



# *For Such A Time As This*

KLCs RESEARCH VISION

## **FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS: KLCs RESEARCH VISION**

LITURGY AND ADDRESS AT A GATHERING OF OUR RESEARCH COLLECTIVE

CRAIG G. BARTHOLOMEW, 11 FEBRUARY 2021

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### **OPENING LITURGY**

The Lord be with you, **And also with you.**

Let us pray:

Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we worship you. All things are from you and to you, and we pray now Father that you will send your Spirit to blow amidst us and illumine Christ, that our hearts may be strangely warmed. Grant that in our lives and work we may not seek so much to be

consoled as to console, and so be instruments of peace.

Holy God, we are conscious that we gather virtually at a time of death, great challenge, and mystery. Give us and our neighbours grace to pierce that mystery so that we might rest in you, at peace and hopeful, even though we do not understand our present situation. Help us to know in the deepest fibres of our being that all will ultimately be well, and very well.

We remember those lost to the Coronavirus and allow now for people to speak the names of those whose passing we grieve ..... Thank you for the gift of their lives, may they rest now in you, and may we remember the gift of their lives with thanks even as we mourn their loss.

We pray for those around the world who are struggling for their lives today. Have mercy Lord upon them, give our doctors wisdom, and help them to look to you at this time.

Lord, we thank you for the gift of one another, we thank you for the KLC, and we pray that today you will help us to hear and answer your call to accompany the Spirit together on the *missio Dei*.

Lord, many cracks have appeared in our cultures. Forgive us that so many of them result from our attempt to live apart from you.

Restrain the evil one at this time, and bring healing. Give us grace to attend to what you are saying to us and your world through this time of crisis.

Father, we are a relatively small group, but our gifts are many. Even as your Son is broken again and again for the life of the world, take our gifts, join them together, and use us also to be the bread of life.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

**And now may the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us always, AMEN.**

**Readings:** Psalm 88 choral version composed by Josh Rodriguez

Esther 4:12-14

Revelation 4:1

## INTRODUCTION

It is wonderful to see you all here. Many thanks Istine and Jarrod for leading us in our liturgy. I so wish we were all gathered at Margaret Beaufort Institute, where our lovely new offices are located in Cambridge, for a cheese and wine reception. Of course, that would involve a great deal of travel and so we are grateful for Zoom.



## A CRISIS

We are, as President Biden has made so clear, and as our liturgy powerfully evoked, amidst a major crisis. Between 8000 and 13 000 people are dying per day around the world from this scourge of the Coronavirus. The bell keeps tolling even as we meet, with every death one too many. As Christians we are not exempt from this horror, and nearly all of us now know someone who has had the virus or died from it.

KLC became independent and is setting out on its journey amidst this crisis. Is this folly or wisdom? While it has not been easy, the journey has been graced in too many ways to recount, from quickly finding a new home at Margaret Beaufort to the coming together of an amazing staff team, to the emergence of a wonderful group of Trustees, to your presence here with us today. Psalm 52 contains these lines: "I will proclaim that your name is good, in the presence of your friends." God has many names but I like this one: GOOD. And amidst many challenges this has been our experience: God is good, and again and again we have tasted and savoured that goodness.



Amidst launching KLC I have often had in mind that great African theologian, Augustine. He wrote his epochal *City of God* amidst the collapse of Rome, and it has never been out of print since. How is that possible? Because, although, as Paul puts it in Romans 8:20, the creation

has been subject to futility, it is not without hope. There is a certain sense – I say this carefully – in which faith is made for times of crisis. Certainly, this is true of hope. This does not for a moment make a crisis such as ours easy but it does make it somewhat less than completely overwhelming.

But where, you may ask, is hope to be found? Only in this God who has come to us in Jesus and sends his Spirit to us again and again. In this strange time, it has been too easy to find ourselves in Psalm 73: “But as for me, my feet had almost slipped. I nearly lost my foothold.” At least one



translation speaks in v. 17 of “until I pierced the mystery”. This time is mysterious and we need to pierce its mystery. By this I do not mean having a rational explanation of it, but of finding our foothold again in Christ, so that we can look reality in the eye but with hope and compassion. This is what Wendell Berry so eloquently calls “difficult hope.”

And it is in that spirit that we move forward as KLC. Much of what is going on may be a veritable cloud of unknowing, but we hold to the fact that God’s name is GOOD, and that he is at work amidst the pandemic. Indeed, the pandemic has exposed the cracks in our cultures, cracks which cry out for healthy, embodied public theology. This is not a time to snooze, but a time for the church to awake,

and to recommit itself to being for God and thus, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer would remind us, for his world. And, as our reading from Esther 4:12-14 reminded us, for such a time as this. We at KLC want to be a part of such a movement, carrying the Christ light into the world where it is so desperately needed in so many ways. To begin to do this, two requirements move to the fore:

- We will only achieve this if we are living every more deeply into the life of Christ, eating and drinking him daily. In other words, our lives must be rooted in a deep spirituality.
- Secondly, we will only achieve this if we recover deep community. In South Africa we speak of *Ubuntu*: I am because you are. Western individualism will not suffice for this evil day. Healthy community will.

This backs us neatly into our vision for KLC, namely,

**To foster and nurture public theology, rooted in spirituality, practiced in community, for the glory of God and in the service of the church and the world.**



Julia Skeen: *Take, eat*

## RESEARCH, WRITING AND PRAXIS

We have changed our name from Ethics to Public Theology, not because we are no longer focusing on ethics, we are! Not only is “public theology” in vogue, but it enables us to resist thinking of ethics only as hot button issues, and also enables us to foreground the inter-disciplinary dimensions of ethics and to create space for such work, always oriented to the ethical question: How then shall we live? Working in this area I have come to see that theological ethics or public theology, far from being a marginal discipline, is really the culmination of Christian insight from across the disciplines.

The niche we think KLC needs to fill is that of *high-level Christian research across the disciplines oriented towards how then shall we live?* In the whole of Europe and the UK there are very few places where such work is pursued. North America is much better served, but even there, certainly in the Protestant world, there are very few Christian research universities. Since returning to Cambridge, I have flagged the need for KLC to build a bridge across the pond into North America. Thus, we welcome our North American friends with us today and David Beldman will speak later about plans already underway to establish a KLC office in the US.

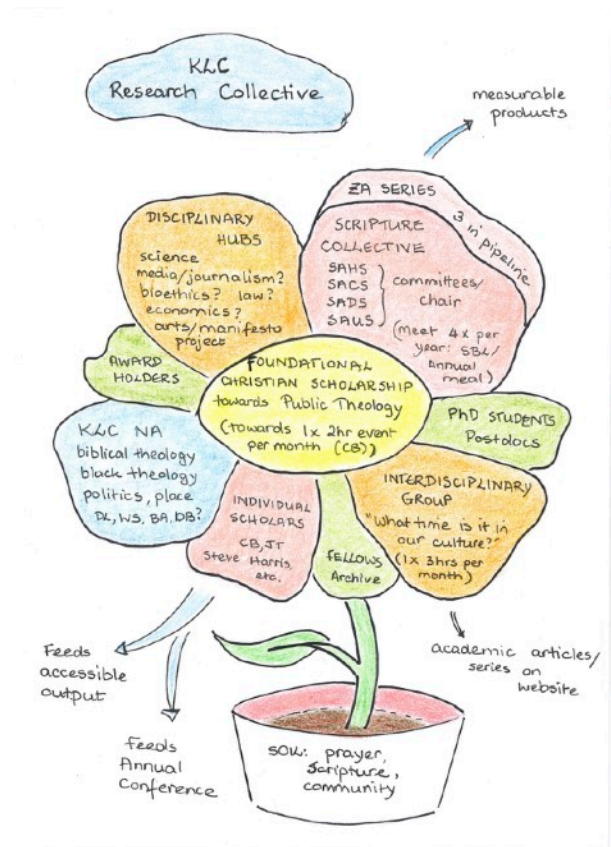
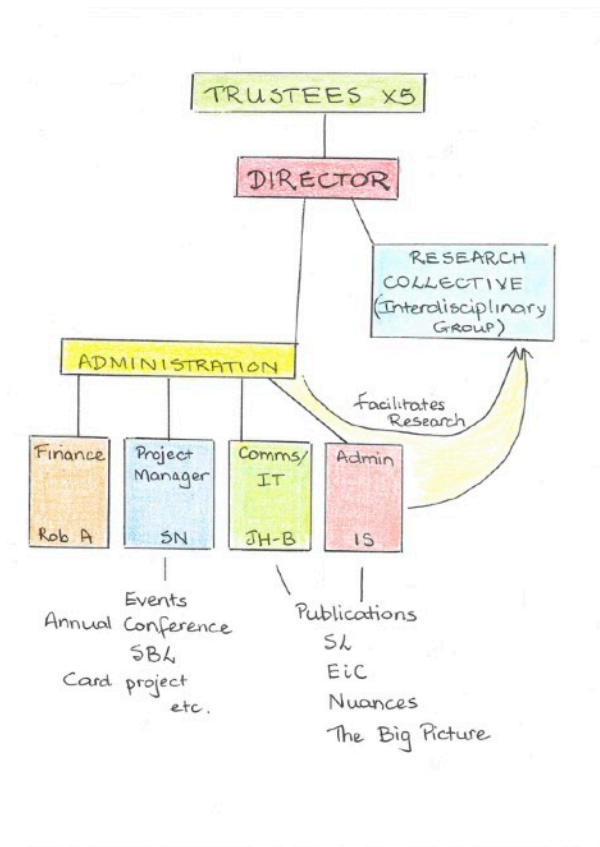
Does research really matter? Especially at a time like this shouldn't we be praying, caring for our neighbours, helping out at food banks, etc. Of course, but this is a false dichotomy. We need both. I remind you that Augustine's response to the fall of Rome was to write a very fat book. Practice that is uninformed by hard thought will be thin and distorted. Research that does not listen to practice and re-enter lived experience will also be distorted. An important insight for KLC that emerged from dialogue among our Trustees is that we *must* appoint Academic Fellows and Professional Fellows, so that we embody a dialogue between theory and praxis, and back again. Practitioners keen to live *coram deo* will welcome such dialogue, as will academics keen to do their work *coram deo*. We also recognise that any renewal of the Christian tradition will need to be accompanied by a riot of song, dance, poetry, healthy homes, good schools, art, music, financial institutions, law offices, medical practices, etc. Only in this way will our work be contained within a plausibility structure such that it must be attended to.

The task upon us is huge. However, I see it, and I encourage us to see it, as *an invitation*. My sense has been that with independence God has opened a wide door for effective service, and we are keen, with your help, to enter through that door. Looking around this zoom, it is beyond belief to think of how much expertise is among us. Oh, that I could get access to all your hard drives!

For those of you who have agreed to be Associate Fellows, note that we do not just want your name associated with us, grateful as we are for that. We know that many of you have full working lives, but, as you will have seen from our Fellows document, we request that you be connected with our work in some way. As appropriate, we want to start developing an archive of your work and promoting it. So yes, do download your hard drive in *Jarrod's* direction. Those chapters in books or journals that have largely been forgotten, those unpublished papers, let us work with you to give them new life and to hand them on to generations to come. Where books have gone out of print, let's think about a Classics Reprint Series, published by KLC. As appropriate, we want you to be a part of our community.

This year we are building our wineskin – our *outré* for Rosemary - so that we have a good institutional structure that can hold the new wine. We are deeply committed to institutional health at all levels, seeking to build a community that is humble, hungry in the sense of appropriately ambitious, and gloriously human and relational. Our 3 Hs – humble, hungry, human. Even as we build our wineskin - and it is steadily taking shape – go ahead and pour your wine in. In my view only SA Pinotage should be allowed, but I concede that a blend of well over sixty varieties will be the tastiest. Many good things are already taking shape: we have signed off on a publishing partnership with Zondervan Academic which includes one multi-author volume from us per year, some very exciting events are already in the pipelines, our new website is up and undergoing steady development – please check in on it regularly, we are developing a whole range of strategic partnerships, we recently hosted a first meeting of our SA Black Writers' Group and we are hoping for a similar group to develop in the USA, etc.

As you reflect on where and how you might connect with KLC I draw your attention to the structure of KLC.



## FOR ACTION

So, what are we asking you to do:

1. Live deeply into Christ, celebrate life, and pray for us.
2. Where you are already involved in great things please connect us to them. Let KLC be an impetus to do this good work even better.
3. Where you think you might connect with our work please take the initiative in doing so. If you think a new hub needs to develop let us know. If you have something you think we might publish send it to us. If there is something you want to write for us let us know.
4. If there are people you think we need to appoint as Fellows let us know, and make the connections for us.



5. Do please spread the word about KLC, and encourage your friends to sign up on our website.
6. Most importantly, build relationships with us. Istine, Jarrod, Sarah, Jenny, I, our Trustees, we are all willing to Zoom until we can connect face to face once again.

Our world needs far more of Christ, not more of us. But, if we accompany the Spirit on the *mission Dei*, he is well able to take our loaves and fishes, meagre as they may be, break them, and feed the hungry, the poor and those in need.

*Veni Creator Spiritus.*



Tim van Vuuren: *Fish*