

In this Issue...

What is love?	... 1
Grandma Vi's Apple Crisp Recipe	... 2
A Baby with Guns	... 2
New Year's Resolution Blues	... 3
The Gospel According to Stallone	... 4
Poetry	... 6
Music Review	... 6

ESSAY

What is Love?

by Joshua Smith

By this all men will know that you are my disciples...¹

That quote from John is probably easy for a lot of seminarians to finish. Not only can we finish the quote but we feel we have a decent handle on its application. And it is not hard to love each other at Seminary. We walk the halls greeting each other, even hugging those we know better. We offer some of our food at lunch to others. We share notes, advice, books, and even rides to the apartments. Man, we must be a glowing spot on the map in God's eyes!

But, as I reflect on those things that come to my mind when I think of love, I am forced to stop congratulating myself. Those actions are all displays of love in a certain kind of way. Primarily, however, it seems to me that they more closely resemble something less valuable, less lofty. In my thinking it seems that I have, that maybe in small ways we all have, replaced love with kindness.

Now, I don't mean to rag on kindness. I think that kindness is a necessary part of love that we could always improve on. I remember a time when a stranger was wandering around the seminary trying to find out some information. He had been wandering around for a little while before I finally got up the gumption and helped him. But even then, that simple act, a small inconvenience in the scheme of life, was far too monumental for me to stretch my selfish heart to do. So, we all need to practice being kind.

But being kind does not seem to be the same as loving. Love demands more than benevolence or pleasantries. It is not satisfied with the mentality of passerby relationships prevalent in American culture. It is intrusive; there are moments when it is downright blunt. It wants the best for its recipients, even if that means committing the ultimate politically incorrect act of calling someone else out. It has an opinion on what is best for you and it will be heard. It hurts sometimes, stings even more often, and occasionally makes you squirm in discomfort. When iron sharpens iron you always get one thing first, friction. There are times when the term most fitting to describe love in action is messy.

¹ The verse referenced is John 13:35: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

At the core of the love that God calls us to are vulnerability and accountability. Love, this gritty, messy type of love addresses the blindness we all have to our own faults, one of the most deep-seated aspects of the human condition. It is potentially one of the most dramatic and life changing forces that God has given humanity. Yet despite its power it is very rarely evidenced in our churches. Instead of true loving relationships the church and we as members of it have seen fit to exist by straight arming everyone to a comfortable distance at worst and at best, allowing a very, very select group the permission to love us. This is not as it should be.

I wish I were someone who can say, here, this is the way out, we just need to do this five step plan. Or, follow these four keys to love and all will be right again. Unfortunately I know that this unloving way that Christians have allowed to become the norm for our relationships will not be restored easily or quickly. And I know that my ideas as to the solution will be just a small contribution in restoring loving relationships in the church. If the Lord tarries maybe we will move beyond this ailment and move on towards another. But until that point I urge myself first and all those who follow Christ with me to strain towards love, real, messy, and true love. Because in its messiness, in the squirms and stares, the blushed cheeks and occasionally in raised voices, love is always, always good.

RECIPE

Grandma Vi's Apple Crisp

by Sara Bosscher

3/4 cup flour
3/4 cup brown sugar
1 stick margarine
3/4 cup oatmeal

Peel and slice thinly enough apples to almost fill a 9'x13' glass pan. Mackintosh apples work well, but any you have on hand will do. Mix the above ingredients and sprinkle over the apples. Bake 1 hour in a 350 degree oven. Serve hot with ice cream.

REFLECTIONS

North Korea's Bombardment on Yeon-Pyoung Do

Student reflects on the recent tensions on the Korean Peninsula

by Jin Su Hwang

Before getting into any discussions on this issue, I would like to describe a little bit of the history behind the struggles of North Korea and South Korea. In a sense, this separation of one country was the result of international political issues. The nation was divided after World War II. North Korea was occupied by the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, South Korea was occupied by the United States. The two zones fought for control of the Korean Peninsula during the Korean War from 1950-1953, and remain separate governments to this day. North Korea is governed by a notorious dictator, Jung-Il Kim. He is 70 years old, and is in a dire situation where he is forced to choose a successor of dictatorial position. Some say it is because of his health issues, and others say he is just preparing for a retirement. Regardless of the reasons, this process of passing down the dictatorial power is causing the uproar.

Jung-Il Kim is known to have three sons. Just like other successions of authority in history, this has become a complicated matter for the state and many leaders in North Korea. The most capable of successors were known to be the first son, Jung-Nam Kim, and the third son, Jung-Woon Kim. Jung-Nam Kim is supported by one of the strongest generals in North Korea while Jung-Woon Kim is known to be genuine successor from a third concubine.

On Nov. 23rd, North Korea bombarded South Korea. According to the UK paper *The Telegraph*, "two South Korean soldiers were killed and a dozen injured after North Korea fired dozens of artillery shells onto a South

Korean island setting more than 60 houses ablaze and sending civilians fleeing in terror.” There are still some debates on the amount of shells fired to the South Korean island but some of the expertise are estimating up to 200 shells were fired.

In my opinion, the bombardments were meant to send a message to the world, to show the competency and power of North Korea. This has happened before. When North Korea seems to be silent and passive, they would do something to remind the world of their power. What was different from previous instances is that they brought casualties to South Korea. For South Korea, they needed to take actions, so that they have attacked back resulting in more damage in North Korea. As far as I know this is first time South Korea taking a serious action upon the assaults of North Korea. This has led many of South Korean citizens to worry whether there would be tension rising for a possible war.

North Korea seems to be performing its repetitive routine towards the world just like a child wanting an attention from the parents. However, there’s a need for taking actions towards such aggressive methods leaving the casualties to Korean Peninsula. The United Nation needs to take action for such aggressive assaults by North Korea.

Pray for the reconciliation among separated Koreans, and hope for something like Berlin wall tumbling down would happen within the Korean Peninsula. Also, pray for missionaries sent to North Korea, who live anonymously there: no one knows their names and their existence in North Korea. In some extreme cases, no one knows of their survival. Finally, pray that North Korea would join the community of one body of Christ and being able to glorify God’s name as they did 100 years ago.

REFLECTIONS

New Year’s Resolution Blues

by Andrew Zylstra

Jonathan Edward’s Resolutions

“1. Resolved: To live with all might while I do live.

“2. Resolved: Never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can.

“3. Resolved: Never to do anything which I should despise or think meanly of in another.

“4. Resolved: Never to do anything out of revenge.

“5. Resolved: Never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.”

—Ohio Sunday School Worker²

If you are anything like me, you have high hopes every year coming out of the holidays. “This is the year that I will start living the life I was meant to lead. Starting now, I won’t settle for anything less than the best version of myself.” These are the things I tell myself as I eat huge meals around Christmas and drink a little too much wine on New Year’s Eve.... Every year.

January arrives and I am focused. Self-improvement is at the forefront of the mind. My wife and I sit down and plan out healthy meals for our family. I find the discipline to sit in the living room without having the television on. The house is clean. The clothes are washed. The kids are happy because I choose to be fully present with them while we play the Princess Memory Game and read books together. I recommit myself to a healthy prayer and devotional life. I read ahead in my classes and start going to the gym. “This is it,” I think. “This could really be the year.”

Then someone in the family gets sick. It’s nothing serious, but my wife and I have to reshuffle our busy lives for a few days. The television goes back on because I have run out of creative activities for the kids. Pressed to stay on top of things, meal choices fall victim to whatever is easiest. Studying takes a back seat while we

² Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996).

operate in “crisis mode.” Going to the gym falls to the very bottom of the priority list. And then we get through it.

Unfortunately, the snow and cold weather of Michigan January have depleted me of much of the enthusiasm that I had a couple of weeks ago. In “crisis mode,” I fell right back into the unhealthy patterns that I hoped to eliminate this year. I make a valiant effort to go back to the gym, but now it seems so crowded and practically everyone there looks twice as good as I do. I am a few days behind in my studies, so I settle in to “staying afloat mode.” My family takes a hit because “staying afloat mode” uses up a lot of energy just dealing with stress. “Welcome back, old friend. I guess we have one more year together.”

STOP! Do we worship the God of second chances or don't we?

For Christians, the whole notion of New Year's Resolutions should do nothing more than remind us of our commitment to personal development *every day*. January first is no magical date that God set aside as special for personal change. God rarely works overnight miracles, so why should we expect him to? Every day is a special day in which God invites us to partner with him in the process of our sanctification. We confess our sins at the close of each and every day. We wake the following morning as new creations with endless possibilities to grow in our relationship with our Lord.

I began this article with a list of resolutions created by Jonathan Edwards, one of our ancestors in the faith. His resolutions are much different than the ones that I have come up with for myself in the past. These are big-picture resolutions that are not easily measured without deep reflection. They are not goals to be accomplished, but rather commitments to be wrestled with on a daily basis.

So don't lose heart. As February begins, I can either look in the mirror at someone who failed again this year, or I can look at someone who, by the grace of God, is going to do the best he can to succeed today. Jonathan Edwards gives us a brief framework to use as a backdrop for all the aspirations we have in becoming who we were meant to be in Christ. So try to maintain a God's-eye view of your life. Fail optimistically and learn from it. Succeed humbly and give credit where it is due. And approach each new day with the excitement and motivation of January first.

REFLECTIONS

The Gospel According to Stallone

by AJ Gretz

When I was home for Thanksgiving break, my family engaged in the typical rituals associated with the holiday - eating large quantities of turkey, cranberries, and various starches, visiting with family, and watching rented movies. This year was no exception. We spent the night of black Friday at my parents house, and for several sweat-pantsed, half-comatose hours we sprawled out on couches and floor and engaged in a movie marathon.

Among this year's choices: *The Expendables*, a movie which features just about every popular action star from the last twenty years shooting enormous guns with their enormous biceps, and shouting witty dialogue like “You best back the [*expletive*] off of I'll blow that Fu-Manchu back into the 60's!”

There was a time in my life when I had a deep love for cheesy, goofy action movies (I still love *Predator*). But as we were watching the movie and making jokes about the bad dialogue and the crazy amount of bad guys Sylvester Stallone kills without reloading his gun, I felt unsettled in my spirit. I was uncomfortable with the idea that we were taking joy and laughing over gruesome images of death.

Over the last couple of years, I have found myself struggling with realistic depictions of violence. I believe in a God who says human life is an immeasurably sacred thing. Yet our culture tries to sell us images of revenge and intense violence day in and day out. For example, one of the most popular video games series right now, *Call of Duty*, is a very realistic simulation of modern warfare. These games sell like they are made of gold. Especially among younger men. What does it say about us that the very thing most humans would never want

to experience - taking a life - is something they are willing to pay \$60+ to “pretend?”

I do not necessarily think violent media makes everyone act overtly violently. Instead, I think it’s influence is much more subtle. I believe all of our violence desensitizes us to the sacredness of life. In fact, it makes us less sensitive, period.

What does it say about the state of my heart when I giggle like an idiot over a rocket splattering some guy in 100 pieces? Am I just being ironic? Or am I forgetting that war, and the taking of life, is a grave, grave matter in the Scriptures. A major hope of the Kingdom of God is that war, and death, will no longer exist. Instead, “He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore” (Isaiah 2:4).

A love for violent media keeps us from being able to hear God, and neighbor, and read into the subtleties and complexities of their hearts. Why? Because we can only successfully do those things when we are full of God’s power and Spirit. And neither will grow as much as possible in a heart that celebrates death - the fruit of sin.

One thing we need to realize is that every time we watch a show or spend money on a movie, we are voting, in a sense. My ratings make a show’s commercials more valuable, enabling the show to continue. My money encourages a movie studio or a video game company to make more products like the ones I spend money on, because I am demonstrating a demand for that kind of product. So as Christians, I believe we need to be selective in how we participate in, and enable, the culture. Otherwise, we may be promoting images, ideas, and values that run directly counter to the Gospel message. Thus, our media habits shouldn't look just like everyone else. We need to put our money where our mouth is (bad pun intended – forgive me), and demonstrate Kingdom values in all of our decisions. And that includes our entertainment.

And so, as a Church, we must be open with one another about our media choices. And we shouldn’t be afraid to challenge one another about them, either. I know that I have had several conversations about this with other seminary students, and they have expressed similar feelings. We need to be talking about this. Because it’s not always easy to discern where and how to draw the line. For example, even though I wasn’t especially comfortable, I felt like it was important for some of my family relationships to stay present during *The Expendables*. But I don’t always know what to do. I need the perspective of my brothers and sisters in Christ to help me see when I am being loving, and when I am being wishy-washy. Without their help, I may be listening closer to the gospel of Sylvester Stallone more than that of Jesus Christ.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” - Hebrews 10:23-24

POETRY

S__n

by **Scott De Young**

While moving past man and humanity—
Equipped with only meaningless discourse—
We return to waste and void,
Playfully pursuing everything and nothing.
("The center cannot stay," they say.

“Things must fall apart *ad infinitum*.”)

Once it was thought that all teaching was of things or signs:
 (“Things are learnt through signs,” they said.)
 Now we have no things, no names, no ...
 (I cannot even say what we do not have.)
 At best we have only concepts and sound-images;
 Even the bees have lost their *buzz*.

Signs can no longer be taken for wonders:
 The celestial rose... the rose... the concept of “rose”—
 Merely an impression in the advanced science of semiology,
 Whose odor is no longer immediate
 And whose beauty is merely an illusion.

FEATURES

Music Review

The Age of Adz by Sufjan Stevens

by **Brandon Haan**

Sufjan Stevens is cool.

Which was why the CCM (Christian Contemporary Music) world practically pounced on him a couple of years ago. Because not only is Sufjan cool, but he’s also a Christian...or at least he was; it depends on who you talk to nowadays. That’s not something you can say about a lot of modern Christian musicians. Not many Christian artists in recent years have been able to exist within the CCM industry and still reach a respectable level of mainstream recognition, so when those few artists of faith who can both articulately use their faith in their work and create moving, meaningful art that speaks beyond Christian circles pop up every couple of years, the CCMers tend to latch on a bit.

There was just one problem when it came to Sufjan though: he didn’t seem to want to be anyone’s poster child. Between 2003 and 2005, Stevens, a multi-instrumentalist from Michigan, blew up out of the New York city music scene and into the national spotlight. His coming out party followed three critically acclaimed albums in three years, two of which were state-themed compositions (one for Michigan and Illinois each) and an extensive tour of the country. Additionally, his effortless self-promotion (riding the rumor he would do an album for every state) and boyish charm made him even more likeable. And then, for the Christian media community, his evangelic background (he graduated from Hope College in Holland, MI) and seemingly introspective, developed faith made him irresistible. He was the CCM Holy Grail: a Christian musician who was actually culturally relevant and widely acclaimed. And the CCM industry went a little nuts over him. There were articles, reviews, and interviews about and with Sufjan hitting just about every major Christian media outlet. Reviewers and essayists picked apart his lyrics and instrumentation, scouring his recent albums for, well, everything they could get their hands on. Interviewers probed his faith, personal life, creative methods, and artistic theory. But the biggest question was always the same. What’s Sufjan going to do next?

But then something happened. Instead of heading out to begin his next big thing, Sufjan kind of disappeared from a cultural perspective. Following *Illinois*, he released only a Christmas compilation and B-sides album. 2009 saw the release of an instrumental ode to the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway complete with an accompanying film piece, but as far as an actual, fully fleshed-out Sufjan album, there was nothing. He performed live only a handful of times during the next few years, and the conflicting rumors of both the next state album and a debilitating creative collapse surfaced. When Sufjan himself did finally speak out towards the end of 2009, his statements were far from reassuring. He expressed his own uncertainty about whether he would continue with music or not, and more and more whispers abounded.

The rampant speculation ran wild until Sufjan's *All Delighted People* EP surfaced in the summer of 2010. The new work appeased fans and gave way to a collective sigh of relief from the larger indie music industry. Sufjan was still making music, and we seemed out of the danger zone. But no one realized in just what fashion Sufjan would fully storm back onto the scene. The full-length *The Age of Adz* followed *All Delighted People* only two months later, and that collective sigh was quickly retracted. Sufjan was certainly back, but he wasn't at all the same.

If *Michigan*, *Seven Swans*, and *Illinois* are Sufjan's canon, in many ways, *The Age of Adz* is his admission of heresy. Not only is the album a reversion to his pre-success electronica experiments, but it's also a dark exploration of the recent neurosis that privately nagged Sufjan the person and crippled Sufjan the artist over the past couple of years. Lyrically, the artist seems lost and confused on *The Age of Adz* as he tries to search for some kind of firm footing. He delves into the frustrations and pressure he faced as anticipation for his next album mounted following *Illinois*. Aimed at those whose overwhelming expectations so paralyzed him, specifically those in the Christian media world, *The Age of Adz* plays almost as a defiant statement that Sufjan no longer cares what anyone thinks, in fact that he *can't* care in order to make true art or to continue his own relationship with God, such as it still is.

Musically, Sufjan's efforts on *The Age of Adz* are at times minimalistic and rhythmic, though at others chaotic and bloated. The beauty of the album lies in Sufjan's ability to seamlessly transition from contemplative orchestration to nuanced electronic barrages of sound and back again, making for a record of complex but balanced compositions reflecting all sides of his formidable talent.

In short, the listener encounters a deep meditation in *The Age of Adz* as Sufjan himself tries to escape the poster child pressure imposed upon him by forces outside his control. It's his effort at proving to everyone that he just wants to make honest art, and he can't keep doing what everyone wants or expects him to if he's to be successful in that goal. Thus, *The Age of Adz* will certainly alienate fans looking for more of Sufjan's banjo-driven neo-folk fare, and it will also push his more mainstream Christian supporters away, given the graphic and, at times, vulgar lyrical nature of the record. But credit must be given where credit is due: Sufjan has done what it seems like he wanted to. He made a work of art. He created something worth listening to and wrestling with. He walked down his own dark night of the soul, and he wrote an album out of it. Like many others, he didn't come out of it unscathed, and neither has his work, but he came out honestly, and he maintained his artistic integrity in doing so, which is what makes *The Age of Adz* worth the listen.

Kerux Staff 2010-2011

AJ Gretz, Co-Editor

Brandon Haan, Co-Editor

Andrew Zylstra, Editorial Assistant

Joshua Smith, Contributor

Jin Su Hwang, Contributor

Sara Bosscher, Contributor

Scott De Young, Contributor

Your Name, Contributor (So please write!)

Interested in writing for *Kerux*? Contact one of the Editors listed above.