

Dark, intricate walls stretched above, beholding robed figures imprisoned by wood. Muted colors created jumbled scenes scattered upon glass. Immenseness swallowed me. Organ chords, the clatter of stark and twisting treble overlaid an ominous bass that shook the tender intestines within me, which I became very aware of. The ideas of “humanness” and “mortality” danced about my mind. I stared up at a looming God of wood, and discerned that the carving resembled my own flesh; peeking ribs, and weathered hair. I felt threatened by our similarity, or supposed lack thereof. My thoughts felt dangerous. What is an insignificant child to be comparing a figure as great as the Lord themselves’ to my own flawed brethren? My breath ought to be taken from me for such naïve thoughts. “The creation cannot dare compare itself to the creator”

Religion brings people together, and also tears them apart. Some shape their identities off of it, like a golden mold, outlining their being with the intent of casting a divine goodness. Others see it as a mask, forcing you to cast a façade; a shell of a human, restricted from personal movement. Religion brings comfort, it brings pain, belonging, ostracism, and purpose. In my experience, it has done a bit of everything.

When I was thirteen years old, I began questioning my place in a greater sense, as many hormone-charged, angst-ridden teenagers tend to do at one point or another. I myself believe that I have the aptitude to think myself through anything; that no matter how unsure I am of something, I can come to a temporary yet satisfiable conclusion (whether it will take me thirty minutes or a hundred some hours to consider). When challenging my secure belief in the afterlife, I quickly began meddling with the idea of nihilism; the query that my sense of security

in the end had been false; that my ever so thorough thinking process of each positive or negative choice in life would only leave me with greater fruitlessness; without any sense of end goal.

As this idea began seeping further into me; a slow poison of enlightenment, I felt for the first time a sense of diffidence with my place in the world. This time in my life more attuned me to the comfort religion can bring to people. Sometimes the idea of something greater than myself intimidates me, the thought of an otherworldly presence looming over me when I enter my church, and the idea of rigid judgement at all times can bring me stress. However, I also have chosen to recognize that for many; religion is a beaten path of life, which leads to an ensured finale.

Early sociologists, such as Emilie Durkheim, believed religion served predominantly as a way to keep society together. We love structure as well as commonality, which both can be experienced when following a group religion. I find this concept beautiful; that we are such thoughtful creatures who look towards purpose.

Science and religion aren't often thought to get along. They talk over each other, push and shove, each wanting to come out on top. They're like children playing a game of "King of the Hill", who eventually forget about the game itself, and rather begin taking unrelated jabs at each other. I've noticed that it isn't as good of a look to take the word of religion over that of science in 21st century America, and I struggle to decide if I believe it is a progressive or dogmatic mentality; to push the concept of science always prevailing.

As I have learned more about religion, and while I continue to learn more about myself and my beliefs, I believe that an open mind is important. I've come to recognize that what I

believe may come from my culture rather than my inheritance, and that it's okay to reshape, redecide, or stick with whatever I may believe.