forgot? You have survived death when you were young. Very young. I prayed for you. In fact, it took a whole church’s prayer to bring you to life. You are a living miracle you know.”

“Yea I can remember.”

“My fellowship consists of many of your uncles and aunties are praying for you daily. May not cast magical effects but we know God helps us.”

“Does that include Uncle Tony? He is a busy fireman.”

“He is the captain. He is not Christian. Perhaps he is too busy to believe. But I still pray for him whenever he runs into fire.”

Feeling better day by day, I sit tall to type my essay. Even with just one hand, I managed to finish it a week before the deadline. Hospital life is surprisingly serene. In the late morning I wake up to have breakfast, take my medicine, revise for an hour or two, lunch, then have an afternoon nap. And spend the next few hours doing basically nothing. Family and friends bring news and snacks from the outside world. After they are gone, I still have time to read some of my favourite books and The Bible. I don't remember being this relaxing since year one. These days I am either preparing for presentations and assessments, or spending all my down time on video games. I have never been...so vacant. And when time is unhurried in a ward, you get to hear things. "God has always been next to you. Look back and count the blessings, he is always here. You are just too busy to know that". Whether that is me talking to myself doesn't matter. "Be still and know that I am God". True, it is in slow pace I feel God. I glance at the opened windows everyday, days and nights take shifts and never in chaos. Cool breeze blows in and it makes people feel energetic. I heard when I was young that you can feel God when you observe how nature works. Thought that was just mentors having nothing to tell us and decided to make up theories. Now that's kinda true. Staring at the windows I am eager to get a walk once I am able to.

In the morning of the fourth day, an urge stirs in me and slowly I rise from the bed. Last night was the best sleep I have ever had, perhaps because I have started recovering.

With a walking stick I sluggishly move myself to the lift, notify the nurse and head to the hospital's garden. It is a tiny grassland with some plants.

I walk slow, very slow.

I take a small right step,

and a left one,

and a right one,

and a left one.

Each step I find peace and comfort that cannot be expressed in words.

On an abundant growth of grasses, I slowly bent my left knee and place it softly on the greens, and another knee.

I raise my still-good arm. I am not praying, I am thinking of God over and over.

I feel the wind, I sniff the grasses, I feel the sunlight.

For the first time in many years, I loudly praise God for the ground I am kneeling on, for my caring friends and family, for all that I have been enjoying, and for everything I am having.

“Mr Wills you are recovering quick,” the doctor is checking me.

“Yea, I just had a walk this morning,” I say.

“Slow as a slug,” Meanders mutters.

“At least I can walk,” I reply.

“But you are not entirely healed yet. I suggest you stay for another three days until you are ready to discharge.”

“Thank you doctor,” mother says to the doctor.

The doctor leaves to check another patient. Meander is watching her watch.

“Umm Jon,” she says, “I want to stay but I have to host a programme two hours later.”

“Oh yea, it is Thursday already. I almost forgot.”

“Go,” my mum says to her, “Zhuang Man will be fine with me.”

Meander works as a part-time host at “The People”. They have a studio next to the Victoria Harbour which has a great view of the city. I know today she will be extremely excited, because she is interviewing someone big. I urge mum to turn on the radio so that I can hear the broadcast live. I can imagine the full crew holding their breath, waiting for the relaxing jazz from the last programme to end. And the director counts down “Five, four, three, two, one...”

“Good evening ladies and gentlemen, welcome to ‘The People’, the guardian of your voice and right to information. I am your host Meander Lee. Today we will take on some less spoken topic, religion. And discussing things with me, is a world-class Theologian. Doctor Martin Yeung is with us. Doctor Yeung is the writer of the latest Christian book *Don’t Take Faith Wrong*. Welcome Doctor Yeung.”

“Thanks Meander. I am happy to be here. Christianity, any religion, is really complicated. We are talking about Christianity today, only because I am a Christian. Even so, it’s hard to start, to be honest.”

“Good thing I art thou host. How about we start with your new book? Now it is so popular in the Christian community and the illustrations in it are all over the social media. Just read them online. So Doctor Yeung, can you tell us why you wrote this book?”

“Frequently, I have always been asked, what shall faith be? What shall Christians be? And that is a good question. From The Bible and church teachings we know a lot, but ultimately experience tells you the most. Therefore I want to share some of my views with easy-to-read passages and relevant comics.”

“Interesting. But doctor, just for the audience who have never heard of it, what exactly is Christianity?”

“Technically it is a religion. It is Christianity, so we believe in Jesus Christ. We acknowledge that we are sinners, we all are. We are supposed to be separated from God. But the blood of Jesus cleaned us from our sins, so that we are no longer separated from God. We just need to believe. And we are God’s children. We get to be in his eternal world.”

“Yes, that’s what the gospel states. Now the question is, why do people believe in Christianity? Or why shall they be? Doctor?”

“Religions in general, more or less, deal with a central issue, death. Humans will die, we all will. No matter what you do, you cannot escape mortality. And what comes after is never known. Different religion has different explanation. We chrsitian in particular knows that there is a God and he has control over everything. Humans have many gods, but only our God cares enough to descend into our Earth, be with us and sacrifice for us. Heaven is real and God is the only way to eternal life and the new world he promised. Gospel means good news, and the good news we shall spread is that we are no longer sinners because Jesus has broken the obstacle of sin between us and God. That begs another question, why don’t people believe in Christianity? There can be a lot of reasons but I just list some which convinced me. Perhaps they have never heard of it. Or perhaps it sounds too far away. Christians are peculiar beings, we go to people and basically tell them they have sinned, they shall believe or they will go to hell. But death is too far away for most people. There are always some more urgent issues to deal with. But yea, that’s what I can think of.”

“That’s really some message to think about, Doctor Yeung. Really deserve some focus. Dear audience, if you have gone this far, I am sure you wish to voice out too. Afterall, ‘The People’ value your input. Don’t hesitate. Message us via CloudSound The People 2027 one word all lowercase. We long for your voices. Back to the programme. Doctor Yeung, you speak of many gods. And there are many religions. How do you view other religions?”

“That is a good question, Meander. Many religions exist. Well, I used to think that we Christians should against all other religions because our God is the only real God. Frankly all religions would state that only their god or gods, is real. Now I sometimes hypothesise, what if we are just worshipping the same God according to our own understanding and ways. Besides, Christian God has no name to begin with, we need a name for him so we call him Jehovah. In fact using the pronoun ‘he’ is a bit inappropriate because God’s sexuality is unknown. The male image is mostly just the ideology of patriarchal Jewish society. Anyway I am a bit off topic. But the thing is, some religions might have different gods for different

things. Most common is the God of Sun. No offence, but why don't just believe in the one God of everything. Our God is the one and only. Well, one trinity of the father, the son, and the holy spirit. That's really complicated and I will not go on unless someone is really interested. And one more thing, only our God would die for our sin. There's none like that."

"I guess our God is unique in this way. And Doctor Yeung, in your view at least, how are Christians different from others?"

"There is one common pneumonia across many religions is that, people give offerings and expect God to grant them wishes. That's not wrong. But Christians are different from them. Our God is no lamp genie. As I have stated in my book, God shall be the one who rules over us. We can believe in our God regardless of our conditions. That's one major difference we have when compared to a majority of religions. Of course even under the Christianity branch there are many varieties but mainly this is how we are different from most."

"Quite a good reminder Dr Yeung. Now, we have our first question from the audience. James128 asks 'How do we know if God is real?' Doctor?"

"In order to demonstrate that he is God, Jesus had a lot of miracles. Since God is the God of everything, including nature, is in his hands. So when there are supernatural things, we know he is God. Not magic, but miracles. Of course, if we only rely on miracles, you are not wrong, but your faith is weak. In fact, many things can tell us that God is real. Nature is the best example. Nature is magnificent in a way that all plants, animals live differently but in harmony. Weather and climates, air and water, all work just fine. At least before humans drastically changed the world for our use, things were good. And still why can't people be convinced that there is a superior power behind all? Yes, we know that there are scientific explanations of how nature works. Even though we know some science and theories, none can explain why exactly such things happen that way, why is the distance between Earth and Sun so precise to nurture life, or when do animals show certain behaviours. That is when you are amazed that God is behind all. Also we have The Bible. You might say the book is too old to prove anything, then fine. But there are testimonies of people experiencing God in their tough times, and find strengths in God. If those are not real, I don't know what is."

"Indeed, God is real, and he has many ways to show it. Next we have from A-Bruh-Ham, I like that name. 'How do I know if it is God's will when I reach out for God?' That deserves an answer because people seldom hear God speak. Doctor Yeung?"

"Read The Bible. I know, it is a book written 2000 years ago. But some words still stand. That's why the teachings are called Truths. Kind of a timeless guide book. Okay, let

me give you something more practical. If it is truly God's will, it wouldn't contrast with universal values and ethics. Also it must be the right thing to do, despite it being difficult."

"True. We have from Jonah Chow asking, looks more like complaining, "Being a Christian is hard, the moral standard is too high knowing that we oftentimes sin. Even thoughts count as sin. Any answer for that?"

"Of course we are all sinners, what do you expect. But being a Christian, if you are doing it right, is that you get reminders from the Holy Spirit to tell us what we should and should not do. But hey, no one tells you that being a Christian is easy, it never is. As The Bible reminds us, we are going against the world and those who endure to the last can be saved. Just look at it this way, we are being good people for good reasons. Because Jesus was doing that too. And just to comfort you, we are sinners, yet God's grace is greater to cover our sins."

"Right, I see. We have Juda asking 'Wouldn't Christianity be too high-end and too separated from the world we are living in?' You know what, sometimes I feel that too, afraid that we might be a bit impractical. When the world is full of chaos and issues we shall attend to, we just gather in a building praising God. I'm sure you can respond to that doctor."

"We do more than that. A true Christian not just cares about the kingdom in heaven, but also those on Earth. Simply because, if you cannot love the people you see, how could you love the unseen God? Early Christians not only worship God, they give out what they had and gave to the poor. Because that's what Christ did himself, to care for the poor. In fact, when churches first reached China, one of the names was Flour Religion, flour which is used for making bread, because we give out food to the poor. If there is one church which constantly helps the needy, then it should be proud of itself."

"Inspiring doctor, we ought to be practical. We have another question from Thomas, 'why can't we see God?' Right, I want to know too. Doctor Yeung?"

"Don't wish for it, you will die. God is the holy one, the almighty. We are sinners, we are not supposed to face God or else or sin could have made us die just by seeing him. Besides, if you can easily see him, is he still God to you? Also, it is entirely about faith. He is here orchestrating everything regardless of our faith. We just need to believe that he exists."

"I umm, gonna tell this to my friends who ask me just that. Oh this is a good one from Theodore Wong, here, Doctor Yeung, can we hear your story of being a Christian?"

"I am already fifty something. But not all my life I believe in God. When I was a young adult, I got into drugs and couldn't live without it. And for that I have done illegal things. That is until... When I was twenty five, my mother died of cancer. I missed my

goodbye, missed the funeral because I was doing drug deals. Father was furious and turfed me away. I was hopeless and homeless for at least a few years. Soon mourning caught up with me and I started to be self-blaming. One day in the street, some men handed me a leaflet, that is about how Jesus forgives us from our sins. How could someone forgive people like me? Under their invitation I started praying. I hear nothing in return, but for the first time in many years, I feel peaceful. With great effort I got rid of drugs. Having achieved that I went on to study theology. That is my journey.”

“Very inspiring doctor. Oh I got another question from our audience Peterson 347, ‘Will all things above still happen regardless of God's involvement? I mean, have you ever considered that religion can be just psychological tricks? ’ Umm, doctor?”

“Have you ever considered that God is behind all these with or without your recognition and faith? And if this has to be a psychological trick or some simple meditation, then it sounds to be a feasible one. Also psychological tricks are gimmicks, God is real.”

“So true doctor. Oh, we have Kimmy Jones saying ‘Doctor, I wish I met Christians like you. But there are a lot of bad Christians, some pastors would even sexually abuse kids. Response?’”

“I don't comment on those people who have done wrong. But I don't hide it. Christians are a bunch of ugly imperfect people, with the pursuit of a perfect God. We are never a beautiful sight to look at. We are saved sinners alright. And all of us are learning to accept each other and praise the same God. Because that is what Christians do.”

“Well, I guess you're right. We sure want to hear more, but this is the end of our programme. Thank you doctor Yeung for joining us.”

“Glad to be here. It was fun.”

“And it is the end of ‘The People’. Thank you audience for tuning in. This has been your host Meander Lee, signing off.”

I am getting better and I can remove the bandages on my ankle and waist. But my left arm is still broken. It will only take a doctor's evaluation to see if I can be discharged earlier than planned.

“So, look at Jonathan here,” Alex comes to visit me, “so, with those [he points at my limbs], you still trust in God? Why would he let this happen!”

“You mean he should have saved me from the accident?”

“He is the God of everything.”

“Are you here just to talk about religion, Mr McSheen?”

“Nah I am actually here to bring news. The university has left this letter on your dormitory mailbox.”

“I have a dormitory mailbox?”

“It’s about special arrangements for your exam. You are getting an extra hour for the exam.”

“See, told you God has everything in place.”

“Whatever,” Alex puts down the letter, “I am also here to bring my father here.”

“Hi Jonathan,” Doctor Albert Epoch enters with several long pieces of metal, “sorry boys, I got lost after Alex showed me the toilet.”

“What are those, Uncle Albert?”

“Skeleton replacement, Mr Wills,” he starts assembling, “they can help you walk.”

“It’s beautiful father,” Alex exclaims.

“Can’t wait to try them on,” I sit straight.

“Is there any chance that these can think like AI? Like things you have invented?” I ask as he attaches these on my left leg.

“Very funny Jonathan,” says Alex.

“No, young man, not these,” answers Doctor Albert, “these are bought.” He stares at my left arm, “Jonathan, can I get some of your fresh samples?”

“What? Why?”

“Your left arm, I heard from Alex that it is shattered. If you need a prosthetic arm I can help. I can give you the best prosthetic arm, one that can be truly linked to you. But first I need some samples to see if it is compatible with your body.”

“Trust my father’s profession Jonathan,” says Alex, “he created me.”

“I know. That I have no doubt. Just, no offence uncle, that sounds like playing God.”

“Funny that is one issue I am thinking of,” Uncle Albert mutters.

“C’mon uncle I am just joking. You are one of the pioneers in combining biological science and artificial intelligence. I have no intention to...”

“It does sound like playing God,” Uncle Albert utters clearly, “we are making things alive and somehow manipulating lifeforms in our experiments. In that aspect I feel like playing God.”

“But father,” asks Alex, “is that always the case that science must conflict with religion? I watched *Prometheus*, I read some science fiction and I don’t know where to draw a conclusion.”

“Science doesn’t have to collide with religion,” Doctor Epoch replies, “now there are many types of scientist. But I do biological science and AI. In my early years I studied Biology and dissected many creatures. The more you study, the more you are actually amazed by nature and appreciate the design.”

“So,” I ask, “do you believe in God?”

“I have seen many wonders in nature. They are just too sophisticated and beautiful to convince people that they are the result of science. I still have no idea about God. But if you suggest that there is a designer called God behind all these, I don’t doubt.”

The hospital discharges me just in time to take the exam. Frankly, a still recovering leg is not as distracting as my broken left arm. The entire two weeks just consist of where to place your hands so that you can still write fast. On the second last Thursday of December, I finish my exam and am free to return home for Christmas. There is one thing tho...

“Wow that’s tough,” Alex sighs as he returns in the early evening, “should be the last one this year. I just had a huge dinner to celebrate.”

“Did your brain implant help?” I ask him.

“I thought it would, but things are just, my brain moves faster than my hands,” the AI complains.

“At least you still get to use both hands,” I complain. “Anyway now that the semester has ended, what do you have for Christmas?”

“Travel,” he says, “a lot.”

“Can I ask you for a favour first?”

“Yes?”

“Can you take me home tonight?”

“I thought your leg is recovering well.”

“Yea but I can’t lift my suitcase,” I pet my luggage, “I need someone.”

“Well, you can ask Zedekiah or Meander.”

“Nah. Zed still has an exam tomorrow, elective. Meander has a paper due tonight.”

“Right,” he puts on his jacket, “I have nothing to do anyway.”

The journey changes from bus to the MTR, from city centre to rural areas. Eventually buildings grow short, the road grows wide and trees grow abundant. The double-deck bus takes us to my home at the outskirts of the Tai Tong Country Park.

“Alex, next stop.”

“Are we there?”

“No, I am not home yet.”

“But Jonathan, you are a man, not a home.”

“I mean...whatever. I want to go there first,” I point at a building outside.

We get off the bus and walk our way to my church. Tall golden fences surround the church. The two-storey architecture has one red square tower at each of the four corners. Dark green glass windows spread along those towers. In between a pair of them is a brown side with a huge wooden door. On top of it a silver cross stands. Pointy white arches are lined side-by-side, 3 in a group on top of each side. It is said that the design is inspired by an altar, and it is built like one.

I lead Alex into the hall. Three columns and tens of lines of wooden pews face the stage. The stage is laid with purple carpet, delicate timber-made chairs and a grand piano on the right. The cross on the middle of the stage wall cannot be missed.

“Just park the suitcase here, people won’t take it,” I instruct Alex.

“What is this?” Alex picks up an inch-thick book with black hard cover.

“Oh this? This is The Bible.”

“Every cult has a book everyone should read,” he says swing the book in his hand, “and that is the ideology a cult tries to spread.”

“There is an ideology alright, God’s ideology. And it is carefully written and selected. It is no random book. God instructed every word on it. First generations of Christians had several meetings to select what to include in this book.”

“Jonathan, that sounds exactly like a cult.”

“Perhaps. But The Bible is not just for the believers to read. What matters more is that it demonstrates the relationship between God and humans through various stories, poems, teachings and revelations.”

“I know, I have been browsing it on the way here.”

“The whole thing?” I squeak in shock.

“Half of it. I have a super brain. I read fast.”

“Well then you might know more than me.”

“Jonathan, there are no people. What are you planning to do here?”

I take out an envelope and drop it into a box in the middle of the hall corridor.

“What is that?”

“Offerings. Haven’t done it in a few weeks you know.”

“You know what, getting you to donate money is one prominent feature of all cults.”

“Do you have an example?”

“I remember when I was very young, I accidentally stepped into a church. And right away they approached me with a shiny box, and instructed me to give money. They demanded money from me! I gave them 30. Back in those days it could buy you lunch.”

“Usually we have a section in our assembly to do that. But that’s not the point. We believe that everything is gifted by God. We show thankfulness and faith by offering one-tenth of what we have. That is how Abraham did it. That is how Jacob did it. That is how Israel people do it. Besides, God promised us on offerings that, ‘Test me in this, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it’”

“So, it is an investment then.”

“It is called faith, knowing that God guided us to what we have, and give offerings in faith that he will give more.”

“But why does God need the cash anyway? He already has the whole world.”

“Good question. Realistically, churches are non profiting organisations. Therefore the resources are from the members. The Bible also notes that we shall be pleased to give out one-tenth to church. Also if a church is the home of Christians, and we get service from it, use the facilities, then we are obligated to pay for it.”

“So, you are a club?

“One of the best clubs. You are not wrong to look at it this way. Come, there is one thing I wish to show you.”

We walk through the dark corridor in between the church wooden pews. By memory alone I grab Alex to the lift, and reach the first floor. After the lift doors open, I turn right to a brighter corridor with white blue walls and light-brown tiled floor. I turn left at the cross road and open a door. And in the pitch darkness I locate the switch, and the lights are on.

“It’s a room alright,” comments Alex dryly, “why are we here?”

“Four years ago I was here, with the chairs arranged in a semicircle. On the night before the release of DSE results I sat right in the middle. People who watched me grow or grew with me came out and prayed for me.”

“Please don’t tell me it is a ritual to accomplish a certain goal. Does that work?”

“No Alex, there’s no religious intent, just people caring about each other. And there is no magical effect. They can’t do anything other than that. I didn’t get good enough to enter

top universities. Instead, I enrolled in Shue Yan University and there were days I came here often to chat with people, and got support. Eventually I learnt to believe that this is nonetheless God's plan and started to try my best in my studies. Looking back, I actually enjoyed my studies and genuinely happy about what I have. And God is behind all."

"Cult chooses vulnerable persons and lure them into their group when they are most defenceless," Alex states.

"Perhaps, but not us. One flaw in your statement is that I have been here since I was young. So I am in this group before I face challenges in life. Well, we do target vulnerable people, but with the intention to help them. Let's just say God is always there, but it is in our adversities we reach out for God. And in others' struggles we guide them to God."

"What if all these, all of your experiences can still happen without praying and without God," Alex suggests.

"What if God already has everything arranged, just that we Christians recognize it, appreciate it and know to seek guidance from him."

Alex is silent.

"I am planning to be a teacher. To do that, I need a PGDE and am applying for it. Regardless of the result, I believe that God is my God. And he always has the best for me."

As we step out of the church Alex notices something by the entrance. A table with ceramic figurines on it.

"Jonathan, what are these?" Alex points at the mini statues.

"Oh these? Virgin Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus on the manger, and the three doctors. God I actually forgot it is almost Christmas."

"Are these the idols you worship?"

"These here [I point at Jesus] is God. But no, these are just decorations. I remember when I was young there used to be big marble ones under the tree over there. In fact, perhaps only Christianity has no idols. Because we don't need one. God exists in our hearts and no earthly materials shall represent it."

"Then how about the cross in the middle of the stage's wall?"

"Oh that? That is the exact symbol of Christianity. Yea, I know it's a roman torture device. Yet our Lord and Saviour Jesus died on one and resurrected. Now this wooden piece is a remembrance of his death for us."

"Why do I recall that some have the statue of Jesus on it as well?"

“That is Catholic. Amazing how you spot the difference. Catholics still focus on the death of Jesus, therefore the statue, I guess. But us Christians know that he has risen from death, and the cross is no longer the symbol of pain but the symbol of hope. That is a convincing message. That is the God we have faith in.”

After these we take the minibus and walk to my home. As we are about to open the door, mother rushes out from the living room, clearly she has been crying.

“Oh Zhuang Man, you are here? Quick, pack your things.”

“Ma, what’s happening?”

“I have just got call from the elderly home. Your grandmother just had a stroke and may not make it. Your father is on his way from his workplace,” she starts to sob, “this might be the last time you see her.”

When we reach there, grandma is conscious but sadly not for long. One by one her children bid farewell to her. Grandma is 96 years old. Over the years she has been praying to different gods and many of my relatives are really concerned for her. Until several years ago she believed in Jesus Christ alone as her own God.

“Jon,” my mother summons me, “come say your goodbye.”

I slowly sit next to her bed, “Grandma, it’s me, Zhuang Man. I...” she moves her head a bit, raises her eyelids with great effort to look at me. She reaches out her right hand and slowly I grab her cold one with mine. “Do you remember when I was three years old I was very sick?” with great effort she nods. “Grandma, do you remember the God you prayed to during that time? Follow that God, and everything will be fine.” She gives out a slight smile. Then she breathes out a long breath. Her neck softens and gradually her hand loses strength. I bury my head in my still holding grip to cry. Time: 24th December, 2027, 12:56am.

Grandma’s funeral is held a few days later in a Christian manner. I dress in my black suit, stand on the church’s stage, and lay out my script.

“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will

dwell in the house of the LORD forever,” I continue, “This is the Psalm 23 we all know and love. Also the Bible verses my Grandma loved. God is David’s shepherd, he protects and provides. But little do people mention, David had had a tough life, being pursued twice by King Soul and his own first-born. There ought to be no such thing as peace when being hunted. Yet it is in these difficult times David experiences the abundance and peacefulness from God. My grandmother lived a tough life. She was born in a traditional Chinese family which values sons more. Despite being the smarter one in the family, my great-grandparents gave everything to her two younger brothers. After graduating primary school, she had been doing labour work for her family. She has six daughters and one youngest son. Against all odds and my grandfather’s objection she managed to raise all her daughters. Once she even stopped my grandpa from selling one of their daughters during wartimes for supplies. She has been in arduous situations all her life. Blessed is that her elderly life is peaceful with most of the time raising her grandchildren including me. Relieved us is that we know she is now in a better place with God, in God’s world where there is no suffering. If there is anything we really miss from her when she was still in this world, that would be her optimism even when circumstances look impossible. What she tells me the most, is to be a healthy, happy, joyful person. That is her only expectation. All her life she has always been diligent, she has always been resilient, she has always been optimistic. As a grandson of her, I am really proud to say, it is her genes I inherited.”

I go back to my seat. My friends Meander, Zedekiah and Athena are here. Alex and Bobby are here too in their suits.

“I am sorry for your losses,” says Alex.

“Thank you.”

“I...” Bobby mutters and adjusts his breathing tubes (the windownesian need these to survive this Earth’s air mix), “don’t know what I shall say.”

“It’s okay Bob. You are here, and that matters to me.”

“Jonathan,” says Alex, “I don’t know if it is appropriate to ask. I have never been to a funeral before. But you guys seem to take death lightly. Is this what chrisitians are?”

“We mourn for our loved ones, and we miss them. We Christians aren’t afraid of death, because our God Jesus has gained victory over death. But life and death is not the only reason we believe. Only our God is willing to descend as a human, live with us, and learn our earthly struggles. And in the end die for us. God is not the God of the dead, he is the God of the living. If that is not the God who deserves our faith, I don’t know who is.”

Drafted on 20th December, 2021

(one week before baptism)

By The Sapient Sabre