The Way

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THE WAY

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by

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Dr. Ron Stottlemyer,
Director

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This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the
Department of English Writing.

Director

Reader

Reader

Date
Ad Majoram Dei Gloriam

--St. Ignatius of Loyola

Lord, may You be the Hand
and I the glove.

--A. H. Pitstick
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Introduction

Life is a sum of simultaneous journeys. Some of these excursions are physical, but the majority are intangible spiritual or interpersonal pilgrimages. In our spiritual as well as physical journeys, the way we choose, the road we travel, will, as Robert Frost penned, make all the difference. This metaphor may appear overused, but only because it remains such an accurate description of the human experience.

This thesis is a reflection upon the great spiritual exodus we all make, to lesser or greater degrees, into the realm of God, which both envelopes and internally supports our natural world. In this journey, dark forces confront us, seeking to tempt us from the true path. As consequences of our choices at such crossroads, we either follow roads that lead into forests of death, where cutthroat bandits lurk, or we travel the open highways of the Divine King.

These examples are extremes, and many smaller paths run between the two, yet it seems wise not to explore the thick forest in search of a highway. For though many speak to the contrary, not all roads in this realm "lead to Rome," the Eternal City, the archetypical capital of the kingdom; our choices may lead us in precisely the opposite direction. In the natural world, we may end up as prey for dangerous animals if we get sidetracked into the wilds; just so, our eternal destiny may not be pleasant if we lose sight of, or lose altogether, our final destination.
Happily, we do not always travel alone. The King himself often journeys with us, though we do not always recognize him. And sometimes other companions help and guide us, though occasionally they lead us astray with "short-cuts."

The following poem serves well, I think, as an epigram for both my thesis and this serious journey of ours.

The Edge of Eternity

The day is soon coming when all will be black
and white.
As always, I leave the choice to you.
But shades of grey...now a wide and easy path,
Will narrow
and become
A Knife Edge...
Upon which no man of earth will chance to stand.

An edge
that will sever forever
darkness and light...
My Children of the day...
and the lost,
who have chosen
the night.

--Gail C. Copeland
The Offer

As Bill pulled the tavern door shut behind him, the icy fingers of a chill wind groped for his neck. Bill shivered, digging his hands into his coat pockets, but then drew in a deep breath of the crisp air to clear his mind of the smoke and sticky-sour odor of spilt beer that were trademarks of the underlit dive behind him. A battered Greyhound bus, shuttling its cargo of dreamers across the nation, rumbled by. Jerking his collar up against the prying wind, Bill watched the bus shudder to a halt at the red light. As it started again with a cough of acrid exhaust, grey as the gathering clouds overhead, Bill turned away and walked slowly around the tired building with its flaking paint.

The dark windows of the upstair flats stared hollowly down at him. The gravel parking lot in back of the building probably wouldn't be the safest place later at night, but now it was only dusk, and Bill was alone in the lot. A few cars were already parked in their regular spots, like horses bedded down in their stalls for the night. Most of them, including Bill's, were older models with dents like battle scars.

Bill stood next to his car, the wind teasing his hair. He kicked an empty beer bottle clinking away from the front wheel, then poked at the tire with his scuffed brown shoe. Ten hours spent ranging the streets, looking for a job. Too bad he wasn't getting paid for wearing down the pavement!

He held a wind-chilled hand against his throbbing temple. He still couldn't believe he had lost his job at the office yesterday. "You don't put enough of yourself into your job, Bill," Mr. Washburn had told him, light reflecting off his boss's thick
black glasses and bald head. "You could do a lot better, even move up in the company—
if you applied yourself. And World Products, Inc. needs someone in that position who
will, well, work. I'm sorry, Bill, but I'm going to have to let you go."

Dazed, Bill didn't hear the rest of Mr. Washburn's speech. Instead of Mr.
Washburn's clean-shaven face, navy suit, and barbershop tie, an image of his new
nineteen-inch color T.V. with stereo sound seemed to hover above the desk. Then, the
office fading completely, the T.V. sat regally on its dark oak stand in Bill's apartment.
A broken-in sofa slouched against the opposite wall. He saw himself relaxing on the
couch in the days before he bought the T.V., reading a paperback war novel from the
short bookshelf that stood near the sofa; a goldtone floor lamp peered over his shoulder
from the corner. But he hadn't read much since he had bought the television. Did he
have three payments or four left on it? With a rush of panic, Bill tried to remember just
when he had bought the set.

Figuring he had three more payments to make, his eyes refocused on Mr.
Washburn, who was looking closely at Bill through narrowed eyes. Bill realized a few
silent seconds had elapsed since Mr. Washburn had stopped talking. Mumbling "I see,"
Bill had stood up rather stiffly, turned, and walked out of the office.

After taking the elevator down to the underground garage, he had just sat in his
car for some time. Finally he decided to walk home; maybe the air would do him good.
He spent the evening dully watching Laverne and Shirley reruns, then skipped dinner and
went to bed early.

Lying in bed the next morning with his stomach growling at him, he had
considered what he should do. He still had his two weeks with World, Inc., so he
decided to skip out today and try to set up at least a temporary job. Let them worry!
He had made his way around all his familiar haunts, willing to tend bar, bus
tables, even wash dishes, but his buds who owned the bars and taverns were all full up,
and they were real sorry, too, just like his boss.

So now Bill stood next to his battered car in the unpaved lot, his last known
chance fading behind him as he had closed the bar’s worn door. What an awful day!
The persistent breeze finally found its way down Bill’s collar, and Bill twitched
as a chill ran down his spine like water down an icicle. As he glanced up, a car pulled
up on the other side of Bill’s car, its tires crunching on the gravel. The dark car was
sleek, with tinted windows, though not without a pock here and there on its pitch-colored
sides. Its lines reminded Bill of a ’68 Barracuda, but for some reason he felt it was older
than that. Still, the owner must have taken good care of it, for the engine rumbled as
it sat there, idled. Bright green and red racing stripes flared into flames behind the
wheels. The license plate read "CHAINS."

Bill cocked an eyebrow as he read the plate. Great, he thought. It’s probably
some punk with chains sewn onto his greasy leather jacket. I don’t think I want to
know. As he put his hand on the door handle of his car, the black car’s hum cut off.

To his surprise, the man who got out of the black car wasn’t a punk at all. He
was wearing a leather jacket, but it wasn’t greasy; in fact, it looked quite stylish. As the
man turned from closing his door, he saw Bill and nodded in greeting. Bill could still
make out his features in the dimming light. The raven hair cut long on top, smooth jaw,
and strong features reminded Bill of the guys at World Products. His coworkers were
young businessmen, all about thirty years old, at ease and enthusiastic in their work. In
fact, file the cheekbones down a bit, fill in the lips, lighten those dark eyes, straighten
the bump of that broken nose, and the newcomer could pass as a fair double for Bill. Bill blinked. "CHAINS" didn’t seem to fit this fellow at all.

An unlit cigarette hanging from his lips, the stranger patted the pockets of his bomber jacket. Looking up at Bill hopefully, he mumbled around the cigarette, "Got a light on you?"

Bill’s fingers closed on the matchbook he had picked up in the tavern. "Sure," he returned. Walking around the front of his car, he lit a match, then held it to the cigarette. The man closed his eyes and took a long draw. Letting his cigarette hand dangle at his side and tipping his head back, he opened his eyes and blew the smoke out in a stream toward the light that blinked from high on the back wall of the tavern.

"Thanks," he breathed.

"No problem," Bill replied. His voice sounding thin in the cool air, he continued, "Just curious, though. What’s with the 'CHAINS' on your license plates? It’s kind of an unusual choice."

The dark-haired man grinned at Bill’s question. He fished around in the pocket of his leather jacket, then pulled out a key ring. He held it up in front of Bill. Bill made out a circle of chain links large enough to fit over the man’s wrist. From each link, more than a dozen keys swung on a regular circular keyring. "My keys," the man replied. "I have so many of them, separating them like this helps me find the one I want faster. I decided to use 'CHAINS' on my license plates, because," he said jingling the keys, "Man, I’d be dead without these."

"Geez, that’s a lot of keys," Bill said, impressed. "What’re they all for?"

The man in the leather jacket chuckled. "Doors," he said. "Oh, a few are for my car and such, but the bulk of them are for doors at work."
"What kind of work do you do?" asked Bill, a tone of incredulity in his voice. He couldn't think of any job right off that would require that many keys, except perhaps janitorial work, and this suave youngish man didn't strike Bill as a janitor.

"I'm a trader," he replied. "Well, I 'buy' things, but since I don't always use money as the medium of exchange, I think it's more accurate to say 'trader.' Most of the keys are for where I keep the stuff I buy, kind of like storage units."

"Buy? What do you buy? People usually work to sell stuff, not buy it."

"Oh, it varies. Sometimes I buy masterpieces, sometimes things that people think are worthless but really are priceless, and quite often I buy stuff that really is junk. To a certain extent, I suppose you could say I'm a junk collector, except that a lot of the stuff I have is really good stuff."

"But, masterpieces, huh? You'd be some kind of art collector, then, right?"

"Yeah, I guess that's a pretty good description."

Bill shook his head slightly and looked down at the keyring the man was swinging in his hand. The stranger took another drag on his cigarette, then flicked it with his thumb. Little flecks of firey ash danced in the air, and then fell extinguished to the ground. Boy, Bill thought, this guy must really be in the goods to be able to go around collecting junk, not to mention all his priceless masterpieces. But maybe it isn't just the guy, though; maybe it's his employer who is doing so well. And maybe I could work there.

Sound casual, thought Bill. "So, uh, where do you work?" he asked.

"For Hell," came the straight reply. "Hell on Earth."
Bill looked at the leather jacket, the car, a ring that glittered on the man’s left hand. "Oh, come on. It can’t be that bad. Look at you. Looks like you’re doing all right."

The man laughed. "Oh, I’m doing fine. But, I’m serious. I really do work for Hell. You know all those things I buy; well, a lot of them are souls. You know, the Devil goes around and buys people’s souls. I’m sure you know about all that."

Bill coughed a puzzled laugh. Maybe this wasn’t the first bar the man with the black car had hung out at today. He glanced around the parking lot, but no other cars had pulled in since "the man from Hell" had arrived. Bill shook his head. This guy’s got to be playing with me, he thought; but what the heck, I’ll go along with his little joke.

"Yeah, sure, I’ve heard about that. So you work for the Big Man Downstairs, huh? How’d you get into that line of work?"

"Oh, it’s real easy. You only got to do one job, to prove your ability, you know, and then you’re in. The perks are real nice, too: power, wealth, pleasure, whatever gives you kicks, all scaled as you move down the ladder." Pausing, he looked at Bill from the corners of his eyes, and said, "You looking for a job?"

Bill pulled his coat closer around his body. It was quite cold out, and that aggravating wind was looking for another way to get past his defenses.

"Actually, I am," he laughed. "What’s the job I’d have to do to get in?"

"Well, I buy things, remember? That’s my job. But, if you’re going to work for the Big D, you have to buy something, too. So you can buy something from me, I can buy your soul from you, and it’ll work out fine for both of us," explained the stranger.

"Sell my soul? Well, I don’t...."
The other man interrupted. "No, no. You've got it wrong. See, you're not selling your soul; you're buying something from me. Your soul's just the price. Everything has a price, right? Like, what would you want to buy: power's nice, or influence, or money's good. What do you want?"

"Well, let's say money," Bill replied hesitantly. "Now what?"

"Easy," the stranger returned. He held up his massive key chain. "Remember all my keys? Watch this." Jerking his head for Bill to follow, he dropped his cigarette in the gravel and crushed it with a few twists of the heel of his black cowboy boot. He walked to the back of his car. The reflected light from the amber parking lot lights seemed to drip off the sleek lines of the car.

"Now, look here," the man in the leather jacket said, holding up his key ring. "I just find the right key--Here it is--and I open the trunk with it."

He turned the key in the lock. With a click, the hood of the trunk popped open an inch. The man pushed it all the way back. The light from the uncovered bulb on the bar's back wall and the two parking lot lights, one at each far corner of the lot, could not reach around the raised hood and their turned backs. Shadows seemed to seep out of the trunk, but the man plunged his arm into the darkness. Pulling a black briefcase up on the edge of the trunk, he turned towards Bill. A ray of light shone between them, ending in a dim puddle on the briefcase.

"Now," he said, "how much money did you want?"

"How much? Well, let's say, oh, ten million dollars. How about that?" Bill answered. Despite his initial, more casual interest in a possible job, Bill found himself thinking more seriously of the situation. Here might be a solution to all his problems.
"O.k. Here goes." The stranger bent over the briefcase, fiddling with the two combination locks built into the front of the case next to the handle. "Ta daa." He straightened up and opened the lid of the briefcase.

Bill gasped. In the briefcase, bundles of unwrinkled bills lay in neat rows. They fit so perfectly it appeared the briefcase had been made specifically with the dimensions of money in mind.

"Ten million dollars. Just like you asked. Care to buy it?" he offered.

"Ten million dollars? Whoa." Bill put out his hand toward the open briefcase, but the dark-haired man snapped the briefcase shut, almost catching Bill's fingers.

"Ah-ah. Sorry. One can't be too careful in this business, you understand," the man explained.

"I see," said Bill. He rubbed his hands together. They were sticky with sweat, and his fingertips itched. Ten million dollars! Boy, he thought, that would do me for life. Think of all the things I could do with that, all the things I could buy. Heck, I could buy out my old company and tell old Mr. Washburn how sorry I was to see him go. He laughed in his mind at that turnabout. A new car, designer clothes, a gold watch, make it two gold watches, a place in Beverly Hills. Wait a minute, property in Beverly Hills isn't cheap. I wonder if ten million will do it?

He returned from creating his world among the rich and famous and found that he was wringing his hands so tightly they had turned all white and red. The man in the leather jacket was looking at him strangely, very intently, but Bill didn't notice.

"Well, ten million really isn't all that much," Bill began, trying to sound nonchalant. "If I were going to buy something, I'd want to buy the best. You understand what I mean?"
"Oh, I understand. Yes, I understand quite well," the stranger replied.

"So, you can make it like, say, fifty million?" Bill asked.

"Oh, quite easily." The man bent over the briefcase again, turning the locks. Straightening, he opened the case. Again Bill saw the tantalizing rows of money, but it didn’t appear that there was any more money than before. "Bigger denominations," the man from Hell explained.

"That’s a neat trick," Bill replied. He stroked his chin with his hand. Boy, this guy was pretty cool.

"Well, do you want to buy it, then?" pressed the raven-haired trader. "It’s quite a deal, not one you’d want to pass up, I don’t think. Fifty million dollars...." His calculating eyes glittered, but Bill was looking at his worn shoes.

"Oh, I don’t know," Bill dallied. If the stranger could make it fifty million, why not more? He thought he’d see what this guy could do. Bargain a little. He looked up. "Fifty million isn’t that much either, really, if you think about it. There are people who have a lot more than that. Maybe if it were a billion dollars...."

The man from Hell sighed in exasperation. This deal was taking longer than he had expected. "Ok, but this is the last change," he said. Still, since he was using minimal resources, he would make big points with the Horrific Head Honcho himself if the deal panned out. Bending over the briefcase, he chuckled to himself. Humans were so stupid sometimes. They never got quite what they bargained for from Old Nick. All that glitters....He turned the locks, and reopened the briefcase. "One billion dollars, hot off the press. My last offer. What do you say? Will you buy it? I’m only asking for your one soul in exchange."
Bill couldn’t believe his eyes. One billion dollars! What an opportunity! He’d be rich, powerful. Anything he wanted could be his; the world would be at his feet.

"Not everyone gets a chance like this, Bill," came the seductive words of the dark-haired man. "You’re a very lucky man, a very special fellow. What do you say? One billion dollars...."

The breeze that had been toying with Bill all evening caught the man’s last words and whispered them in Bill’s ears as it wrapped itself around him. One billion dollars....Still, to sell his soul....

"And remember," the man interrupted Bill’s thoughts. "You’re not selling your soul like they always make out in the stories. You’re buying a very special commodity, and you have a right to use anything in your possession to acquire something you want. It’s a trade, really. Your soul, as is, for my briefcase, as is. It’s like trading your couch for a T.V., instead of using money. We just use a different type of collateral. You’re gaining a lot, one billion dollars to be exact, and you aren’t really losing anything. Nothing substantial, anyway," he shrugged.

Bill looked up and met the man’s eyes. They had seemed a deep blue earlier, but now it was hard to tell. A very tempting offer. No, not an offer, he corrected himself. A chance. A chance to buy a billion dollars.

Bill took a deep breath, feeling caught by the magnetism of the stranger’s eyes. The air was strangely still, as if the storm were about to break. The parking lot lights, the House of Charity shelter across the alley, the flashy black car at his side, everything melted away, leaving only the stranger’s midnight-colored eyes, mesmerizing as inky whirlpools. He said, "I’ll take it."
The stranger's eyes gleamed. "You've made an excellent choice," he smiled.
"This really was a steal."

He closed the briefcase with a snap and handed it to Bill. "The locks won't work
anymore, so you don't have to worry about that. It's all yours. As for my payment, I'll
be back at a later date to collect." He pulled the hood of the trunk screeching down.
As it snapped shut, the wailing noise stopped. He brushed past Bill and opened the door
to his car.

Bill stood where he was, clutching the briefcase to his chest. It felt warm against
the front of his coat. One billion dollars! He was holding one billion dollars! He
couldn't quite believe it.

The man slammed his door, and Bill jerked out of his daze. As he stepped back
from the car, the man rolled down his window, slipped a pair of sunglasses on, and
grinned at Bill. "Nice doing business with you." The window was rolled up again, the
car with the "CHAINS" license plate revved, backed up, and with a spray of gravel
roared out of the empty lot.

"Yeah, nice doing business with you, too," mumbled Bill as he watched the car
speed away. The sky rumbled and a few raindrops hit him, but Bill didn't notice. He
stood there alone for a moment in the pool of light cast by one of the parking lot lights.
One billion dollars!

Bill dropped to his knees in the gravel and set the case down in front of him.
Putting one hand on each side of the briefcase, he slowly and reverently pushed the lid
back. There it was, all the money still in neat bundles, just waiting to be used.
Bill picked one bundle up and caressed the dry, crisp packet in his hands. He broke the little band that held the bills together. Holding one of the bills up to his eyes, he scanned the curly writing on the ten-thousand-dollar bill.

As he examined it, his mouth dried. He jerked his head up, but the man in the black car was long since gone. He whispered one word to himself, and then leaped up, the bills falling in a scattered pile at his feet. On the face of hundreds of bills, the smile of a man with horns laughed up at him as Bill’s anguished scream echoed in the empty lot, "Counterfeit!" And the tears of heaven fell.
Meditations I

The generous heart counts not the price, but the need.

* * *

Death picked two flowers, ethereal as souls.

One sheltered a dew of goodness in its center.
Death gently placed this blossom in a pot filled with the water of everlasting life.

The other had let the sun burn away its grace.
Death threw the weed on the snapping fire.

* * *

May I not "Please, God," as often as I please God.

* * *

Ah! how she pined to do great things for God, but there were not the opportunities such as she imagined. So she just was nice, and patient.
Then she died, when she was still quite young.
When she got to Heaven, she cried bitter tears because she had not done anything great.
God took her in His arms and said,
"My Child, you did what was great. You did My Will."
There are two ways to show love:
   With arms closed, as in embracing;
   and with arms outstretched, as in giving a gift.

* * *

Our greatest creation is what we make of ourselves.

* * *

We are like candles. Our meaning in life is to bring light to the world. And we are consumed in the process, our being becoming joined with the Light.

* * *

My soul has long since fled
the meager wire cage of my heart,
and found its resting place
in the bower of God’s love.

It has returned to the leafy bough
of its eden birthplace.
Hatred consumes the hater before it destroys the hated.

* * *

One must walk a mile in another Man's shoes
Before one can walk on water with Him.

* * *

Beware of swamps.

Temptations sparkle and float like fireflies in the distance behind the trees;
what looks like firm ground may quickly become quagmire.

Stay in the boat, wherever it goes;
To disembark is sure death.

* * *

When you grope for God,
it is with only one hand.

He already holds the other.
The stars, ah, the stars!

Each good deed, however small, is like a star. Slowly, one by one, they push the darkness back. Though the effect of one star alone may be hard to discern, yet together they brighten the sable sky, give startling and refreshing beauty to the night, and lead the wayward back to the True Path.

* * *

Moral is just one letter away from Morale.

* * *

God is a Fisherman.

He gives us more line when we fight against Him, but reels us in when we get close. In either case, God never lets go.

It is the fish, attracted to the bait perhaps despite itself, that breaks the line.
For many people, Mathematics is almost completely unrelated to life. Outside the little arithmetic they use to balance their checkbooks or to compute their taxes, the world of Math seems totally detached from "normal" life. Science, at least, is based in the physical world around us, they think, a world they can touch. Mathematics, in contrast, seems to concern itself solely with an intangible world of numbers. And while Science and its cousin Technology often stand at the heart of conflicts in our world, Mathematics merely observes from its ivory tower, seemingly unaffected.

Mathematicians, however, those who understand more deeply the nature of Math, know that Math is fundamentally derived from the world in which we live. Mathematical relationships describe the geometry of a honeycomb or a nautilus shell, the decay of radioactive material, the curve of a river bed. Mathematics could be seen as a pure form of Physics, which investigates the laws that govern natural events. Such laws are always mathematical. By studying the abstract dance of Math and noting how precisely it describes the real world, mathematicians see a deep unity in the order of the universe, a unity in which everything is tied together by the thin silver lines of formulas. Here mathematicians catch a glimpse of the mind of God.

Yet even the relatively uninitiated might share such a glimpse, for one area of Math is most evidently tied to God: the concept of infinity—-but, what is infinity?

Concerning God, one might say that infinity refers to God’s unlimited, unbounded nature. He has the power to know everything, to do anything, to be anywhere and everywhere, at any time and at all times. One would puzzle that mathematical infinity,
on the other hand, must have something to do with numbers. It cannot be the last number since no matter how large a number you think of, you can always add one to it to get an even larger number. So, what is mathematical infinity and what can we learn about God from it?

Let's think first about our intuitive guess that infinity must have something to do with the idea of a "last number." If I asked you, "How many numbers are there?" you would probably answer, "An infinite number," which is the correct answer. Now, any time you answer the question, "How many?" you answer with a cardinal number: that is, simply a number that tells how many. (Numbers can also be numerals. A numeral refers to position, like "numero uno." If you say, "I'm number one," you mean you're the best; you have the highest position. But if I ask "How many are there of you?" and you say, "One," you are answering with a cardinal. So any number has two functions: to be a cardinal and tell how many, or to be numeral and answer what position.)

Back to infinity. I asked, "How many numbers are there?" and you answered, "An infinite number." Your answer tells me how many, so your answer must be a cardinal. A cardinal is always a number (unless it's a bird or a bishop), so "an infinite number" must be a number similar to the way "one" is a number. However, we can't name "an infinite number" using the digits 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 or 9 because to form a number from these digits is to form a number less than infinity. Even 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 isn't infinity, because I can find a larger number by adding one to it: 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,001. So we need a new symbol for our cardinal "an infinite number." The symbol to be used
was decided by Georg Cantor, a man who spent a lot of time studying infinity in the 19th
century. He used the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, aleph. It looks like $\aleph$.

Then a problem came up. He found a number that is greater than $\aleph$! One
could trace his argument using set theory like this. Suppose someone shows you two
pieces of candy and asks you what you want to do with them. You have four choices:
you can eat piece A, you can eat piece B, you can eat both of them, or you can eat
neither of them. Using math notation, we would say that a set of two things (A, B)
implies the four possible ways of grouping, or combinations of, the two things: (A, B,
AB, 0). It can be proved that the number of combinations in the second set is always
$2^n$, where $n$ is the number of things in the first set. ($2^n$ means two multiplied by itself
$n$ times. So $2^2 = 2 \times 2 = 4$.) Thus, if someone showed you three pieces of candy,
there are eight ($2^3 = 2 \times 2 \times 2 = 8$) different combinations: (A, B, C, AB, AC, BC,
ABC, 0).

Now, what happens if you are shown $\aleph$ pieces of candy? There are $2^\aleph$
combinations in the second set. Now I ask, "How many combinations are there?" Since
$2^\aleph$ is greater than $\aleph$, we need a new cardinal. So Cantor decided to call our $\aleph$
null or aleph-zero, $\aleph_0$, indicating it's the most basic idea of infinity. $2^{\aleph_0}$ is called $\aleph_1$, or
aleph-one.

Again, what happens if you are shown $\aleph_1$ pieces of candy? There are $2^{\aleph_1}$
combinations. $2^{\aleph_1}$ is called $\aleph_2$.

"Good grief!" you say. "When will it all end?" Well, it doesn't. Just as I could
always add one to our regular numbers, I can always find $2^n$, where $n$ is any $\aleph$.

Now, I ask, "How many $\aleph$ are there?" You are immediately suspicious because
that question sounds very similar to the one that started this whole discussion. And
you're right. Just as we used a new cardinal number to answer our first question, we need a new cardinal to answer this question. Cantor used beth, the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet. "The second letter?" you say. "It sounds like you intend to go through the whole alphabet, and maybe a few more alphabets after that." And again, you're right. We can apply the same argument about sets to the beths, to the whole Hebrew alphabet, and to any other alphabet. The big question is, "Where does it all end?"

Well, since the heavy-duty mathematicians were a little tired of creating bigger and bigger sets and were running out of alphabets, they called an end to the thing by saying, "Let's call the last infinity, that is, absolute infinity, the last letter of the Greek alphabet, omega (which looks like ω)." (For mathematicians love Greek best of all. That way they agree with everybody else and say, "It's all Greek to me.") They weren't quite sure what omega is or how to describe it, and they're still not sure. It remains one of the big brainteasers in math. (There is a long tradition, running all the way back to the earliest Greek mathematicians, of leaving horrendously tricky brainteasers like this for the next generation, to give them something to work on, and ulcers.)

So, what did we learn from all this? Well, we learned that there is always something beyond one type of numbers: that is, that there is an aleph beyond our regular numbers, a beth beyond the alephs, and so on. We also learned that our regular numbers, the alephs, the beths, and all the others, are very different types of numbers. You will never find an aleph in our regular numbers, and you will never find a beth among the alephs. It's a "Birds-of-a-feather-flock-together" type of thing. Lastly, we learned that there is an ultimate infinity, which is way beyond all the other infinities. That is omega.
Here's where math teaches us a little about God.

Let's draw a few parallels from the mathematical world to our world and to the Divine. To begin, we say that our moral world is represented by the realm of regular numbers with which we are familiar: 0, 1, 2, and so on in a sequence of aleph-null numbers. However, we must remember that there are negative numbers, too. So, we include -1, -2, -3, and so on in our world. There are as many negative numbers as there are positive numbers, so their cardinal number is aleph-null also. (It is not "negative aleph-null," because aleph-null answers "How many?" and you never answer "negative ten" or "negative aleph-null" to that question.)

As babies, we start out pretty neutral, at zero. As we do good deeds in life, we move up the positive scale: 1, 2, 3, ...; as we do bad deeds in life, we slide into the negative numbers. For example, we might rank Mother Teresa very positively and Hitler very negatively. Note that this is not really a ranking system; the same value may be occupied by any number of people at the same time. The best human being there could ever be would be the aleph-null-th number; the worst would be the negative aleph-null-th number.

Where does God fit in? Well, God is infinite. But which infinity is He? Aleph-sixty-four? Beth-twenty-seven? (Recall that the alephs, beths, and so forth are all different kinds of infinity. Thus the phrase "infinitely large," for example, to a mathematician is an imprecise use of language; the mathematician will wonder "How infinite?") Since God is greater than everything and anything, He must be Omega ($\omega >$ everything.).

God's Son, Jesus, is both divine and human. As God, He is Omega, but as the perfect, sinless human being He is, He must also be the aleph-null-th number. That is
a very stunning thought. How can Omega, a HUGE, HUGE number beyond our imagination, be compressed into relatively-tiny aleph-null? This is the mystery of the Incarnation. After His death, when Jesus’s body was no longer restrained as ours are, His glorified body may be represented as aleph-one. This is not to imply that it was then easier for His divine nature to reside in His glorified body. The Incarnation was accomplished in Time, and His divine and human natures were fully and irrevocably meshed with His human body at the moment of the Incarnation.

If Jesus is the aleph-null-th number, what happens in the negative infinity direction? This is the realm of the Devil. Since the Devil possesses supernatural powers, he is certainly more negative than the negative aleph-null-th number. (Remember that numbers up to the aleph-null-th number in both the positive and negative directions represent our natural world.)

Is the Devil negative omega? Is he as evil as God is good? The answer to that is no, for three reasons. First of all, God created Lucifer the angel. Since the Devil or Lucifer is a creation, he can never be as great as his creator. Therefore, the Devil is not negative omega. What is he? I’m not sure. He is in flux as we are, able to move up and down the scale of numbers, although he is deliberately pursuing a course in the negative direction. However, he shall never reach negative omega because if he did, he would be as evil as God is good, which is to say God has a perfect and equal opposite, which is to say God is not more powerful than anything else, which cannot be by the mere definition of God.

Second, what God creates is good. Even when we move in the negative direction, we cannot erase our created-ness, which is an intrinsic good. Regardless of our actions, we remain created. Hence we have at all times a minimal amount of good. We can
choose to polish this basic goodness of our being or to bury it, but, in either case, it is always there. Thus Lucifer’s created-ness prevents him from becoming perfectly evil; that is, negative omega. (Note the distinction that God created Lucifer the angel, and Lucifer the angel made himself into Satan the Devil.)

Although the Devil is not negative omega, he is still infinitely evil, on the order of the alephs, or beths, or some other negative infinity other than negative omega. Therefore, we ought to exercise prudence and caution and not disregard his supernatural power. However, we should also live lives of faith and hope because God exists and is beyond and greater than anything else.

The third reason the Devil can never be greater than God is that, even if the Devil were negative omega, God would still be greater than he because God is Good and Right, two powerful attributes which the Devil lacks. (Remember that Evil and Wrong are not positive, existent attributes; they are the lack of the virtues Good and Right. Similarly, Emptiness is nothing in and of itself, but is merely the deficiency of Fulness or Existence.)

So there is absolutely Nothing at negative omega. Although Absolute Nothing is God’s opposite, it is not His equal, nor is it greater than Him. \(- \omega \neq \omega\), and \(- \omega < \omega\). Again, if we say \(\omega\) is God and God exists, then if \(-\omega\) is the antithesis of \(\omega\), then \(-\omega\) does not exist. Something that exists is always greater than something that does not exist.

This discussion should give us a sense of humility. No matter how good a person we become, we are still closer on the scales of infinity to negative aleph-null, the worst a human being could be, than to Omega, which is far beyond our meager powers to comprehend; compared to God, we are much closer to Hitler than we are to Omega.
Conversely, no matter how bad a human being we become, we can always repent. Through forgiveness and atonement, we begin anew at zero. We can see what precious gifts forgiveness and the opportunity to attempt to correct the consequences of our evil acts are. However, repentance is the necessary step to salvation.

After death, we are freed from our sinful nature and transcend our world of regular numbers, becoming at least aleph-one; we are robed in our glorified bodies, which are like Christ’s after His resurrection.

We can summarize our discussion with a number line (Figure 1). The first line represents all numbers, with positive numbers and infinities increasing to the right of zero and negative ones decreasing to the left.

(-\omega) \longrightarrow \text{Negative Infinities} - \aleph_0 - 0 - \aleph_0 \longrightarrow \text{Positive Infinities} \longrightarrow \omega

Nothing \longrightarrow \text{Satan} \longrightarrow \text{Us} \longrightarrow \text{God}

**Figure 1.**

Below the number line, we indicate the corresponding theological and moral ideas we’ve discussed. First, we note that there is Nothing at \(-\omega\). The range of negative infinities, excluding \(-\omega\), is Satan’s scope of possible supernatural evils. The moral scale for humans is from negative \(\aleph_0\) to positive \(\aleph_0\). The area of the positive infinities is the domain of the saints and angels in heaven. Finally, we come to \(\omega\), far greater than anything else, which represents God. Thus we see that intangible Math, seemingly so abstract and removed from our lives, can teach us much about a most fundamental—and also intangible—part of our lives, our relationship with the supernatural and with the Divine.
Spiritual Mountaineering

In the range of spiritual development, we are all climbing different mountains. How can we compare altitudes then? Perhaps the lower slopes of your mountain are covered with shale, perhaps mine with verdant pastures of grass.

One approach to the top may prove impassable and the mountaineer must journey around the peak at the same altitude or with slight variations or even go back downwards again to find a clearer, but not necessarily more direct, route.

And, ah! the final assault on the peak! Give it your all! Lose not your heart! On the last reaches, burst out with the flagging energy of your soul renewed by the sight of the apex.

Be prepared for the glorious breathtaking experience on top!
A sliver of dim winter sunlight was just beginning to peek around the ruffle of the calico kitchen curtain, turning the dark shadows behind the geranium pots to shades of grey, but Saundra was already up. She liked to sit here at the maple breakfast table in the quiet hours before the day was truly born. Now that she was working at the clinic, her schedule was not much different from her days in college when she would get up early to review before her eight o’clock morning classes. "Why do they always have to put the toughest classes in the morning?" she would sigh as she looked through her notes. Saundra smiled as she thought of those early morning struggles. Now only a morning newspaper and a cup of steaming coffee sat on the table in front of her.

She picked up the coffee mug and held it in front of her face, closing her eyes to savor the rich, warm smell. The relaxing heat soaked into her hands, and Saundra felt the muscles across her shoulders loosen. She opened her eyes and grimaced. She couldn’t believe how tense she was, even after a fairly good night’s sleep. "That last letter must have disturbed me more than I thought," she mused. "I just have to learn not to let them bother me so much." The previous secretary had told Saundra they got such letters fairly often. "They don’t mean anything, just that there’s one more rabid conservative out there!" the woman had laughed. "Don’t take them seriously!"

Still, Saundra had been sick with worry for two days after she first opened an anonymous bomb threat to the clinic. When nothing happened, Saundra figured the letter had just been a scare tactic. She would still alert the clinic’s supervisor whenever the clinic received any threatening letters, but now they almost seemed routine. The letters
were saved as evidence, though, in case the clinic ever was bombed. The clinic also got preachy letters about the supposed immorality of what went on there, but those she sent on a quick trip to the circular file.

The last letter, however, had been unusually difficult to erase from her memory. She recalled slitting the envelope open casually, just another piece of mail, pulling the letter out, and looking down at the quavering lines:

...roses, tulips, violets, the list is endless. You cover the seed with earth, and for a long time you don't see it. But it's there nonetheless, growing. If you uproot it, you destroy that pale green stem and the little head just beginning to lift up; you'll never see it bloom, smiling at the sun.

Nothing is ever finished. Whatever lives, grows, either in its body or its essence, until it dies. Beauty is in growth....

Saundra had just laughed and thrown the letter away. Some old man with arthritic hands, been fertilizing his flower beds too long.

Later in the day, however, she had found herself thinking of the morning glories on the trellis at home and how, come Spring, the bright blue and white flowers would nod at her as she left for work each morning: "Beauty is in growth." But the image and words had faded when she thought to herself that morning glories were just flowers, but people had to get back to their lives.

The fragrant smell of coffee and cream returned Saundra to the breakfast table. She shook her head, trying to clear it of the stubborn memory. Glancing down, she saw her morning newspaper, patiently waiting for her to stop daydreaming and return to her habit of reading it before work.

"A little bit of news should help," Saundra thought. Setting down her coffee, she opened the paper on the table before her. She scanned the headlines on the front page,
then turned to the comics. "The best part," she laughed to herself. Finishing those, she flipped to the last page of the main section where late-breaking local news was posted. From the titles, it didn’t appear much was happening: "City-council meeting postponed;" "School mill levy accepted;" "Inmate walks away from state home." That last one caught her eye.

"Inmate Erik Roe walked away from the state-run Green Hills Rehabilitation Center late yesterday afternoon," the brief paragraph read. "Officials have made no comment on the apparent lapse in security during an exercise period on the grounds of the Center. They describe Roe as 45-55 years old, 6’ tall, about 200 pounds, with blond hair and blue eyes. He was last seen wearing jeans and a red plaid flannel shirt. Officials request the help of people living in the area to locate Roe. Roe is considered a 'Class A patient,' meaning he may injure himself or others in a confrontation. Officials therefore ask anyone sighting Roe not to approach him, but instead to contact the Green Hills Center at 329-8612."

"Poor man," Saundra thought. "He’s probably severely retarded, or something. By now, he must be very confused, not to mention exhausted and famished." Hoping they would find him soon, Saundra thought about the Rehabilitation Center. She wasn’t exactly sure what went on there; she did know, though, that a wide green lawn and chain-link fence surrounded the four-story concrete Center. She knew, because she had driven past it that one day, on her way to go waterskiing at the lake with Martha. Were there even watchtowers to prevent just such an escape? Saundra couldn’t remember. She guessed Roe was likely lost in the scrubby woods past the fence. That or possibly he wandered out of the narrow belt of trees and brush into the neighboring residential
subdivision. In either case, Roe was definitely out of his element and no doubt feeling terrified.

Saundra looked over the rest of the main section of the paper. It looked like some headway would be made in the state courts to overturn recent restrictions the legislature had passed that affected the clinic. She humphed in satisfaction; she was tired of the clinics always being in the news. Finishing up the paper and her coffee, she put the mug in the sink. She decided she felt much better, not really tense at all anymore; it would be a good day. She felt energized and ready to get to work, where the white walls and soft music made the world orderly and kind.

She walked down the hallway to her bedroom to change for work. The sun would definitely be up by now, she thought, observing how the varying shades of grey around her room were now almost all replaced by the real colors, light blue and coral, of her bedroom furniture.

Saundra had just slipped into her white work pants and was pulling her pajama top over her head when she thought she heard a click. It had sounded like the front doorknob had been turned. Letting the shirt fall down again, she stood still and listened. As she listened, she heard the familiar creak of the front door. Saundra’s skin prickled and she narrowed her eyes. "What can that be?" she thought. She paused and didn’t hear anything else. "Maybe the mailman stuck a package inside since I don’t have a screen door. I’d better go and see...but not in my pajamas! I’ll change real quick."

Saundra quickly changed into her white top ("It makes me look like a nurse!" Saundra had said the first time she wore the outfit.). She turned toward the bedroom door and then stopped abruptly. "The postman doesn’t deliver at eight o’clock in the morning! What’s...."
Quiet footsteps in the hall stopped her thoughts. The loose floorboard creaked. Her heart thumping in her chest, Saundra glanced around the room. Only the one window, which didn’t open far enough for escape. Certainly no baseball bat standing around! What was she to do?

There was no time to do anything, anyway. As Saundra’s widened eyes watched, the bedroom doorknob turned, the door was pushed open from the hall, and a huge man stood filling the doorway. There was mud in swatches on his jeans; his crimson flannel shirt was ripped at the elbow. A few twigs and leaves stuck in his disheveled blond hair brushed against the lintel. And his eyes are blue, Saundra noted. It must be Erik Roe. She took a deep breath, held it a second, then let it out slowly. "O.k," she thought. "Be nonconfrontational. He’s probably more scared of me than I am of him."

"How old are you?" Saundra jumped at the man’s deep voice.

"What?" Saundra stammered. *That* was a totally unexpected question.

"How old are you?" he demanded again.

"Uh, twen-, twenty-seven," she replied.

To her surprise, Roe chuckled. A deep, ugly chuckle, in fact. Saundra was having trouble breathing. She wanted to run, but her feet felt tied to the floor. There was nowhere to run in any case, since Roe blocked the doorway. She could never get past him.

Roe stopped laughing and pulled a huge knife out of a sheath on his belt. He slowly waved it back and forth in front of his face, mesmerized by the light glinting on the sharp blade. Her eyes widening, Saundra took half a step backwards and held up her hands.
"What do you want?" she managed to gasp. Then the words came in a rush. "If, if you're hungry, I've got food. I'm sure you must be hungry after being out all night. Or, or maybe you're tired. Why don't you, uh, take a hot shower and then you can sleep...sleep here...."

Saundra's voice dropped off as Roe lowered the knife and let his arm hang at his side. Maybe she was getting through to him....

"I don't want your food. And I'm not tired, either," returned Roe. "In fact, I feel great, ready for a full day's work."

"Oh, you're working, then, huh?" Saundra rambled, thinking to distract Roe from thoughts of his knife. "What, uh, work do you do?"

"It's a service to the world," he said simply. "I eliminate anyone who isn't fully human. And you, my dear, fall into that category."

"Fully human?" Saundra's voice rose. "Fully human? What do you mean? I'm fully human. What makes me not?"

"You're not thirty."

"Not thirty? Not thirty years old? What has age to do with it?"

"No one is fully human until they're mature. And that doesn't happen until they're at least thirty years old," came the reply. Roe shrugged his shoulders. "Before that they're just a drain on our resources, a burden on society. They aren't wanted."

"But I am wanted! There are people who love me, who want me!"

"Maybe," Roe shrugged again. He stroked his thick thumb up and down the narrow back of the knife blade. "But you're still not mature and I don't want you, so I'm going to have to kill you."
Saundra’s jaw dropped. Her lungs felt crushed by some giant vise. The oak
dresser and the little cuckoo clock near the door, the picture of Grammy on the near
wall, everything began to blur, leaving only the gleaming blade in sharp focus.

Roe took a step forward, adjusting his grip on the hilt of the knife. Saundra
jerked fully upright. She took another step backward and felt the edge of the bed against
her leg. Saundra held her hands out again and gasped, "Wait! Wait a second! I’m
almost thirty! Doesn’t that count for something? Don’t I have potential? I’ve made it
this far...."

Her voice trailed as she saw Roe shake his head from side to side. The room
began to blur again, this time from the tears swelling up in her eyes. The tears trickled
down her cheeks as she heard Roe’s nonchalant words, "Sorry, but today’s the cut-off
day."

He advanced again. "No," Saundra whimpered. "No, you can’t, you just can’t.
It’s not fair. It’s not right...." Roe’s low laugh stopped her. "Of course, you wouldn’t
understand how it’s right. It just proves you’re not mature. You’re not fully human.
How could you possibly understand how important and how right this is—for me, for the
world. If you were mature, you would agree. You would help me make sure that only
the desired, mature humans live...."

She took a deep breath and cried, "No! You can’t! I’ll scream, and people will
hear and they’ll come and they’ll find you. They’ll stop you and they’ll throw you in
prison and...."

Roe had paused in his walk across the room. Saundra looked into his eyes,
searching them for a trace of human compassion, of reason. Roe’s eyes glinted like the
light on his knife. Saundra felt a chill crawl down her spine. "Class A," the newspaper
had said. She screamed the words in her mind. "He's not retarded! He's a crazy lunatic!"

Roe was talking, saying something. She forced her mind back to the nightmare. "...won't hear you. You can scream all you want and they won’t hear you. And even if they do, they won’t care. It makes no difference. In any case, you won’t scream for long...."

Roe closed the final gap between them. His movements seemed incredibly slow, as if the air were thick as congealing blood. Saundra watched a fold in his sleeve flow slowly up and down. A loud sound rasped in her ears as Roe lifted his arm. Somehow she realized she had gasped. Tick. Why was the clock so loud, and so slow? Tock. As Roe’s free hand reached out, Saundra screamed.

The scream filled the room, then was cut short as Roe’s huge hand closed around Saundra’s throat. Tick, tock, tick, tock.
Afterword

In the next day's newspaper:

**Murder in Green Hills Sub**

Police are presently investigating the bizarre murder of an abortion clinic's secretary. Saundra Roe's dismembered body was found in her Green Hills house by the supervisor of Life Choices Clinic, Lucille Ferdater. After Roe failed to arrive at work yesterday and didn't answer repeated phonecalls to her house, Ferdater went to Roe's bungalow to check on her. Seeing the front door open, Ferdater entered. She found Roe's mutilated body in the bedroom.

Police have confirmed that Saundra Roe was murdered yesterday morning sometime between eight and nine o'clock. Though they have no firm description of the killer, they suspect the killer is a large man, strong enough to dismember Roe with a knife.

If anyone has any information that might help solve the murder of Saundra Roe, call the police at 329-7718.

**Erik Roe Still At Large**

Inmate Erik Roe has been missing from the Green Hills Rehabilitation Center for two days. He apparently walked away from a physical exercise period. Roe is 45-55 years old, 6' tall and about 200 pounds, with blond hair and blue eyes. He was last seen wearing jeans and a red plaid flannel shirt. Officials urge anyone sighting Roe not to approach him, since his condition is severe enough that he may injure himself or others if he feels threatened. If you see Roe, contact the Green Hills Home at 329-8612.

**LIFE CHOICES CLINIC**

We'll help you make choices that are right for YOU.

Call us today at 326-6684!
Of Pride, Greed, and Lust, Pride is the ultimate weapon of the Devil and hence, the ultimate sin. A man is not always rich and there are not always women around him, but he always has himself.

* * *

Life is not to have; it is to live.

* * *

Hell will be having everything you ever wanted and everything you strived so inordinately for and knowing it’s everything you ever wanted and having it all mean absolutely nothing to you.

* * *

To love the creation over the Creator?

Ah, but the creation is so beautiful!

But the Creator created it. He must be even more. For can we ever create something greater than that within us?
My heart is a maze.

The gate stands open;  
it has no lock.  
All may easily enter.

But, like Archimedes’ ant,  
one must solve the tortuous path  
to reach the golden honey.

* * *

I never felt so secure as when I stopped trying to plan my life.

* * *

Jesus is the Sun of God.

The warm light He radiates  
is life for the world.  
Those who leave their orbit around Him  
are lost  
to the outer darkness  
and circle other suns.

* * *

When we make others suffer, we participate in crucifying Christ. When we suffer in love, we participate in His redemption of the world. Here, then, is the value of our bearing up our sufferings. Praise be to God, the Ever-Present and Ever-Redeeming!
I've never moved a mountain.
I always ask myself, "Why?"
God put the mountain there.
Why move it here?

I've never moved a mountain.
But I ask myself, "Why not?"
Perhaps God put the mountain here,
So I could move it there.

* * *

Screens knit by God:
Thousands of little crosses.
Strong and durable,
Impenetrable by all
Except the Divine Wind;
Our lives.

* * *

There is always a light at two places in a tunnel:
The Beginning and the End.
In the middle,
Halfway done with our quest,
Things are darkest.
Jesus said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega,"
the beginning and the end,
the beginning and the end
of the journey of life.

* * *

God's love for us
is so undying
that Jesus rose on the third day.

* * *

I am not just a being;
I am a becoming.

* * *

Evil people seem
To live longer than good people
Because God is patiently
Waiting for them to
Come back to Him?
Concerning married priests:
You don't go into the priesthood to have it all.
You go in because you want to give it all.

* * *

Sometimes roses can only reach out with thorns.

* * *

To do Your Will
Is sweeter to me
Than praise.

* * *

Jesus turns up in the most unlikely places,
because we must learn to see Him everywhere.
The places where we are ready to see Him
are already taken care of.
He who deserves the greatest crown in heaven will wear no crown at all.

* * *

Leben Leben.  (Live Life.
Leben Lieben.  Live Love.
Lieben Leben.  Love Life.
Lieben Lieben.  Love Love.)

* * *

We must learn to love poor, broken things, as well as the One True Perfect God, because, after all, that is how He loves us.
The Devil approached me with a plea.
"Sell me your soul," said he.
"I'll trade you riches, jewels, and wealth.
Or maybe you'd prefer a stunning body and--fair--health.
Or how about slavish fans,
Or power over every man.
As you please
Any one of these
Can be yours....

"In return, I'll ask my meager price:
To possess your soul....That'd be nice.
Oh, of those other things, I have no need.
But you could use them well, I think, indeed.
Why not choose?
You have very little--just the Intangible--to lose.
And it surely is a lie
That you want your soul more than I.
So...which of the doors...?"

"I can't sell you my soul," I said with a smile.
It's not mine anymore, Kaa of Guile.
No lie will I say:
I gave it away."
The Way

Thomas was tired. He was tired of the dust; he was tired of the anvil-like surface of the Way; most of all, he was tired of those obnoxious pebbles that kept finding their way into his sandals. One was digging at his left heel now. Thinking it might work its way out, he kept walking, but four paces more, and the nasty rock had only burrowed in further. He had better stop.

Limping to the edge of the Way, he collapsed with a small growl on a big limestone boulder, while the others continued on. He slipped the worn sandal off, held it up, and shook it vigorously. A small grey rock fell to the ground.

"Geesh, how can such a little thing cause so much pain?" he asked aloud in exasperation. But it was out now. He dropped his sandal on the pebble for good measure. Immediately he wished he hadn’t, for a spume of fine white dust puffed up, and he sneezed twice; so much for his revenge.

Kicking off his other sandal, Thomas stretched out his feet and wriggled his toes. A break now and then was a good thing. The sun lay a golden towel across his shoulders and began to dry his sweat-soaked tunic and the drops on his forehead. A breeze tousled his short brown hair; he felt very glad he was young. His gaze returning from the blue sky and creamy clouds, he watched some other Wayfarers walk, or run, by. He smiled as he saw a man and a woman walking together, holding hands. Their obvious care for each other reminded Thomas of the many times he, too, had been helped by others around, over, or through various obstacles in the Way.
So many people, all traveling this road; the Way, he thought, would surely be easier for all of them if it only ran through the verdant pastures ten yards or so off to the right and left. There green grasses bowed and flowers swayed. Every now and again a bit of the wind that played in the meadows brought a lingering whiff of the blossoms' tantalizing perfumes.

Instead, here ran the Way, narrow as a knife's edge and long as time, and full of stumbling stones. Despite the tempting differences between the meadows and the Way, Thomas trusted the words of that strange old man. With his snow-white hair floating around his face, the man had descended upon Thomas several days ago as he sat resting on the edge of the Way. "Listen to me, you young whippersnapper. Don't go to the left; don't go to the right. And don't go looking for butterflies in those marshy meadows, either, because there aren't any. Just stay in the Way, and you won't get lost." He had chomped his dentures into place, then was gone as quickly as he had come. Somewhat dazed, Thomas had sat for a bit longer than usual on his boulder. Moving on at last, he figured it was probably sound advise; the old man sounded like he knew what he was talking about.

Following the Way now with his eyes, Thomas caught his breath and was struck once again with the severe beauty of his goal. Far in the distance, a rocky mountain rose high above the horizon of space-time, crowned with clouds whiter than lamb's wool. Crag upon crag it towered from the lowly plain.

Breaking his gaze from the Mountain, Thomas looked down at his callous bare feet, his sunburned hands. He had already come so many gritty miles; he had so far yet to go. Why couldn't he just stop and stay right here, where he was comfortable?
He glanced back in the direction from which he had come. No, the past can’t catch up with you, he reassured himself, not on this road. Thomas shivered. Where had the sun gone?

In the chill, he itched to get moving again. He pulled his sandals on, jumped up from the boulder, and set off toward the Mountain. The sun came out again as his strong legs carried him quickly down the road. The pace of his steps and his rhythmic breathing invigorating him, he soon overtook those who had walked by as he sat on the boulder.

As he passed them, his footsteps slowed a little. About fifty yards ahead, a group of people were gathered together. That could only mean one thing, and Thomas’ interest was piqued: Some notable individual was talking to the crowd.

As he approached the group, Thomas caught sight of the gathering’s nucleus, a grave poker of a man, with brief spectacles pinching his hooked nose. He was leaning forward slightly, peering intensely at his audience. "I’ve spent a great deal of time exploring this Way," he was saying as Thomas came up. "I’ve walked up and down it, trying to uncover its mysteries. Why is the Way so narrow? Why doesn’t the Way go through the green meadows with those gorgeous flowers? Why does it instead keep plodding on and on so dully? Why are the rocks which so many others before us have trod upon still so sharp?" He punctuated each question by jabbing the air with his finger. The questions came on and on in a stream; obviously, the man was quite some authority.

The people murmured among themselves, intrigued by his questions.

"Well, I am pleased to announce," he finally concluded, "that I have discovered this small path that splits off from the Way." He stepped to one side, then pointed down at the edge of the Way near where he was standing. Thomas, craning his neck with the
others, saw a sandy footpath. Apparently this side track had simply decided not to bother with the Way's trademark stumbling stones. The sand also appeared to get finer and softer the farther it led from the Way.

"I have decided to take this new route, to show that it indeed is the true Way. After all, after having led us so great a distance already, the Way surely must get easier as it gets closer to its final destination. Who will join me on this brave venture?" A cheer rose from several in the group.

As the scholar turned onto the sidetrack, sixty or seventy travelers strode after him. The other Wayfarers in the crowd pleaded with them to remain in the Way, but their friends seemed blinded by the pedant's ponderous air of authority. They were much impressed by his convoluted logic, though they couldn't understand half of it. A few of those leaving had private misgivings, but they quickly buried them, not wanting to appear ignorant.

Thomas stood watching them go, hesitating. Should he too try the new way? Although it seemed to head in much the same direction as the Way, with the great distances involved, it really was impossible to tell for sure. As if in answer to his question, the old man's words returned again: "Just stay in the Way." Remembering the penetrating look the old man had given him, Thomas pulled his foot back from the new path. Turning towards the Mountain, he didn't see the poker man or his followers again.

Several days later, he ran across another leader with the prerequisite crowd. This teacher, a woman, had decided that the Way didn't allow enough room for individual expression; after all, it was so narrow and straight. Clenching her thin hands into fists and shaking them at the sky, she cried for all the crowd to hear, "This Way, besides
being boring, confines and restricts our creative impulses. We must not follow blindly what is, after all, only the fossilized track of dead journeymen. We must escape its narrow-minded tyranny, and blaze a new, a living path. So," and here she flicked her long unbound hair over her shoulder, "I'm leaving. I will make my own way. I will show it can be done."

With that, she pointedly stepped off the Way. As she walked off, she looked over her shoulder once, perhaps only to see if anyone were following her. If that were the case, she was gratified since not a few travelers, struck by her pluck and grit, followed in her footsteps. Thomas, however, remained in the Way, shaking his head sadly. This woman reminded him too much of the last leader, only more extreme. He did not see her or her disciples again, either.

Unknown to Thomas, up ahead another fellow had gotten fed up with the dust and the stones and the various other irritants of the Way. With his sausage-links of fat jiggling slightly and a puff of breath, he had decided to stop for awhile and simply enjoy life. So he sat down right there in the middle of the Way. As he was a fairly big man and the Way was a fairly narrow Way, his lumpy bulk in the middle of the Way made it difficult for people to proceed.

Many Wayfarers sat down, perhaps to experience a little of what this guru was feeling. By the time Thomas reached the area, people had backed up along the Way for quite some way. Word of the cause of the stoppage filtered back to Thomas and the others. Thomas was irritated, but figured the wait wouldn't hurt him; a break now and then was a good thing. Soon enough the crowd would get moving again.

A few people nearby weren't quite so patient, however; they started climbing over the other travelers, stepping on a great many toes and hitting a great many noses and just
plain contributing to the general discomfort. But eventually even these had to stop, for sitting blocking the Way by this time was a vast crowd, and there was no Way to get past or around it.

Finally the flabby man, who was thoroughly enjoying life and all the attention he was getting too, noticed the lush green meadows with their tempting flowers. He decided he could enjoy life—and much more of it—much better in the green meadows with their intriguing flowers than he could sitting on rather painful stones in the midst of an old, dusty Way. So he heaved himself up and tottered over to the green meadows with the curious flowers and plopped down again to enjoy himself. Many, many people followed his example, and ran off to the left and right of the Way to enjoy life in the bright green meadows, to smell the tantalizing flowers, to taste the flowers' almost too-sweet cloying nectar, to hear the wind rustle in the grass, and to feel the soft satin petals of the flowers that were smoother than any skin and silkier than any hair.

The travelers who remained in the Way, including Thomas, were quite startled by this mass exodus. They were also quite tempted to join those who were so clearly enjoying themselves. However, they decided to continue in the Way, knowing that if they just kept on and were true they would eventually reach that snowy Mountain.

The last teacher Thomas saw was a short man with glowering brows. One day a strange light had flickered to life in his eyes, and he stopped in his tracks. Thomas had been walking right behind him, and when the man stopped so suddenly, he bumped into him. Thomas murmured his apologies, but the man didn't acknowledge them. His green eyes snapping, he glared at the Mountain defiantly, arms akimbo.

"I know," he proclaimed, "I just know (and you'll have to accept it on my word) that I do not have to continue plodding along this Way like some stupid humble jackass.
Leave that to others. No, the Mountain will come to me! Oh, I may have to wait awhile, but the Mountain will come. After all, faith can move mountains, can’t it? And soon this one will come running up to me like a good, obedient dog."

Thomas looked at him askance; said "Excuse me;" and, giving him a wide berth, continued on his Way. Boy, some people were just loopy, he figured. How else did they get such ridiculous ideas?

Nonetheless several other travelers stopped and tried to copy the leader’s bold pose. As time went on, more and more travelers stood there waiting for the Mountain to come to them like a good, obedient dog. As far as the Wayfarers who moved on knew, they stood there into eternity, for they were not seen again.

In the end, Thomas and a few other travelers made it to the Mountain. On its wide and rocky slopes, though, Thomas lost sight of the others and had to make his ascent to the top alone.

There what a sight revived his exhausted eyes! A beautiful garden lay before him, pristine and pure and designed with such an eye to beauty that each inch magnified the glory of every other inch. And here was water, living, sparkling, laughing, glorious water, like there hadn’t been in the green meadows with their queer flowers. A butterfly splashed with blue and yellow dancing around his head, Thomas rushed forward and fell to his knees beside a stream. Into the icy water he plunged first his hands, then his feet, all unmercifully torn by the sharp stones that littered the Way and the steep sides of the Mountain.

Those who had finished the long, difficult, and narrow Way before him walked forward from among the trees with peacocks at their sides to greet Thomas and to assure him that his wounds would close and be healed.
Then a Man came, Who, with warm joy in His eyes, reached out to Thomas and took his bloodied hands. Suddenly, they felt very warm, burning, as though they were held in the furnace of the sun. Thomas noticed that the other Man's hands and feet were also lacerated, but more so, as if He had walked that journey a thousand thousand times.

Looking up into His eyes, Thomas saw the Man again, but as though for the first time. His eyes, though not His face, were those of the old man who had given Thomas advise long ago. He walked the Way with me, Thomas thought; He is One Who helped me over those nasty stumbling stones and other obstacles. In awe, Thomas glanced down, and saw the remaining scars on his feet, red and white jagged lines. They were beautiful scars, for they were the standard, the flag, of his journey and destination.

At last, hand in scarred hand, he was home.