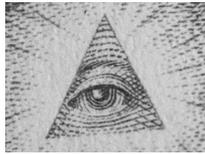




IS ANYBODY OUT THERE NORMAL?

FRANK ARUNDELL

Is anybody out there Normal?



The Eye of God, also known as the Eye of Providence, is an equilateral triangle with a single eye inside it, usually with rays emanating from it.

It symbolizes the omnipresence and omniscience of God, who watches over all things. It is also associated with the Trinity (which the triangle symbolizes in itself).

Historically, representations of an eye tended to be avoided because of the association with the Evil Eye (a widespread and ancient European superstition).

No medieval example of the Eye of God has yet been found. A rare Renaissance example of it appears above Christ's head in the Supper of Emmaus painted for the Carthusians in 1525.

The symbol has been connected with Masonic ritual, probably because medieval masons' guilds were dedicated to the Holy Trinity.

In the 18th and 19th centuries the Eye of Providence was used in Courts of Justice to remind judges of their responsibilities. The Eye of God appeared above the altar of the St. Aloysius church in London, which was built by French Catholics in 1808 but destroyed in World War II.

“The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous.” - Psalms 34:15

“The eyes of the Lord are in every place.” - Proverbs 15:3

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The year's at the spring
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hillside's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn:
God's in His heaven—
All's right with the world!

“Pippa Passes” Robert Browning
(1812-1889)

“The above poem appears in the middle of Part I of the play Pippa Passes. The stage direction preceding it is: From without is heard the voice of PIPPA singing—. The direction immediately following is: PIPPA passes. Because of this the poem is found in some anthologies under Pippa Passes or Pippa's Song. The play is set on a holiday in the town of Asolo, the whir of the spindles of the silk mill is silenced and Pippa, the little silk-winder, saunters forth with her lute to brighten life's ordeal with song, little realizing what good she is doing. Her song of peace: “God's in His heaven. All's right with the world!” induces faith in God's justice, hope for our welfare, and charity towards mankind in all who hear her sing.”

“The poetry of Browning, says Walter Pater (1839–1894) an English essayist, literary critic, and fiction writer, in a passage

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of subtle and essential criticism, 'is pre-eminently the poetry of situations. The characters themselves are always of secondary importance ; often they are characters in themselves of little interest: they seem to come to him (Browning) by strange accidents from the ends of the world. His gift is shown by the way in which he accepts such a character, and throws it into some situation, or apprehends it in some delicate pause of life, in which for a moment it becomes ideal.' Each of the scenes of *Pippa Passes* contains such a situation, and, by a unique experiment in construction, all are strung upon a single thread, and, as Pater, speaking of a single poem, continues, the poem 'has the clear ring of a central motive; we receive from it the impression of one imaginative tone, of a single creative act.'"

"It was first published by Browning in 1841, In writing *Pippa Passes*, more perhaps than in any-thing he ever wrote, Browning wrote to please himself. He created a form of his own, and he filled that form with an abounding and not excessive energy of life, that energy which is beauty. The scene between Ottima and Sebald (characters in the play) has been called Elizabethan: it is modern, but it is on the level of the best Elizabethan work in drama. The blank verse throughout is the most vivid and yet dignified, the most colored and yet restrained that Browning ever wrote; and he never wrote anything better for singing than some of *Pippa's* songs. I am not sure whether *Pippa Passes* can be justly called Browning's masterpiece; but I do not know any other of his works which seems to me so nearly perfect."

(ARTHUR SYMONS (1865 – 1945), a British poet, critic and magazine editor.)

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Economic and social correlates of IQ

IQ	<75	75–90	90–110	110–125	>125
US population distribution	5	20	50	20	5
Married by age 30	72	81	81	72	67
Out of labor force more than 1 month out of year (men)	22	19	15	14	10
Unemployed more than 1 month out of year (men)	12	10	7	7	2
Divorced in 5 years	21	22	23	15	9
% of children w/ IQ in bottom decile (mothers)	39	17	6	7	–
Had an illegitimate baby (mothers)	32	17	8	4	2
Lives in poverty	30	16	6	3	2
Ever incarcerated (men)	7	7	3	1	0
Chronic welfare recipient (mothers)	31	17	8	2	0
High school dropout	55	35	6	0.4	0
Scored "Yes" on "Middle Class Values Index" ^[c 1]	16	30	50	67	74

Whenever I think of those wonderful lines from Browning about God’s “location” I run for my Louis Untermeyer Treasury of Great Poems to refresh myself with the work of Browning and his contemporaries. Robert Browning was one of the most erudite of the modern poets. It never seems to fail, the line: “God’s in his heaven— All’s right with the world,” awakens in me an innate partiality to philosophy and theology every time I hear it. Having grown up in the waning days of Scholasticism (Medieval, Aristotelian Catholicism) under the

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tutelage of the famous Baltimore Catechism and the Sisters of St. Dominic, Browning's remark in one of Pippa's songs, stands in contrast to my childhood understanding which says: "God is everywhere!" even though we believe that Jesus ascended to heaven and is "seated at the right hand of the Father Almighty," according to the Apostles Creed. Probably, this was my first real entry into philosophy; a youthful dichotomy to be thought of in terms of the whereabouts of God. I don't exactly remember where or when I heard Pippa's song for the first time, but I also remember having heard the childish parody based on it which went: "The bird is on the wing... ain't that absurd?... the wing is on the bird." A first lesson in semantics I suppose.

The reason I brought up this little octet of Browning's is that it states in beautiful poetic form the percept of normalcy; order, peace, gentleness, tranquility, etc. So much so that the troubled people of the town of Asolo, Italy, in Browning's play, are redeemed by thoughts of the order in nature; with God, comfortably and safely ensconced in his heavenly home leaving the world peacefully taking care of itself. Pippa, the fourteen-year-old who works in Asolo's silk mill, on her only day off (New Years Day), wanders through the town singing happy songs that miraculously change for the better the lives of all those who hear her. Pippa's little song says that everything is as it should be in the world of man and nature, that everything is full of promise, i.e., normal. Without questioning Browning's personal religious convictions, which are open for anyone who wants to pursue them, (see victorianweb.org), in these few pages I would like to engage with Pippa's "utopian" views that are in opposition to the many ab-normalities which most of us understand as a part of true reality; the extraordinary existence

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each of us experience simply by being a coincidence of opposites; living human beings.

Normality

In my opinion it is normalcy or normality that people crave; although I think its fair to say that the normality that most people want is primarily based on comfortable averages as signs of health, and medians in terms of the laws of nature in physics and statistics. For instance, we would all like our physical condition to be perfectly normal, within the averages of homeostasis, i.e., metabolic equilibrium, but I'm not sure we want our bank account, our talents or our intelligence quotient to be in that same category. Philosophically speaking then, this brings into question whether or not normalcy is both good and bad depending entirely on the category. In other words, too much of a good thing or not enough of a good thing is considered ab-normal. For instance, can working for too much of a good thing, be called "greed?" On the other hand, can not working at all be considered sloth, depending on ones physical condition and motivation of course? When thinking about what is too much or too little Matthew's gospel from the NIV gives us the words of Jesus to ponder:

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your

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heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matthew 6: 28-34)

It's very clear that the Lord is talking about obsessing over the goods of this world, goods the “heavenly Father knows” we need. What about abstract goods, like art, music, language, literature, etc.? Is it possible we could become obsessed by those as well, sidetracking our primary purpose in life which is loving God and neighbor? Recognizing that all things are gifts of God, if God is the Creator of all things, and therefore things are good in themselves, it is possible that by using these gifts in the right way (for Matthew, “righteous” way) we may very well be glorifying and praising God. It is also true that they may be used in a wrong way purveying what constitutes evil.

Middle-Class Values

Take knowledge for instance; as an adult, not knowing much can obviously be detrimental; but can knowing too much also be detrimental? I don't know too many people who would think so. Recently I had the pleasure of reading Herrenstein and Murray's *The Bell Curve*, a book based on statistics resulting from intelligence testing. The findings are eye opening for those interested in sociology and class-structure in American life. If one's IQ is any measure of human cognition, and that can be argued, we certainly would rather be much above average than average or below average. Can being “greedy” for knowledge be abnormal? *The Bell Curve* found that 50% of Americans are average with an IQ of between 90 and 110. The

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other 50%, divided by race and culture make up the rest. While people of higher powers of cognition, with an IQ of between 100-125, are the most successful in accomplishing the “American dream” those below normal, between 75-90, seem not able to avail themselves of the “good life easily.” Those in the higher intellectual percentile, those who claim “Middle Class Values” are the successful ones according to the statistics. This, of course, is predicated on what one considers success. If success is measured in monetary terms, Jesus may have had a different opinion: *“Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”* (Matthew 9: 24) What are Middle Class Values anyway?

Wikipedia says: “The term middle-class values is used by various writers and politicians to include such qualities as hard work, self-discipline, thrift, honesty, aspiration and ambition. Thus, people in lower or upper classes can also possess middle-class values, they are not exclusive to people who are actually middle-class.” It seems to me that this explanation is a bit confusing. It’s saying that in order to measure human-values, which most people consider the above qualities to be, one must conceive of them in a class-conscious environment; and having those human-values makes one “middle-class”. Those various writers and politicians who are using the term middle-class values (available to all people) must be using the term in the service of politics. Only an elitist would make the mistake of calling all potential voters, i.e., those with the middle-class values mentioned above “deplorable”. Mrs. Clinton made that mistake and paid the price.

The Help of God

Another common saying or motto having to do with normalcy is: “God helps those who help themselves.” It emphasizes what is presumed to be the importance of self initiative. The saying ostensibly suggests that the same human qualities required for middle-class values should be present in an individual before he or she can expect help from God.

“The beliefs of Americans regarding this phrase and the Bible has been studied by the Christian demographer and pollster George Barna of The Barna Group. To the statement ‘The Bible teaches that God helps those who help themselves’; 53% of Americans agree strongly, 22% agree somewhat, 7% disagree somewhat, 14% disagree strongly, and 5% stated they don't know. Of ‘born-again’ Christians 68% agreed, and 81% of non ‘born-again’ Christians agreed with the statement. In a February 2000 poll, 53% strongly agreed and 22% agreed somewhat that the Bible teaches the phrase. Of the 14 questions asked, this was the least biblical response, according to Barna. A poll in the late 1990s showed the majority (81%) believe the concept is taught by the Bible, another stating 82%. Despite being of non-Biblical origin, the phrase topped a poll of the most widely known Bible verses. Seventy-five percent of American teenagers said they believed that it was the central message of the Bible.”

“Barna critiques this as evidence of Americans' unfamiliarity with the biblical texts and believes that the statement actually conflicts with the doctrine of Grace in Christianity. It ‘suggests a spiritual self-reliance inconsistent with Christianity’ according to David Kinnaman, vice president of the Barna

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Research Group. Christian minister Erwin Lutzer argues there is some support for this saying in the Bible (2 Thessalonians 3:10, James 4:8), however much more often God helps those who cannot help themselves, which is what grace is all about (the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, Ephesians 2:4–5, Romans 4:4–5). The statement is often criticized as espousing a Semi-Pelagian model of salvation, which most Christians denounce as heresy.” (Barna Group)

“The bottom line then is there is debated biblical support for the modified expression: God helps those who help themselves to the extent that motive aligns with the divine will. Otherwise, it’s just people helping themselves without reference to whether God sanctions it or not as being his will”.
(Wikipedia modified)

One could conclude that since it is God’s will that people love Him and must equally love their neighbors as themselves: *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”* (Matthew 7: 21) The initiative indeed begins with us. The spirit of the saying conforms to the spirit of the biblical texts, though not word for word. Regardless of the fact that Jesus did a hundred percent of the work for our salvation on the cross, doesn’t discount our initiative by following his example of incommensurable love. It is not only by faith, but by our acts that humanity responds to the will of God. Whatever we do with our freedom matters as much as the faith we possess generated by God’s grace. *“Faith without works is dead.”* (James 2: 28)

The Eye of Providence

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Pippa's Song from Browning's poetic soul; and our own living activities, not expecting God's intervention, has many of us thinking that: "God's in his heaven, and all's right with the world" but quite apart from us. Others tend to "see" the Father by meditating, using their own unique transcendental-horizon, as Fr. Karl Rahner put it. Many are also able to sense the glory of God's reflection here on earth in a "mystical" way through the incredible beauty of Creation itself, hopefully without falling into the trap of pantheism. The ageless icon of God's eye peering at us through the equilateral triangle representing the Trinity supports the idea of God constantly monitoring us from afar, even though Proverbs 15: 3 tells us: "*The eyes of Yahweh are everywhere: observing both the wicked and the good.*" "Throughout history there has been a strong tradition across time, continents and cultures of using eye symbolism to generally represent a benevolent creator force watching over, helping and protecting humanity and to represent a spiritual part within us." (David Percival) "In 1782, the Eye of Providence was adopted as part of the symbolism on the reverse side of the Great Seal of the United States. It was first suggested as an element of the Great Seal by the first of three design committees in 1776 and is thought to be the suggestion of the artistic consultant, Pierre Eugene du Simitiere." (Wikipedia modified)

"In his original proposal to the committee, Du Simitiere placed the Eye over shields symbolizing each of the original thirteen states of the Confederation. On the version of the seal that was eventually approved, the Eye is positioned above an unfinished pyramid of thirteen steps (again symbolizing the original States, but incorporating the nation's potential for future

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growth). The symbolism is explained by the motto that appears above the Eye: *Annuit Cœptis*, meaning "[Providence] approves (or has approved) [our] undertakings". (Wikipedia)

The Evil Eye

“The evil eye is a curse believed to be cast by a ‘malevolent glare,’ usually given to a person when they are unaware. Many cultures believe that receiving the evil eye will cause misfortune or injury. “In Judaism the evil eye is mentioned several times in the classic *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of Our Fathers). In Chapter II, five disciples of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai give advice on how to follow the good path in life and avoid the bad. Rabbi Eliezer says an evil eye is worse than a bad friend, a bad neighbor, or an evil heart. (First and Second Century CE) Judaism believes that a ‘good eye’ designates an attitude of good will and kindness towards others. Someone who has this attitude in life will rejoice when his fellow man prospers; he will wish everyone well. An ‘evil eye’ denotes the opposite attitude. A man with ‘an evil eye’ will not only feel no joy but experience actual distress when others prosper, and will rejoice when others suffer. A person of this character represents a great danger to our moral purity. Many Observant Jews avoid talking about valuable items they own, good luck that has come to them and, in particular, their children. If any of these are mentioned, the speaker and/or listener will say: ‘b’li ayin hara’ (Hebrew), meaning ‘without an evil eye’ or ‘kein eina hara’ (Yiddish; often shortened to ‘kennahara’): ‘no evil eye’. It has also been suggested by the 10th commandment: ‘do not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor’ is a law against bestowing the evil eye on another person.” (Wikipedia)

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Abraham's God: The God of the Jews

“God in Judaism is understood to be the absolute One, an indivisible, and incomparable being who is the ultimate cause of all existence. Judaism holds that Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the national God of the Israelites, delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and gave them the Law of Moses at biblical Mount Sinai as described in the Torah. Traditional interpretations of Judaism generally emphasize that God is personal, while some modern interpretations of Judaism (Reformed) emphasize that God is a force or ideal. Judaism, the oldest Abrahamic religion, is based on strict monotheism, finding its origins in the sole veneration of the ancient predecessor to the Abrahamic God, Yahweh. No consensus has been reached by academics on the origins of monotheism in ancient Israel, but Yahweh, from a secular standpoint, ‘clearly came out of the world of the gods of the Ancient near east.’ The worship of multiple gods (polytheism) and the concept of God having multiple persons (as in the doctrine of Trinity [misunderstood]) are equally unimaginable in Judaism. God as a duality or trinity is heretical in Judaism - it is considered akin to polytheism. ‘[God] the Cause of all, is one. This does not mean one as in one of series, nor one like a species (which encompasses many individuals), nor one as in an object that is made up of many elements, nor as a single simple object that is infinitely divisible. Rather, God is a unity unlike any other possible unity’. This is referred to in the Torah: ‘Hear Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One’”. (Deut. 6:4) (Wikipedia modified)

“God is believed eternal, the Creator of the universe, and the source of morality. God has the power to intervene in the

world. The term God thus corresponds to an actual ontological reality, and is not merely a projection of the human psyche.”
(Wikipedia modified)

Maimonides (1135-1204)

“Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, commonly known as Maimonides, was a medieval Sephardic Jewish philosopher who became one of the most prolific and influential Torah scholars of the Middle Ages.” (Wikipedia)

“Maimonides describes God in this fashion: ‘The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there is a Primary Being who brought into being all existence. All the beings of the heavens, the earth, and what is between them came into existence only from the truth of His being.’ ”

““In the philosophy of Maimonides and other Jewish-rationalist philosophers, there is little which can be predicated about the Godhead other than its existence, and even this can only be asserted equivocally. (The only grasp of the God of Israel we have, was given to us by Moses with the words: ‘I AM WHO I AM.’) How then can a relation be represented between God and what is other than God when there is no notion comprising in any respect both of the two, inasmuch as existence is, in our opinion, affirmed of God, may God be exalted, and of what is other than God merely by way of absolute equivocation? There is, in truth, no relation in any respect between God and any of God’s creatures.”— Maimonides, Moreh Nevuchim, (Pines 1963)

“Since all of existence ‘emanates’ from God, whose ultimate existence is not dependent on anything else, some Jewish sages

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perceived God as interpenetrating the universe, which itself has been thought to be a manifestation of God's existence. In this particular way Judaism could be regarded as being similar to panentheism while always affirming genuine monotheism.”

(See my booklet: *Confessions of a Panentheist*.) (The several paragraphs above are gyped from various postings of Wikipedia, modified.)

Jesus: His Father and Our Father

According to Matthew's gospel (1: 17) we get the following timeline:

“ All the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.”

Most biblical scholars reckon a generation to be between 40 and 70 years. Let's trust Matthew's calculations but split the scholars' reckoning in half, making the length of a “generation” 55 years: $55 \times 14 = 770$ years; $\times 3 = 2,310$ years from Abraham to Jesus if my math is correct.

The gospel on the third Sunday of Easter this year tells the story of Cleopas and probably Barnabas who were distraught and on their way home after the crucifixion. According to Luke, they met up with a stranger on the road to Emmaus, about seven miles west of Jerusalem. The disciples were obviously confused and hoping things would get back to normal. What they were unable to comprehend is that for the Jews, as well as for the rest of the world, there would be a new normality; a difference between the hidden God they had worshiped as Jews and the God they now knew— personally.

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“Two of the disciples of Jesus were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking together about all that had happened. Now as they talked this over, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side; but something prevented them from recognizing him. He said to them, ‘What matters are you discussing as you walk along?’ They stopped short, their faces downcast.

Then one of them, called Cleopas, answered him, ‘You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days.’ ‘What things?’ he asked. ‘All about Jesus of Nazareth’ they answered ‘who proved he was a great prophet by the things he said and did in the sight of God and of the whole people; and how our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and had him crucified. Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all: two whole days have gone by since it all happened; and some women from our group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the early morning, and when they did not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.’

Then he said to them, ‘You foolish men! So slow to believe the full message of the prophets! Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory?’ Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself.

When they drew near to the village to which they were going, he made as if to go on; but they pressed him to stay with them.

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'It is nearly evening' they said 'and the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them. Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; but he had vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?' They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven assembled together with their companions, who said to them, 'Yes, it is true. The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' Then they told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognized him at the breaking of bread". (Luke 24: 13-35)

I found a very interesting blog called Yeshua (Jesus) in Context, which gives us a little more information about Cleopas:

“A strange thing happens at the end of Luke’s gospel (several strange things, in fact). Yeshua, unrecognizable even by his disciples, walks with two of them on a road to Emmaus. Which two? Only one is named: Cleopas.”

“Why is only one of them named? And what else do we know about Cleopas? Here is where we get into some fascinating material from Richard Bauckham’s *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. Cleopas is perhaps the most interesting case. And this evidence is the kind of simple, memorable material to silence skeptics who doubt completely that the story of Yeshua has a solid historical basis.”

“First, a few things we know about Cleopas:

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- (1) Cleopas is one of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus
- (2) His wife is named Mary and she was at the cross (John 19:25, Clopas is a form of Cleopas and the name is rare).
- (3) Cleopas was Yeshua's uncle (Joseph's brother) spoken of in Eusebius (citing Hegesippus) in Hist. Eccles. 3.11; 4.22.
- (4) Cleopas' son, Simon, the cousin of Jacob (James) and Yeshua, was the leader who replaced Jacob (James) over the Jerusalem congregation."

"But here is the most important thing: Cleopas is a perfect example of a trend in the gospels. The people who are named are treated so for a very important reason. The only consistent answer that explains why some are named and some are not (Baukham mounts his case with overwhelming evidence of detail) is that the named characters were known to the evangelists as eyewitnesses."

"They lived and told their story of encountering Yeshua again and again. Cleopas is one example, a person of great importance in the Yeshua movement after the events the gospels narrate. He is a rare case of someone we know from later historical records as well."

"And the fact that he is named and not the other disciple illustrates the truth. The only plausible reason the other disciple is not named is that Luke did not have a record of his story or that he was not generally known afterward as one of the eyewitnesses in the movement. But Cleopas, apparently, was."
(Yeshua in Context, by Derek Leman; Online)

Leman mentions several anomalies he found in Luke's Emmaus story. The fact that the travelers didn't recognize Jesus

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when he inquired into their conversation; and why the scripture only named one of them, Cleopas. Since they met up with what would have been the “glorified” Christ it served Luke’s narrative to have the unrecognized “stranger” go through all the prophetic accounts of the coming of the Messiah in Hebrew Scripture, similar to the way Stephan is reported to have done in (Acts 7). Many biblical scholars have advanced the thought that the other traveler was Barnabas, a Cypriot, who later traveled with Paul. If Cleopas was a witness within the “movement,” as many have claimed, he must have seen the works of Jesus among his followers. The blind see, the lame walk the dead are raised, etc. One would wonder why Cleopas, according to Luke, should still hold to the Jewish view that the Messiah would solve all Israel’s political problems by setting her free from oppression. As he, Jesus, calmed the sea, the few who were with him are said to have been astounded and remarked: “What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?” Surely, they must have all thought this is much more than just a future political leader of the Jews. Cleopas and his traveling companion recognized him at the “breaking of the bread” during which the resurrected Lord vanished from their sight. The connection of Cleopas, with the Last Supper, i.e., the “breaking of the bread,” is curious since he was not present, as far as we know, in the upper room at that time. The gospels tell us without equivocation exactly who Jesus was or who he knew himself to be:

“Jesus said to Thomas:

‘I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.

No one can come to the Father except through me.

If you know me, you know my Father too.

From this moment you know him and have seen him.’

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Philip said, 'Lord, let us see the Father and then we shall be satisfied.'

'Have I been with you all this time, Philip,' said Jesus to him 'and you still do not know me?'

*'To have seen me is to have seen the Father,
so how can you say, let us see the Father;*

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?

*The words I say to you I do not speak as from myself:
it is the Father, living in me, who is doing this work.*

You must believe me when I say

that I am in the Father and the Father is in me;

believe it on the evidence of this work, if for no other reason.

*I tell you most solemnly, whoever believes in me will perform
the same works as I do myself, he will perform even greater
works, because I am going to the Father.*

Whatever you ask for in my name I will do,

so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

If you ask for anything in my name, I will do it.'"

(John 14: 6-14)

Few people will contest the meaning of Jesus in the gospels regarding his Father and our Father as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. The Trinity arises from nowhere else but the words of Christ himself, confessed Son of the Father before all ages. Only the grace of God promotes the faith to believe, and both faith and reason in conjunction allows for the leap to the true freedom man seeks. The Creed of Nicaea (325) synthesizes the gospel beautifully.

“One Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God,

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born of the father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father.”

No where was it put more succinctly than by Jesus himself in the Synagogue at Capernaum where many left him for his “blasphemous” statements.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.’ Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.’” (John 14: 1-7)

It had to have been very difficult for those who for generations had worshiped the unseen God of Abraham. This was Jesus’ “I AM” with a little more meat on the bones, so to speak. In the early church “Arianism taught that the Son was created by the Father and in no way equal to him. This was in many ways a purer and more spiritual approach to religion, since it did not force God to undergo the undignified experience of being made of “meat.” Islam is essentially Arian, granting Jesus a miraculous birth, miracles, death (though not crucifixion) and a resurrection, but all as a matter of God (Allah) demonstrating

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his power by committing more spectacular miracles than usual.”

“Arianism leaves an infinite gap between God and man, and ultimately destroys the Gospel, leaving it either as fake-news or a cruel parody. It left the door open to Manichaeism, which mixed Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Gnostic elements into Christianity, so that God is good but creation is bad (or at worst, a mistake) and the work of an evil anti-God. Only by being orthodox and insisting on the identity of the natures of the Father and the Son and the Spirit can we truly understand the goodness of creation and the love of God, and live according to them.” (Robert Barron, RC Aux. Bishop of Los Angeles: *Exploring Catholic Theology*: Baker Academic 2015) We recommend you check out Bishop Barron, he definitely is today’s Fulton J. Sheen.

Augustine’s Pippa moment

If you have not read the works of Augustine of Hippo you have missed one of the great theological adventures of all time as well as one of the world’s great works of literature. According to his contemporary, Jerome, Augustine “established anew the ancient Faith.” For most of Augustine’s life he was a ferocious seeker of normalcy for himself, that is, a lifestyle free from doubt and anxieties where he could rest in the comfort of knowing the truth of his personal convictions. In our opinion his desire to “find himself” is congruous with the conditions which many millennials find themselves today; wrestling with the relativism of intellectual unfathomables generated since the “enlightenment,” espousing science to be the ineluctable cause of all things; trying to eclipse the innate, tenuous conviction in

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our minds that God exists, even without the revelation of Christ. Since the 60's, most of the rebelliousness against faith has been taking place in the halls of higher education and sadly within the shambles of many modern families where marriage is tenuous. We should also mention a world in which it is "legal" to kill babies in the womb for almost any reason.

"Believing that the grace of Christ was indispensable to human freedom, Augustine helped formulate the doctrine of original sin and made seminal contributions to the development of just war theory. When the Western Roman Empire began to disintegrate, he developed the concept of the Church as a spiritual City of God, distinct from the material Earthly City. His thoughts profoundly influenced the medieval worldview. The segment of the Church that adhered to the concept of the Trinity as defined by the Council of Nicaea and the Council of Constantinople closely identified with Augustine's *On the Trinity*." (Wikipedia)

There is no way of knowing whether or not Robert Browning read *The Confessions*. Those of us who have, remember Augustine's Pippa moment in Book 8. We will gyp this moment from our Kindle Edition, (\$0.99)

"'Stop thine ears against those thy unclean members on the earth, that they may be mortified. They tell thee of delights, but not as doth the law of the Lord thy God.' This controversy in my heart was self against self only. But Alypius (his friend) sitting close by my side, in silence waited the issue of my unwonted emotion. But when a deep consideration had from the secret bottom of my soul drawn together and heaped up all my misery in the sight of my heart; there arose a mighty storm,

bringing a mighty shower of tears. Which that I might pour forth wholly, in its natural expressions, I rose from Alypius: solitude was suggested to me as fitter for the business of weeping; so I retired so far that even his presence could not be a burden to me. Thus was it then with me, and he perceived something of it; for something I suppose I had spoken, wherein the tones of my voice appeared choked with weeping, and so had risen up. He then remained where we were sitting, most extremely astonished. I cast myself down I know not how, under a certain fig-tree, giving full vent to my tears; and the floods of mine eyes gushed out an acceptable sacrifice to Thee. And, not indeed in these words, yet to this purpose, spake I much unto Thee: and Thou, O Lord, how long? how long, Lord, wilt Thou be angry for ever? Remember not our former iniquities, for I felt that I was held by them. I sent up these sorrowful words: ‘How long, how long, to-morrow, and tomorrow? Why not now? Why not is there this hour an end to my uncleanness?’ So was I speaking and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo! I heard from a neighboring house a voice, as of boy or girl, I know not, chanting, and oft repeating, ‘Take up and read; Take up and read.’ Instantly, my countenance altered, I began to think most intently whether children were wont in any kind of play to sing such words: nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So checking the torrent of my tears, I arose; interpreting it to be no other than a command from God to open the book, and read the first chapter I should find. For I had heard of Antony, that coming in during the reading of the Gospel, he received the admonition, as if what was being read was spoken to him: ‘*Go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me*’ (Matthew 19:21): and by such oracle he was forthwith converted unto Thee.”

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Eagerly then I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting; for there had I laid the volume of the Apostle when I arose thence. I seized, opened, and in silence read that section on which my eyes first fell: *'Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, in concupiscence.'* No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away."

In this case the "oracle" was Romans 13: 13. (The Confessions of St. Augustine: (Kindle Locations 2147-2160). Green Planet Publishing. Kindle Edition.)

As I re-read these words I instantly recalled Pippa's Song in Browning's play. While Browning leaves God comfortably in "his heaven," Augustine found his comfort in his intimacy with the Father in Christ through the Spirit . "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee." (Book 1, The Confessions) A professional theologian may argue that Augustine found his rest not so much that God is in him, but he, and everything else is in God.

For most of us comfort in faith-alone tends to fall a bit short of absolute trust in the Word of God and generally winds up as a sincere hope. The grace of God, the "supernatural" gift of God, is usually found in some form of experienced conversion to Jesus Christ; it leads us to what Jesus called the faith that saves us. When grace is described as "participation in the life of God," both our human reason and our human will has to have been surrendered to an exterior or interior experience of the

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veritable reality of the living God in whom and with whom we share our lives. Our existence is inexorably connected in a substantial way to the life of God our Father, through Jesus, in the Spirit. The Trinity is the key to understanding how Jesus could say: *“If you know me you will know my Father also.”* and: *“When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.”* It is the Spirit who provides the grace to persist in the love of God and each other; with the conviction of following Christ trusting in the scriptures, empowering us to say with humility: “We believe!”

When Paul and Silas reached the Areopagus in Athens and confronted the erudite Greeks with the “good news” of Jesus Christ, he used some of their own beliefs to make his case:

“The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said. ‘For we too are his offspring.’” (Acts 17)

Jesus had made it quite clear:

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“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.” (John 6: 63)

St Paul in his letter to the Romans says:

“You are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.” (Romans 8: 10)

From a determinist point of view it can be said: “spirit” does not exist; casting aside that Jesus tells us *“God is Spirit,”* which humanity has believed way back from the brain to mind transition. Has man’s rejection of God become the new-normal? Can we reasonably return to the spiritual values which much of the world appears to have lost? Will we be able to say with a true conviction in faith “Jesus, I trust in you?” Each has to answer for himself or herself before the Providential Eye of God and determine what is normal.

“Beloved: If you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.

When he was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten; instead, he handed himself over to the one

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who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you had gone astray like sheep, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.” (1 Peter 2: 20-25)

Forth Sunday of Easter, Gospel Acclamation
(John 10:14)

Alleluia, alleluia.

“I am the good shepherd, ’says the Lord;

’I know my sheep, and mine know me.’”

Alleluia, alleluia.