

I.S. Conference 2010 - kNOw FEAR
Assignment Option 1: Op-Ed
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Fear is something that all human beings have in common. Though some individuals may *appear* to be fearless, there is no one who is entirely unafraid. Fear can be debilitating and can come at us from so many different sources that it can be hard to know how to respond to it. Dr. Bader-Saye, the plenary speaker for the Interdisciplinary Studies conference, spoke about how we live in a culture of fear. Media, politicians, and oftentimes others around us use the natural human tendency to feel fear in order to manipulate and gain power over others. According to Dr. Bader-Saye, since the culture we live in today is one of fear, there is an obsession with the “ethic of security,” which is seeking ways to gain safety in order to protect ourselves from what we fear.

In the breakout session Dr. Martin led, which focused on fear of death, we watched and discussed *Flight from Death*, a documentary that deals with humanity’s fear of death. Though we often deny that we fear death, our goal of maintaining safety is rooted in our fear of dying. Death is an unknown to us for, although many of us may have come close to death at some point, we who are alive clearly cannot know what it is like to die or know for certain what lies beyond physical death. In this documentary it is suggested that we not only fear physical death, but also a symbolic form of death. The failure to “meet the mark” that society has set for us can often cause one to despair and can send one to a place where they are as if they were dead in society’s eyes. Often this type of death is feared more than the actual physical death as it is an easier thing to

accept that one would experience physical death in comfort, surrounded by those whom they love than to picture oneself alive physically but desperately needy and alone with no one to care if they did die. Dr. Bader-Saye also addressed the issue of wishing to avoid a form of symbolic death when he spoke about how people feel the need to accumulate resources in order to prevent needing another to look after them. Money is often seen as a source of protection from the symbolic death that can occur when we are no longer able to care for ourselves.

In *Flight from Death*, the question “what are we going to do with death?” is turned around to ask, “what are we to do with life?” In this documentary, we see a secular standpoint where individuals seek to make the most of their lives in order to reduce the fear of death. In the discussion portion of the breakout session, Dr. Martin suggested that affirming life does not necessarily mean we are focusing on individualistic activities that give meaning for our lives; rather, we can live life and face death within a community of faith that lives not just for itself but instead lives for others and for God. This suggests that believing in eternal life for the soul once the body has passed away is not sufficient for a Christian. Though our fear of death can be abated if we believe that when our earthly lives end we will not plummet into nothingness, it is not enough to live only for ourselves, happy with the comfort that we are assured of individual salvation. The question “what are we to do with life?” very much applies to Christians and should impact how we live our lives everyday.

In order to take the question of “what are we to do with life?” and answer it in our lives, we need to have courage and hope. It is hard to be courageous alone, however. Dr. Bader-Saye suggests that “courage is a communal virtue – it is hard to be courageous on our own.” This is why it is so necessary for Christians to gather together in community. The quote from G.K. Chesterson that Dr. Bader-Saye used to illustrate how courage works really makes sense in relation to the question about life. Chesterson proposed that “courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die.” In living courageously, a Christian needs to learn to have the courage to live with the trust that God has a plan and place hope for the future in Him. The fear that is so pervasive in the culture we live in is strong but, as Christians we need to have the faith to believe that God’s plan for us and the world is what will ultimately win in the end.

There are a lot of pressures in life, and these do not go away while one is a student at university. Sometimes the stresses of keeping up with readings and assignments can cause us to feel a sense of despair. At times the busy university student can become so focused on completing the task at hand that they don’t pause to really think about the issue of fear; fear that goes beyond the fear of failure in one’s classes. In a culture that focuses on providing instant gratification and keeping things moving at a fast, productive pace, we often run the risk of not taking the issue of fear into consideration as we ought to. Perhaps we can channel the fear we feel (and often seek to suppress) into a useful way of

confronting bigger issues about life and death. Instead of allowing ourselves to be people who passively live our lives without thinking about the deep and sometimes controversial issues, the students at King's should allow themselves to come to firm convictions based on the teachings of Jesus, even if they go against the popular opinion of the culture we live in. This means we need to be prepared to hold firm to what we believe to be right, no matter how fearful we may be about the reaction of our friends and fellow students. Dr. Bader-Saye proposed that when we have courage, we are able to "take the risk of hospitality" and make room for strangers who come into our community. This can be applied not only in the community at King's, but also to the larger world around us. We can include those who are on the fringes of our little groups and welcome and care for those who are "symbolically dead" to society. To do these things may be difficult because of the fear we will feel, but with the help of Christian community and our Saviour, it is truly possible to become people of courage, hope, and light to those in the world around us.