

ISSUE 04 | TRINITY 2022 | THE KIRBY LAING CENTRE



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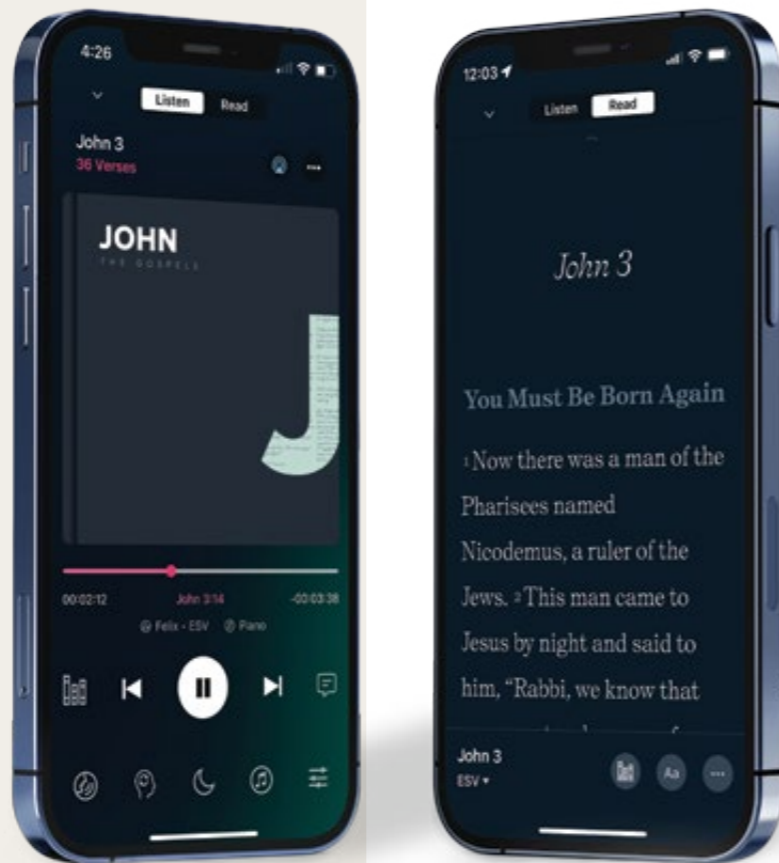


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# Difficult Hope

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*The Big Picture* is produced by the Kirby Laing Centre for Public Theology in Cambridge, a nonprofit academic research centre whose vision is to foster Christian scholarship and public theology, rooted in spirituality and practised in community, for the glory of God and the flourishing of the church and world.

We regularly produce publications and various resources, and host webinars and other events, all aimed at exploring answers to the question: How then should we live?

For more head over to our website, [kirbylaingcentre.co.uk](http://kirbylaingcentre.co.uk).

*The Big Picture* magazine is a periodical that seeks to: (1) Educate, inform and inspire readers about public theology, (2) Ground our work in Scripture, (3) Embodiment with creativity, through art, poetry, music, the written word, etc., the big picture vision of the gospel, (4) Connect with good practice wherever it is found, and (5) Build community locally and globally with our friends and partners actively represented in the magazine.

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# Difficult Hope

## EDITORIAL

**ISTINE RODSETH SWART**, Associate Editor

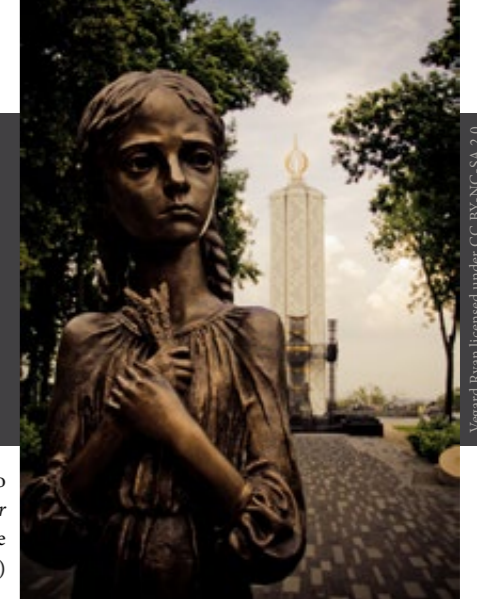
Pain and suffering get our attention. The problem of pain and suffering is high on the list of reasons why many reject God and if we are honest with ourselves, why being a Christian is not for the fainthearted. As believers we are not exempt from affliction, travail and catastrophe, but we have an additional challenge: How do we respond appropriately, biblically?

How should we present ourselves before God when suffering is intolerable and relentless, when unfairness and injustice prevail, when evil runs rampant, when God does not heal or rescue his petitioners; does not bring relief, nor intervene on their behalf. What should an honest expression of our anguish as individuals and as a church community look like? In the context of a relationship with God, our contributors encourage us to recover the ancient practice of biblical lament, so powerfully exemplified in Psalms, rooted in and in fact *required* by our covenant relationship with God.

We may be so overwhelmed by personal and local issues that we become indifferent to suffering elsewhere in the world, or we may choose to look the other way. If, however, as the body of Christ, we are called to bear one another's burdens, then the war in Ukraine and atrocities suffered at the hands of evildoers – the *Holodomor*, the Holocaust, genocide in Rwanda to name a few – clamour for attention and demand a response. If we have been fortunate to experience the minimum of trouble in our lives and have given little thought to suffering, then the COVID-19 pandemic, as a global threat, must surely give us pause.

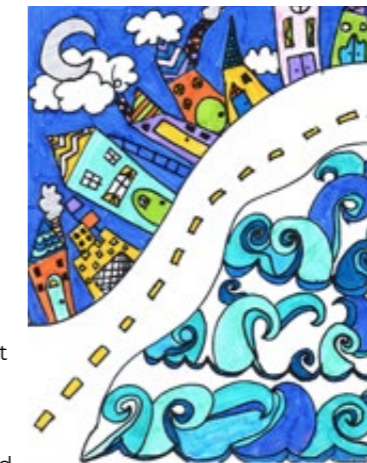
This fourth *The Big Picture* edition explores the concept of “difficult hope”; what it looks like when you have no parents and have to flee your war-torn homeland; when the pandemic claims family members, friends, colleagues, your livelihood; when you are the healer, but are afflicted and do not receive healing.

Monument to the *Holodomor* (the Great Famine in Soviet Ukraine)



How is difficult hope manifested when you are called to speak out against corruption; refuse to bear false witness or to swear allegiance to an antichrist, even at the cost of your own life; live a small, hidden life, but can execute an act of resistance that may reverberate through history?

What shape does hope take when you wish to live as an artisan of peace; to offer hope to your community as a farmer, a librarian, a musician, a poet; when you write novels, sculpt, paint or draw?



In young Kate Beldman's drawing, quaint and character-full houses are separated by a safe, broad road from threatening waves, equal in height to the dwellings they could so easily engulf. In this image, there is more than a hint, a promise perhaps, of a time when we will be permanently separated from evil, strangers to tears and calamity, unencumbered by sorrow, free to live joyfully in the presence of the Never-Failing Light.

Alas, we have not yet arrived there. So great is our distress, so deep our pain, so pressing our needs in this dystopian, already-but-not-yet time, that we cannot be satisfied by hollow utterances, shallow counterfeit wisdom, delusions of hope. Our contributors speak with many different voices, in prose, poetry and artworks, but are in accord: In our lives, today and tomorrow in the real word, hope is difficult but real; only to be found in the One by whose stripes we are healed – the King of kings, and of necessity to be practised with perseverance and resilience.

Wassily Kandinsky, *Painting with Houses*



# 5 Reasons to Read Wendell BERRY Today

CRAIG G. BARTHOLOMEW

As long as a Gnostic impulse continues to course through the veins of so much modern, Western Christianity we will not recognise the importance of a voice like that of Wendell Berry. Gnosticism is suspicious of the material, embodied world, always turning away its eyes towards “the spiritual.” It is the Gnostic impulse that underlies the sacred/secular dualism that so pervades Western evangelicalism and reduces Christian faith to a *church* view rather than a *world* view.

Once we discover – really discover – that Christianity relates to all of life, we will see that over his lifetime Berry has bequeathed to us an extraordinary gift in his life, his essays, his novels and his poetry. We need an anti-Gnostic *prophet* and in so many ways Berry is just this. He not only helps us to see the problem with Gnosticism, but again and again he helps us to see what real, embodied life in all its glory

and frailty looks like. How is it that he has been able to do this? And why should we read him today?

## 1. Because he is attentive to place.

Berry had every opportunity to pursue a prestigious academic career. However, he made the decision to return home to Kentucky and to farm and attend to his place. Doubtless some of his fellow academics saw this as a catastrophic move. However, it was precisely this move that has generated such a rich life and extraordinary body of work. Henri Nouwen notes that that which is most particular is most universal. Berry embodies this. By attending closely and carefully to his particular, small farm in Kentucky and doing so over his lifetime he has provided us with universal insights. In his

“Introduction” to a collection of Berry’s essays titled *The World-Ending Fire*, Paul Kingsnorth observes that “This [his farm in Kentucky] is the place in which he has lived, worked and written for the last half-century. This is the place whose story he has told, and through it he has told the story of America, and through that the story of modern humanity as it turns its back on the land and lays waste to the soil.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Introduction” in Wendell Berry, *The World-Ending Fire* (London: Penguin, 2017).

Gustave de Smet, *Large Landscape with Cows*  
by Jean Louis Mazieres licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0



Festival of Faiths / Flickr

Berry’s critique, to which Kingsnorth refers, is penetrating and searing. But he has never ceased to hold before us in deed and in word a marvellous alternative. You cannot read Berry without warming to his love for the land, animals and farming, people and community, and so much more. His focused world opens out on all of life and the picture is exquisite.

Berry is a proponent of the *local*, of local, healthy food production and so on. This is a note we desperately need to hear. Our globalized consumer culture has meant that we source our products from *wherever they are most cheaply available*. The West has shipped out its industries all over the world and to China in particular so that our industrial base has been shattered. The absurd extent of this is evoked by Sarah Elton of Toronto in her 2010 book *Locavore*. As a young mom she was shocked to attention about what we eat when she bought her daughter an iced cookie. When she got home she checked the wrapping for the contents only to see that the cookie was made in China. It is astonishing to think that a wonderful, walkable city like Toronto with its many coffee and muffin chains, ends up selling iced cookies made in China.

But Toronto is not alone. We have known for years how dangerous Vladimir Putin is, but this has not stopped us from becoming dependent on Russia. Oil and gas sales fund the war in Ukraine, and,

Photo: Jan Kalish (@jankalishphotography)



THE BIG PICTURE



Leon Wyczółkowski, *The Sower*; Vincent van Gogh, *Enclosed Field with Ploughman*



despite repeated warnings, countries like Germany are so dependent on Russia that now, when we need them to turn off the tap, they appear unable to do so. For years London has been awash with dirty Russian money with a veritable tribe of PR consultants, lawyers and others to function as the enablers of the oligarchs.

When we realise that it is not just about the economy, stupid!, we will start to awaken to the need for local and national sustainability, for avoiding a dysfunctional dance with brutal autocracies that puts us in their debt and renders us unable to respond decisively when something like the war in Ukraine breaks out. As we awaken, we will need a prophet like Wendell Berry to point the way to health, sustainability and therefore genuinely ethical foreign policies.

## 2. Because he is attentive to farming.

Because we are embodied, we survive – delightfully – by eating the creation. You would think that this would make us intensely aware of the food chain and farming and agriculture. Alas, our closest link to food production is generally the pristine supermarket. In the process, agribusiness devastates the land and animals are subjected to dreadful suffering. I think the first book I read by Berry is his seminal

*The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*. His work in this area is simultaneously damning and rich beyond measure. In his *Standing on Earth: Selected Essays* he writes, “To live we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness, and others to want.”<sup>2</sup>

## 3. Because he calls us to attend to the Bible and the doctrine of creation.

In the quote above Christian motifs dominate. Indeed, there is a strong Christian motif in Berry’s corpus. In his must-read essay, “Christianity and the Survival of Creation,”<sup>3</sup> Berry describes the sacred/secular dualism as “the most destructive disease that afflicts us.”<sup>4</sup> He accepts that the ecological critique of Christianity is valid but ... notes that the disparagement and neglect of the creation by Christians is not biblical! We need to recover the doctrine of creation and as we do so we will see that “Belief in Christ is thus dependent on prior belief in the inherent goodness – the lovability – of

<sup>2</sup> (Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1991), 98

<sup>3</sup> In Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community* (NY: Pantheon, 1992, 1993), 93-116.

<sup>4</sup> Berry, *Sex, Economy*, 105.

the world.”<sup>5</sup> As Berry evocatively notes, the Bible is “a book open to the sky.”<sup>6</sup>

It is disturbing – Berry would say “blasphemous” – how we have so often domesticated and privatised the Bible. Berry calls us to defamiliarize ourselves with the Bible so that we can see again how it opens out on all of life, on God’s good creation.

#### 4. Because he is attentive to difficult hope.

One cannot, like Berry, attend closely to the world without realising that something is profoundly wrong with it. Christians capture this in the doctrine of the fall. Amidst a world charged with God’s glory, as Hopkins writes, the global Coronavirus pandemic and now, as if we had not been through enough, a single word like “Bucha,” evokes untold misery. Hope amidst such horrors is difficult, and the theme for this edition of *TBP*, namely “difficult hope,” comes from Berry.

Berry is an essayist, a novelist and a poet. He titles his essay on a poem about the war in Vietnam, “A Poem of Difficult Hope.”<sup>7</sup> Searingly, he notes that “A person who marks his trail into despair remembers hope – and thus has hope, even if only a little.”<sup>8</sup> Berry writes of [Hayden Carruth’s poem](#) that it “preserves the poet’s wholeness of heart in the face of his despair. And it shows us how to do so as well.”<sup>9</sup>

In 1 Peter 3:15 the apostle writes, “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” Amidst the challenges of our days we need hope. And Christians are called to be a people of the resurrection, a

people of hope. Amidst what feels like a long, dark and derelict Holy Saturday, we need to find hope anew. How do we do this? We need practices of revering Christ as Lord in our hearts. Such practices are not escapist illusions but anchor us in Christ so that amidst the realities of life we hope. We cannot do this alone – note the use of the second person plural in 1 Peter 3:15. Individualism will collapse before the challenges of our day in despair. Healthy community – central to KLC’s vision – will enable us together to find our way back to difficult hope again and again.



Ruizanglada, *Ascension*

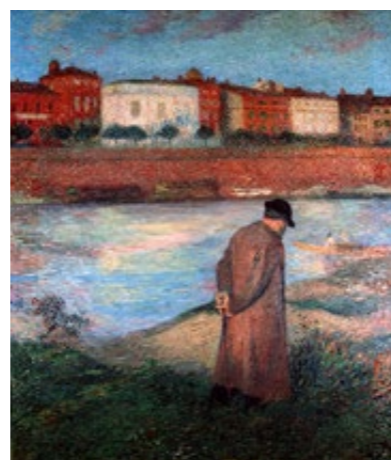
#### 5. Because he is attentive to words.

In his *Standing by Words*,<sup>10</sup> Berry asserts that for some 150 years we have witnessed language becoming “either meaningless or destructive of meaning. And I believe that this increasing unreliability of language parallels the increasing disintegration, over the same period, of persons and communities.” Postmodernism, with its endless and monotonous deconstruction, has been a milestone on this journey. During the years of the Trump presidency we were exposed to endless lies, alternative facts, and constant accusations of fake news with large sections of the media branded as the enemy of the people. We became immune to it. But now, the terrible sounds of war are again heard in Europe, civilians are being slaughtered and the Putin regime resorts to the

same playbook of fake news. A terrible gift of the war in Ukraine is its reminder that *words and truth matter*, and their loss yields the most dreadful disintegration.

Yet again, Berry not only diagnoses the problem but embodies the solution. He is a wordsmith *par excellence*. Read his essays, novels – his eight novels centred on Port William are a delight – and poetry, and you will see what I mean. We need new generations of comparable essayists, novelists and poets who will help us to see, who will help us to agonise, who will help us to hope. KLC longs to be part of such a renewal and we invite you to join us in this journey.

If you are not aware of Berry’s life and writings a feast awaits. If you are, note that I myself have found it wonderfully refreshing to return to his work. It goes without saying, but alas it still needs to be said, that my love of Berry’s work does not mean that I agree with everything he says or writes. I am, for example, writing this on my computer; Berry does not use a computer. His provocative essay, “Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer,” is readily available online. We can and must learn from people we sometimes disagree with. Berry’s corpus is far too important and rich to ignore.



Henri Martin, *Poet*

Craig Bartholomew is the director of the Kirby Laing Centre for Public Theology in Cambridge.



Paul Nash, *Void*

#### C. HUGO HERFST

Last year, before the developments in the Ukraine, Pope Francis made a helpful distinction between *architects* and *artisans* of peace. Few of us would be included in the guild of international peace architects as key players on the global stage. All of us, however, can contribute to peace as artisans. Yet even artisans need some kind of inherited family secret recipe or insight to produce the desired bread, cheese or furniture. For Christian artisans of peace, the inherited insight is found in the grand narrative of Scripture and if our pressing desire is to be peacemakers at such a time as this, Scripture must inform our efforts.

Scripture has been described as an encyclopaedia of utopias and dystopias, where the idea of utopia is constructed in terms of *shalom*. Utopia and dystopia are juxtaposed throughout the narrative: creation versus fall; the creational vocation of both Adam and Eve in the *imago Dei* versus fratricide and exploitation; Exodus as liberation to settle in a land flowing with milk and honey versus the humiliating exile away from that same land. Yet even in the darkest dystopia, the light of God’s promise shines on a more hopeful future of a genuine utopia.

At a time when our global community struggles wearily to exit the pandemic, as we watch with horror as Russian forces inflict intense suffering on the Ukrainian people in a motley mixture of twisted nationalism and nefarious religious illusions, the very possibility of utopia seems suspect. We desperately want authentic *shalom*, not some Pollyanna version of a pipe dream. Do we still dare to hope?

Perhaps the more urgent question is: *What* should we hope

for? *Which* utopia should we seek? Do we simply pine for a pre-pandemic world? Again, Scripture guides our reflection. Ecclesiastes rejects the dystopia of greed, disordered loves or unbridled economic growth in favour of the utopia of the ordinary: the celebration of all of life *coram Deo* – either when days are good, or honest reflection when things are less than optimal. Prophetic literature is replete with rich images of a utopia that continues to resonate with the best futures that humans could imagine: swords beaten into ploughs; a fraternal, ecological solidarity between the rest of creation and humans; and a reversal of infertility so that fruitfulness and abundance push against narrow limits of scarcity.

The biblical utopia is really all about *Life*; a dynamic, communal life shaped by mercy, righteousness and justice that delights God far more than material wealth, military power or technological prowess (Jer 9:23–24). At its deepest level it is life with Yahweh, the God of the covenant; a life that the prophets insist is nothing less than the triumph of good over evil, life over death. It is a triumph which is decisively enfleshed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus who demonstrates and announces the ultimate biblical utopia: the kingdom of God.



Aristarkh Lentulov, *The Gate with a Tower. New Jerusalem*

In this particularly poignant moment, we find ourselves living the tension between the “already” and the “not yet” of the kingdom of God. We yearn for utopia in a time of alarmingly frightful dystopia.

We are not alone.

Paul reminds us that all of creation has been groaning in labour pains – pregnant with utopian hope – for the promised future. We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan while

we wait and pray. Astonishingly, the Spirit himself groans as he intercedes with sighs that are too deep for words (Rom 8:18–27). There is a symphony of sighs that clings to God’s promise for a creation that will be set free from bondage to all that is evil and will obtain glorious freedom. As artisans of peace – and hope – we join our groaning to the Spirit’s sighs when our words seem inadequate. Thus, artisans of peace and hope will inevitably be people who see “useless” prayer as powerful, patient protest, confident that the final word will be life, a life that will be better than we could have possibly imagined. If utopia is often defined as *no place*, we need reminding that it is *no place ... as yet*.

Dr C. Hugo Herfst, OblSB, and his wife, Jackie, recently returned to Guatemala where they had previously served for over 20 years. He is an Associate Fellow of the KLC.



Diego Rivera, *Still Life and Blossoming Almond Trees, California*

# An Agrarian Hope

MICHELLE STINSON

It had been an unseasonably warm and dry winter in Denver. As a result, the day's impending storm system was being discussed in hope-filled tones everywhere I went on that January morning. Returning home, I sat and watched as the trees outside my upstairs window began to gather snowflakes as light and delicate as candyfloss. After an hour or so, the once bare branches were cloaked in delicate white snow. And if I didn't know where I was and what season it was, I would tell you that I was seeing the snowy white blossoms of springtime that would soon blanket the almond orchards back in my former home state of California. And with this memory, and the expectations it stirred within me, I found myself drawn towards hope.

This extended season of Covidtide has created in many of us an inner restlessness, as the certainties of our remembered past lives continue to elude us in the present. And yet for me, even in the midst of a season of my own life upheavals, the sight of snow-blossoms on a bare winter branch simultaneously reminded me of the beauty in my Californian past and pulled me forward in hope to the surety of renewal found within creation itself.

Hope, in its most basic sense, is “a desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfillment.”<sup>1</sup> Within the Hebrew Bible, the various words for “hope” hold this same sense of confident expectation, and yet here the foundation of this

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hope>

hope is in God and the expectation that God will fulfill God's promises. The Hebrew Bible opens with the claim that God is the creator of the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1). As the narrative unfolds, God's creative efforts extend to the land and the living creatures (Gen 1–2). And yet it is God's human creatures and their continued rebellions that lead eventually to God's destruction of the created world through the waters of a flood (Gen 6–8). Yet even as God's creation experiences de-creation, God's renewed commitment to the created world and its inhabitants is shown through an act of re-creation:

“I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.” (Gen 8:21b–22)<sup>2</sup>

I would propose that the divine decree of Genesis 8:21–22 contains within it the fundamental elements for a reaffirmation of hope in the world. First, it reasserts YHWH as creator and sustainer of the heavens and the earth. Key terms used in verse 22 echo the initial creation story including “seed” (זרע, cf. 1:11–12,29), “day”/“night” (לילה/יום, cf. 1:5), and “cease/rest” (שבת, cf. 2:2–3). Second, this decree underscores the reestablishment of the order embedded

<sup>2</sup> All biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.



John Martin, *The Assuaging of the Waters*

in creation. The hope expressed in Genesis 8:22 draws upon the cyclical certainty of agricultural seasons (“seedtime and harvest”), as well as nature's daily (“day and night”) and seasonal (“cold and heat, summer and winter”) rhythms. And finally, it is a hope that rests in God's faithfulness to humanity, not humanity's response to this divine initiative. As Victor Hamilton aptly observes: “However irregular the human heart may be (8:21b), there will be regularity in God's world and its cycles.”<sup>3</sup>

In her book, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, Ellen Davis defines “agrarianism” as “a way of thinking and ordering life that is based on the health of the land and of living creatures.”<sup>4</sup> This definition focuses on humanity's engagement with the created world. Drawing loosely from her definition, I would propose that images of “agrarian hope” within the biblical text draw upon the reliability and orderliness of the created world as a mark of God's sustaining care for the land and its living creatures. It is a hope expressed through the regular, repeated patterns of agricultural growth and the regular recurrence of elemental environmental cycles.

Within the Hebrew Bible, nature's seasons and agriculture's rhythms often serve as signposts of hope. Images drawn from Genesis 8:22's divine promise of creational order appear time and again on the lips of biblical prophets and poets as they speak hope-filled words in the midst of Israel's seasons of uncertainty. Psalm 126, one of the so-called “Psalms of Ascents” (Pss 120–134), provides an avenue to consider the rhetorical power of agriculture's rhythms as an invitation to hope, an invitation offered to us as well in the midst of the disorientation of this prolonged pandemic.

Psalm 126 opens with a recollection of God's work in Israel's

<sup>3</sup> Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 310.  
<sup>4</sup> Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.

past, a time “when the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion” (verse 1a), a time marked by great joy (verses 2, 3). In verse 4, the gaze of the psalm singers turn from the past to consider the reality of their present need: “Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb.” The psalm closes with a hope-filled plea, drawing its imagery of restoration from the agricultural cycles of “seedtime and harvest”:

May those who sow in tears  
 reap with shouts of joy.  
 Those who go out weeping,  
 bearing the seed for sowing,  
 shall come home with shouts of joy,  
 carrying their sheaves. (Ps 126:5–6)

Considered within the agrarian context of ancient Israel, the rhythm of “seedtime and harvest” becomes a powerful invitation towards hope. For it is the expectant hope of harvest that draws farmers to their fields with seed in hand, even in years of uncertainty and distress. And it is through the rhythms of nature and the cycles of agriculture that we experience the surety of God's work in the world.

As our experience of this global pandemic continues, hope may seem elusive as so many of our human constructs for ordering our time and life are continually upended. In the midst of this disordered human reality, Israel's poets call



Vladimir Baranov-Rossine, *The Tree and the Rainbow*

us towards a hope that lies outside of our calendars and planners and turns our eyes to creation as a signpost of hope. For as seen within Psalm 126, it is the elemental order rooted in agriculture's rhythms that offer us a glimpse of hope after these long years of grief and loss. It is a hope that is reinforced as day by day the morning light grows earlier, as month by month the heavens bring forth much needed moisture for the land, and that as we go to plant our gardens after the last spring frost that the seeds in our hands hold the hope of a future harvest.

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# CHRIS'S Column

## WORD ON THE WORLD

Why, LORD, do you stand far off?  
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?  
(Ps 10:1)

**Chris Wright** seeks a biblical response  
to the crisis in Ukraine.

I write this on Day 5 of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. I have no idea what the situation in that country will be by the time you read this. But right now where else could one look for a “word on the world” than to the Psalms. Book I of the Psalter contains familiar gems: the wonders of creation (Pss 8 and 19); the Lord’s shepherding care (Ps 23); God’s royal ownership and authority over all the earth (Pss 24 and 29) and more. But a dominant theme, especially in the first dozen psalms, is rampant wickedness, violence and injustice, and the desperation of those who suffer such attacks and cry out to the Lord God of justice to act in their defence.

There are many believers in Ukraine today (along with believers in Russia too who deplore and grieve over the actions of their president) for whom the words of these psalms speak directly and powerfully. So rather than trying to write an essay myself, let the psalms speak for themselves, and for our suffering sisters and brothers in the midst of this conflict.

There is *the face of ruthless and arrogant evil*, linked with greed and ill-gotten wealth.

- 2 In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak,  
who are caught in the schemes he devises.
- 3 He boasts about the cravings of his heart;  
he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD.
- 5 His ways are always prosperous;  
your laws are rejected by him;  
he sneers at all his enemies.
- 7 His mouth is full of lies and threats;  
trouble and evil are under his tongue.

- 8 He lies in wait near the villages;  
from ambush he murders the innocent.
- His eyes watch in secret for his victims;
- 9 like a lion in cover he lies in wait.
- He lies in wait to catch the helpless;  
he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net.
- 10 His victims are crushed, they collapse;  
they fall under his strength. (Ps 10:2-10)

And, while there are no wholly innocent parties in human affairs, there is the protest of *those who are wrongfully and undeservedly attacked*, knowing God is the righteous judge.

- 3 LORD my God, if I have done this  
and there is guilt on my hands –
- 4 if I have repaid my ally with evil  
or without cause have robbed my foe –
- 5 then let my enemy pursue and overtake me;  
let him trample my life to the ground  
and make me sleep in the dust. (Ps 7:3-5)
- 4 For you have upheld my right and my cause,  
sitting enthroned as the righteous judge. (Ps 9:4)
- 7 The LORD reigns forever;  
he has established his throne for judgment.
- 8 He rules the world in righteousness  
and judges the peoples with equity. (Ps 9:7-8)

And because of that ultimate *confidence in the justice of God*, the victims of unjust attack can appeal to God, crying out for him to act in line with his known character, in words that we must surely echo and pray with the victims of this latest aggression.

- 14 But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted;  
you consider their grief and take it in hand.
- The victims commit themselves to you;  
you are the helper of the fatherless. (Ps 10:14)

Left: Antonio García Vega, *Mourners*

Right: Fyodor Bronnikov, *The Rich Man and Lazarus*



- 18 God will never forget the needy;  
the hope of the afflicted will never perish.
- 19 Arise, LORD, do not let mortals triumph;  
let the nations be judged in your presence.
- 20 Strike them with terror, LORD;  
let the nations know they are only mortal. (Ps 9:18-20)



Annibale Carracci, *Dead Christ*

“Let the nations be judged ...” The psalmists have no illusions about *the machinations of the nations in general*. In the present fog of war and escalation of rhetoric and belated action among Western nations, we should not naively overlook the collusion of some governments (especially

the UK) in facilitating the laundered criminality underlying the astronomical wealth that protects Putin and his friends. Such whitewashing of blatant but concealed wrongdoing brings its own curse in the international arena.

Whoever says to the guilty, “You are innocent,” will be cursed by peoples and denounced by nations. (Prov 24:24)

Those who turn a blind eye to evil, even when it is exposed with serious warnings by official commissions and reports, will find themselves ensnared by their own action (or inaction).

- 15 The nations have fallen into the pit they have dug;  
their feet are caught in the net they have hidden.
- 16 The LORD is known by his acts of justice;  
the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands. (Ps 9:15-16)

Indeed, there is a bleak logic about evil, that it tends towards its own destruction. The Evil One sometimes overreaches himself and *the worst wickedness destroys its perpetrator*. Only God the sovereign judge knows how and when. The cross is the ultimate proof, when God took the worst that human and satanic evil could hurl at his Son and turned it to its own defeat, and then raised Jesus in victory from the dead. The psalmists had not heard of that yet, but they could thank God for the certainty of his righteousness. Wickedness and evildoers will not have the last word with impunity in God’s moral universe – an assurance of the biblical gospel narrative that the psalmists can thankfully anticipate as an ultimate reality.

- 14 Whoever is pregnant with evil  
conceives trouble and gives birth to disillusionment.
- 15 Whoever digs a hole and scoops it out  
falls into the pit they have made.
- 16 The trouble they cause recoils on them;  
their violence comes down on their own heads.
- 17 I will give thanks to the LORD  
because of his righteousness;  
I will sing the praises of the name  
of the LORD Most High. (Ps 7:14-17)

5 You have rebuked *the nations* and destroyed the wicked;  
you have blotted out their name for ever and ever.

7 The LORD reigns forever;  
he has established his throne for judgment. (Ps 9:5,7)

“The *LORD* reigns!” And therefore even in the midst of the most evil events, we must *look for the signs of the kingdom of God* – the God who can bring good out of the most terrible evil (again, remember the cross). When I visited Ukraine in October 2017, there was so much to give thanks for: a growing number of Langham Scholars; expanding impact of evangelical seminaries; favour with the government for higher theological education; significant biblical “salt and light” by Christians in the public arena. God does not do waste. The mustard seeds of his kingdom will grow, and we will have reasons to be amazed at the work of God’s hands, just as we are now so appalled at the blood-stained hands of fallen humanity.

There is hope in the midst of the horror. And so we pray with and for our sisters and brothers that one day they will be able to, “Sing the praises of the LORD, enthroned in Zion; proclaim among the nations what he has done” (Ps 9:11).

Rev Dr Chris Wright is Global Ambassador and Ministry Director of Langham Partnership ([www.langham.org](http://www.langham.org)). He is the author of many books including commentaries on Exodus, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Lamentations and Ezekiel, and is a Senior Research Fellow of the KLC.

This article was first published in Transform, for Langham Partnership.

Kazimir Malevich, *Triumph of Heaven*



# LAMENT:

## *The Liturgical Shape of Difficult Hope*

BRIDGET NICHOLS

That lament has become a dominant theme in the composing of texts for worship should not surprise anyone who has followed contemporary events over recent years. The surprise, perhaps, has been that this is not innovation, but rediscovery. Lament belongs to the most ancient fabric of prayer. It confronts us in the writings of psalmists and prophets, and in their recapitulation in Jesus' own lament over Jerusalem and last words from the cross.



Vasily Vereshchagin, *Night at Calvary*

Yet there is a temptation to be cynical – the same temptation offered by an overused commodity. Has the apparently irresistible urge to attach laments to public acts of worship, especially those crafted to respond to current or historic events, become merely a device signalling the right sort of consciousness on the part of organisers and participants? Here, we might legitimately distinguish between good lament and bad lament. Good lament is surely the truthful naming of things cruel and shameful and horrifying by communities who are still clinging, however precariously, to hope in the faithfulness of a God who listens and eventually acts. Bad lament founders in its own catalogue of regret and struggles to achieve any turn towards hope.

If lament is again being recognised as a vital part of what makes the discourse of prayer “authentic” (a word to be used thoughtfully and carefully, and with Charles Taylor’s *Ethics of Authenticity* on a nearby bookshelf), then we owe it to ourselves to do it well. By that I mean not so much a polished and eloquent performance, as an utterance that does not require rigorous analysis to defend its truthful credentials. John Witvliet is one of the surest guides and some of his principles set the standard to which writers could profitably aspire. Lament should be personal and direct. It should not be clogged with qualifications or conditional expressions. It should use strong words – “those less fortunate than ourselves” make less of a claim than the unedited naming of our neglect of the poor and desperate. Lament should also disrupt the regular prayer patterns of the worshipping community. A mass shooting, or the abduction of schoolchildren, or the murder of a local resident properly cuts across the prescribed readings for the day and the intercessions composed a week ahead of the service.

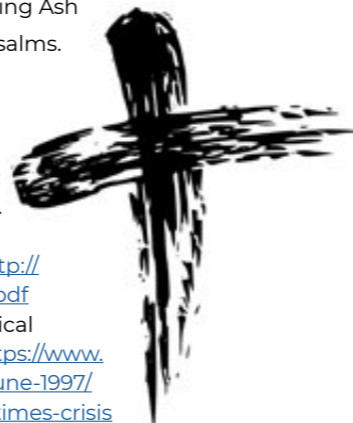
Lament is above all an inhabited process. If hope comes as its final outworking or poetic turn, such hope can never be taken for granted. For that reason, Witvliet says we should lament slowly, perhaps praying through a psalm over a whole hour. At the end, something has changed in us. Perhaps that is all that needs to happen – the testing of the integrity of our humanity (a point Wendell Berry makes in “A Poem of Difficult Hope”).

That returns us to the question of whether lament can be introduced too often into the practice of worship. One obvious conclusion is that it has its own urgency. We know by attending to the world we live in, local and global, when lamentation is called for. Communities may be less clear as to when their own conduct calls for corporate lament. We go on needing Ash Wednesday and the penitential psalms.

### For Further Reading

- Taylor, Charles. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Witvliet, John D. “What About Liturgical Lament?” <http://eredienstcreatief.nl/witvliet3.pdf>
- ——. “A Time to Weep: Liturgical Lament in Times of Crisis.” <https://www.reformedworship.org/article/june-1997/time-weep-liturgical-lament-times-crisis>

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JAMIE A. GRANT

How does one find hope in the midst of lament? This is not an easy question to answer constructively. It is much easier to express how one does not – or at least should not – resort to finding a superficial substitute for hope in dark circumstances. The Christian believer should not move from lament to hope quickly or lightly or unthinkingly or out of the crushingly stupid social pressure to be “fine” because anything other than “fine” is somehow a failure of faith. There is hope to be found in and from lament but that movement is not easy and we should be prepared to dwell honestly before the covenant God for as long as it takes to find genuine hope. Rico Villanueva’s helpful study of the changes of tone found in lament psalms is called *The Uncertainty of a Hearing* for good reason.<sup>1</sup> Expressions of hope or confidence in God are found in the biblical laments but these

<sup>1</sup> Federico G. Villanueva, *The Uncertainty of a Hearing: A Study of the Sudden Change of Mood in the Psalms of Lament*, VTSup. 121 (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

do not outweigh the expressions of present pain and should never become an “easy way out” for us as readers. There is hope in lament but we find it carefully, thoughtfully and through theological honesty.

### Lament as Covenant Complaint

As I write, truly terrible things are happening in Ukraine. Things that

have – perhaps shamefully<sup>2</sup> – inspired the Western church to seek its voice of lament once again. The trouble is that Christians of our generation lack the spiritual vocabulary to emulate (or even appropriate) the bluntness of the biblical lament literature. This inability is rooted in a failure to understand what covenant really means.<sup>3</sup> We tend to think of covenant as a one-way street – we are obligated to relate to God in the light of his law. However, the psalmists believed that covenant obligation runs *both* ways. One of the most mind-blowing concepts of the Scriptures is contained in the central theological tenet that the Creator God

<sup>2</sup> Shamefully because truly terrible things happen throughout the world all the time but the proximity of the war in Ukraine has brought a sense of focus to the Western church that is often absent when horrors are viewed from a distance.

<sup>3</sup> With apologies for self-reference, I discuss this link between lament and covenant relationship more fully in Jamie A. Grant, “The Hermeneutics of Humanity: Reflections on the Human Origin of the Lament,” in *A God of Faithfulness: Essays in Honour of J. Gordon McConville on His 60th Birthday*, eds. Jamie A. Grant, Alison Lo, and Gordon J. Wenham, LHBOTS 538 (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 182–202.



*The Unbowed Man*, Khatyn Memorial, Belarus.

and Sovereign over the cosmos *binds himself* to relate to us in a particular way. The crux of lament is found in offering prayers to *God* that *accuse God* of covenant unfaithfulness. It would be an understatement to say that our contemporary spirituality is uncomfortable with such expression in our prayer language.

“But God is forever faithful to his covenant,” I hear you reply. Agreed, he is. However, it doesn’t always *feel* that way. It doesn’t always *seem* that way from a human perspective. Where is the promised divine justice in Mariupol or Bucha? Commonly, it is easier to prevaricate than it is to call it as we see it. The psalmists refused to do so because what is the point in offering a polite, well-intentioned, theologically-appropriate lie? It is, after all, offering a *lie* to the One who sees our hearts.

“Okay, but God is *still* always faithful to his covenant, so we must be in the wrong, not him.” Agreed again, but that doesn’t matter. Of course, when it comes to lament, the problem always lies in our skewed or incomplete perspective on the realities that we observe. However, human finitude is a given in prayer – we always pray from a fallible perspective. Take Job, for example. Through lengthy debate and defence he accuses God of two things: 1) the complete loss of control over the events of his life (or, possibly, even of wicked intent in the running of his affairs) (Job 38:2) and; 2) the removal of divine presence in a manner that equated to enmity – God had turned against him (e.g., Job 19:6-12). The Yahweh speeches (Job 38-41) make it absolutely clear that Job is wrong on both counts. Yet, he is then commended by God for speaking to him, even though his perspectives were completely wrong. Job is then – as the only human participant to address God directly throughout the book – confirmed in that role of

intercessor on behalf of his friends (Job 42:7-9).<sup>4</sup> So, Job’s example of lament confirms for us the importance of honestly expressing reality as we see it to God. Even when we know that we must somehow be wrong in fact, the biblical examples of lament prioritise absolutely brutal honesty over propriety. The God of the Scriptures *requires* honest prayer from his people.



William Blake, *Job confessing his presumption to God who answers from the whirlwind.*

**Wherein “Hope” Then?**

At this point you may want to refer the title of this reflection to the Advertising Standards Authority. Prayers of lament reflect the bleakness of the world back to God but we have to remember that prayers of lament reflect the bleakness of the world *back to God*. This is the great irony of lament prayer. The lamenter views God as the ultimate *source* of her anguish and, at the same time, the sole

<sup>4</sup> See Elaine A. Phillips, “Speaking Truthfully: Job’s Friends and Job,” *BBR* 18, no. 1 (2008): 31–43, for helpful discussion of how we should probably translate Job 42:7 and 9 as “speaking rightly *to me*” rather than “about me.” Job here is being commended for clinging to God in prayer rather than stepping away from relationship with him.

*solution* to her pain, or to the problems of this world.

Lament offers (at least) three sources of hope. Firstly, lament forces the church to address the realities of the world that fall short of the divine intent head on. In lament we refuse to live in a privatised world of “faith” which pretends that war and abuse and injustice do not exist. Such prayers give us the opportunity to repeat back to God the standards that he demands, reminding him (not that he needs reminding) of the brokenness of his beautiful creation and requiring him to bring that kingdom reality, inaugurated in Christ, ever more fully into being in our day.<sup>5</sup> All we are really doing is asking God to do the things he wants to do anyway. Such prayers change the world: does that not inspire hope?

Secondly, lament believes unswervingly in a God who intervenes in human history and seeks that intervention in present reality. All too often the contemporary church lives out life in a dualistic bubble that shuts out the world. We focus on “heaven” and “quiet times” and “worship.” What sort of worship of the living God does not get its hands dirty? Lament reminds us of the God who *visited* his people in the Exodus – the release of real people from real slavery – and expects the same

<sup>5</sup> Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (London: SPCK, 2011).



Crucifixion Scene, I Yesus Church, Axum, Ethiopia

today. Lament clings to the historical reality of the cross and the empty tomb. The *Logos* dwelled among us and he still does by his Spirit and through his church. Lament refuses simply to concede that God will sort things out in the end. Of course, the psalmists knew that to be true, but they lived with a this-world-here-and-now expectation rooted in knowing the God of the Exodus. How much more so should we expect divine intervention in our historical realities because we know the God of the cross, the empty tomb and the ascension?

Thirdly, there is hope in lament because it offers believers the opportunity to continue to walk in relationship with God even when every logical thought suggests that withdrawal would be the better option. So it was with Job and with

Heman, the “author” of the bleak and apparently hopeless Psalm 88. Both believed God to be the cause of their pain, yet also that any sense of future hope could *only* be rooted in relationship with him. When we fail



Niko Pirosmiani, *The Ascension of Christ*

to lament, we fall into a functional atheism. Not that we disbelieve the existence of God, not even that we deny God’s intervention, but we resort to a worldview that refuses to believe that God intervenes in *my* history and *this* world. Lament brings hope because Yahweh does not expect a cowed, polite propriety. He expects us, at times, to scream in his face when confronted with loss, anguish and pain. By so doing, despite all indications to the contrary, Christians resolutely cling to the psalmic belief that he is the Lord who reigns (Ps 93:1) and that his steadfast love endures forever (Ps 136:1). Surely, in these two statements there is – and always will be – hope.

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# Freezing Order

CRAIG G. BARTHOLOMEW

There is at present regular discussion among news outlets as to whether or not the sanctions against Putin, his colleagues and the oligarchs work. They do, and one of my reasons for saying this is the remarkable work of Bill Browder and Putin's reaction to it.

Around the time in 2018 that the Putin regime recklessly attempted to assassinate the double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in Salisbury, UK, using a highly toxic nerve agent called Novichok, I discovered Bill Browder's explosive and searing *Red Notice: How I Became Putin's No. 1 Enemy* (2015). After graduating from Stanford, Browder set up the largest hedge fund in the new Russia. He and his colleagues began to expose the rampant and breathtaking corruption they discovered. Initially this was useful to Putin until one day Browder flew back to Moscow only to be held and then extradited back to the UK. The full force of the Kremlin was unleashed against his company and workers.

A Russian lawyer he employed, Sergei Magnitsky, continued to expose the corruption. Magnitsky refused to go into hiding because, he said, there were human rights in the new Russia. Sergei was arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and when his health broke down completely he was taken to a

prison with a medical centre, handcuffed to a pipe in a room and then beaten to death. His crime: as a Christian Sergei was not willing to sign up to the state propaganda about Browder: you shall not bear false witness.

Sergei Magnitsky

Browder could not get the British or the US government to act. The Obama White House was resetting relations with Russia. However, several senators in the US Congress worked with Browder to get the Magnitsky Act passed, which targeted the assets of every person involved in Sergei's murder. Since then 34 countries have passed

similar Magnitsky Acts and a Global Magnitsky Act has come into existence which targets human rights' abusers globally.

Tellingly and brutally, the day after the Magnitsky Act was passed by the US Congress, Putin banned the adoption of Russian babies by Americans. Brutally, because these were often sick and unwell babies who benefitted enormously from being adopted by Americans. This is important, because when you hear that Donald Trump Jr. and Donald Trump himself only discussed "adoption" with Putin and Russian representatives, this is certainly code for Putin requesting that the Magnitsky Act be repealed, and probably that Browder be handed over to Russia.

*Red Notice* and now Browder's latest must-read book, *Freezing Order: A True Story of Russian Money Laundering, Murder and Surviving Vladimir Putin's Wrath* (2022), document the great lengths to which Putin has gone to try to get the Magnitsky Act repealed and Browder's work halted. Why? Because Putin and his kleptocrats keep the huge amounts of money they have stolen from the Russian economy in the West, where they and their families enjoy lavish lifestyles, superyachts, great houses and the high life. Putin cares about money and power, and the Magnitsky Act threatens both, as do the unprecedented raft of sanctions imposed since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24. Freezing assets and sanctions work.

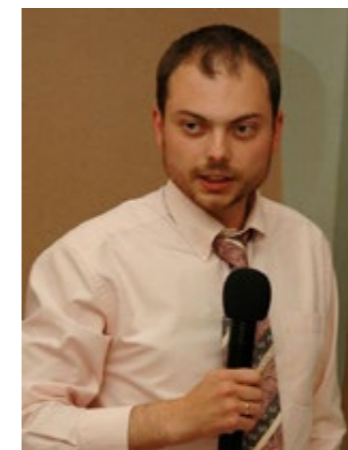
Russia's brutal and unprovoked war against Ukraine should come as no surprise. The warning signs have been many: Georgia, Salisbury, Crimea, Syria, to name some of the most

prominent. When we recoil from the horrors of Bucha and other Ukrainian cities, we need also to think of Aleppo and Obama's famous red line that turned out to be no red line at all. London has been awash with corrupt Russian money for decades and, until the war in Ukraine, we mostly turned a blind eye, glad to have all this money flowing around our capital. The first use of a nerve agent on European soil since World War II with the attempted assassination of the Skripals should have caused national outrage. This was notable – not least among the churches – by its absence.

Some of the most disturbing aspects of *Freezing Order* are the harrowing stories of Putin and his oligarchs' enablers in the West. A veritable industry of PR firms, lawyers, and the elite selling their souls for Russian money is profoundly disturbing. The Putin regime has learnt well how to play the Western game and, amidst our hollowed-out Western consumer culture, far too many have been more than willing to assist.

Competent lawyers with integrity are a gift; competent lawyers without integrity are a curse. In *Freezing Order* lawyers function as heroes and as despicable anti-heroes.

The war in Ukraine and Browder's new book should make us revisit aspects of the Trump presidency. Chapter 39 of *Freezing Order* is important. Trump described Putin's offer to hand over 12 Russian hackers in exchange for Browder as an "incredible offer." He only walked this back after pressure in Washington mounted. And we should not forget Trump's "perfect" phone call with Volodymyr Zelenskyy when he tried to withhold military aid in order to secure dirt on Hunter Biden. This led to Trump's first impeachment. The calibre of Zelenskyy as a wartime leader is now available for everyone to see, a spectacle that illumines Trump's manipulation of a vulnerable leader for what it was.



Vladimir Kara-Murza

Sergei's, Browder's, and so many others', stories are ones of extraordinary courage. Vladimir Kara-Murza is another exceptionally courageous Russian politician. He is a protégé of Boris Nemtsov, the Putin opponent brutally gunned down outside the Kremlin. Kara-Murza has worked closely with

Browder. Twice he has been nearly fatally poisoned. As I write, in the last week, Kara-Murza was arrested in Moscow. He is a graduate of Cambridge University and also holds British citizenship; once again the silence is deafening.

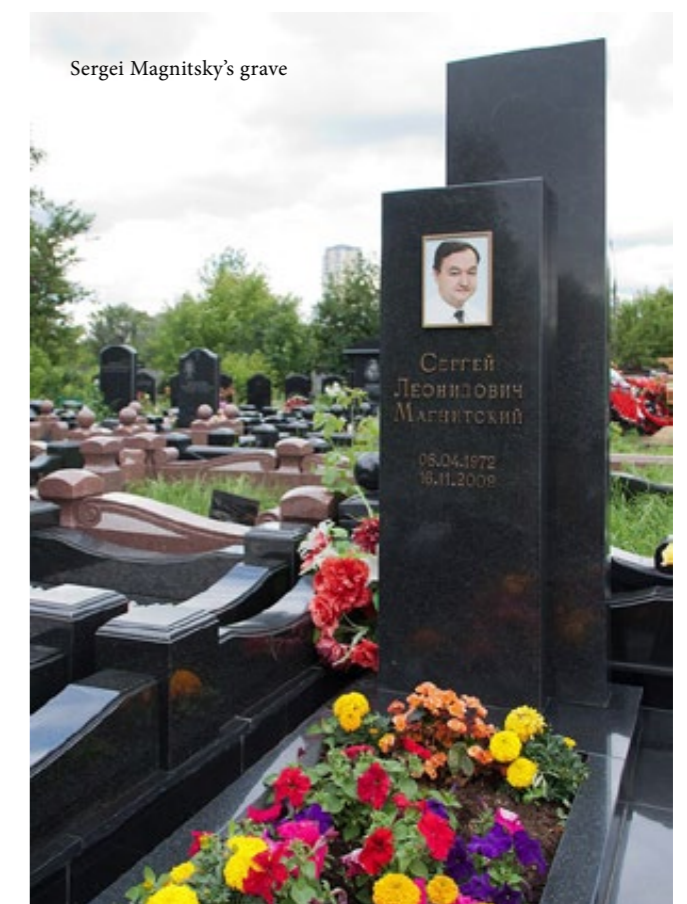
I learned from the book of Job that evil, for that is what it is, has a habit of overreaching itself. Satan could never have dreamt of how Job would be formed by his suffering and emerge at the end having "seen God." It seems that with the war in Ukraine, Putin may have done the same, namely badly overreached. His actions have united Europe, NATO

The Putin regime has learnt well how to play the Western game and, amidst our hollowed-out Western consumer culture, far too many have been more than willing to assist.

and democratic countries around the world in their opposition, achieving the opposite of what he has worked for over years. While for years Browder has often been a voice crying in the wilderness, now he is being consulted by government amidst the crisis. We need to do all we can to ensure that Putin has indeed overreached. One small way to do this is to read both of Browder's books.

Another way for Christians to help is to recognize Sergei Magnitsky in our church calendars each year as a 21st-century Christian martyr. He was murdered on 16 November 2009, 358 days after he had been arrested. In *Red Notice* Browder writes, "Sergei was religious and he would not violate God's ninth commandment: 'Thou shalt not bear false witness.'" (255).

Craig Bartholomew is the director of the Kirby Laing Centre.





## UNDERSTANDING VLADIMIR PUTIN

CRAIG G. BARTHOLOMEW

We do need to be able to recognize evil but it is not always easy to do so. Intriguingly it was when the American psychiatrist Scott Peck was researching his book on evil, *People of the Lie*, that he became a Christian. He asserts that when counsellors encounter evil in their counselling, they need to be able to name it. His examples are instructive because evil often tries “virtuously” to point away from itself.

In the prayer Jesus taught his disciples we pray, “Deliver us from evil.” To pray this with understanding we need some sense of what evil is. Alas, privatised, dualistic Christianity often reduces it to personal temptation and Harry Potter and ninja turtles. It certainly includes personal temptation but involves far more than that. Indeed, “When you see the world through blinkers, knowing the truth does not make you free.”<sup>1</sup> Jesus knew about evil and temptation. Before he began his public ministry he was tempted by Satan through devious quotations from the Bible to set aside his mission that would lead through the cross. Jesus’ personal temptations had cosmic implications, and evil is not just personal but social, national, international, political, economic and structural. Jesus came to lead the whole creation in an exodus from sin and evil, precisely because sin and evil affect the whole creation.

I am told that a reason why some of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands were so resilient in opposing National Socialism during WWII was that churches took the threat seriously. They were able to do this because they took being well informed seriously. As the threat of Hitler loomed over Europe, church study groups got hold of *Mein Kampf* and read and studied it. They became informed citizens, realised just what they were up against, and were thus prepared to recognize and to oppose the evil spreading out across Europe.

<sup>1</sup> Owen Matthews, “Cross to Bear: Can Russia Ever Atone for Putin’s Sins,” *The Spectator* 16 April 2022, 12-13, 13.



Evil has not gone away. But do we care, and are we equipped to recognize it? It is hard not to see that what the Putin regime is doing in Ukraine is evil. Murder, war crimes and genocide are unquestionably evil. How is it that this war has suddenly – or so it seems to many of us – erupted in Europe just as we are staggering out of the pandemic?

To understand what is going on in Ukraine today we need to understand Putin and his regime. Amidst the tsunami of disinformation that is generated nowadays, not least by the Putin regime, being informed is more important than ever. Disinformation and fake news are successful when they create just enough doubt to blur the truth, leaving us unsure about whether or not that which is evil is really so. Catherine Belton’s acclaimed *Putin’s People: How the KGB Took Back Russia and then Took on the West* (London: William Collins, 2020) is an important recent book in this regard.

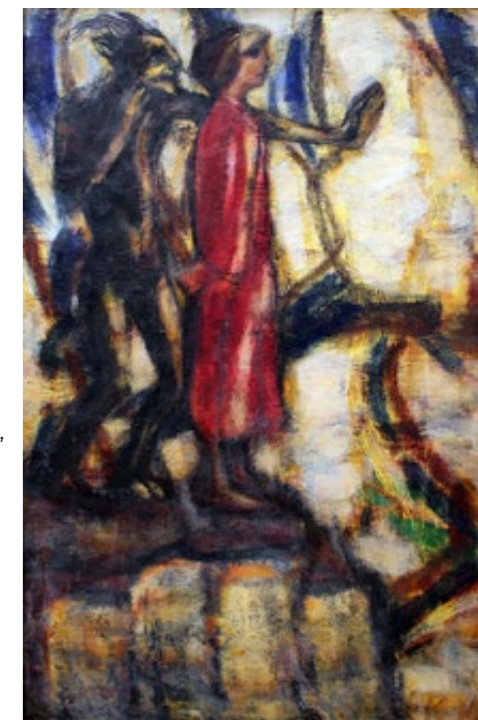
Belton’s narrative is detailed and thorough and I can only provide a broad sketch of it here. The subtitle articulates a central theme of the book. Putin himself was a KGB officer in East Germany where he worked with and alongside the dreaded *Stasi*. A former member of the far-left Red Army faction testified that Putin “worked in support of members of the group, which sowed terror across West Germany in the seventies and the eighties” (36). During this time he seemed to have developed an interest in deadly poisons that leave little or no trace (42). When the Soviet Empire collapsed the KGB was initially marginalised, but it did not just disappear. Especially in St Petersburg, where Putin had become deputy mayor, the KGB regrouped and fought for power and wealth at all costs. When Putin moved to the Kremlin and began his rise up the ranks, he took all these contacts with him, and once he became president after Yeltsin, the KGB was, as it were, back in power. “Putin’s rise to power did of course amount to the takeover by the KGB of the Kremlin” (196).



Antonio García Vega, *The Victim*

Putin soon evolved into a brutal leader for whom the end justified the means. His first term as president was “drenched in blood and controversy” (11), some of which remains unclear because of cover-ups. With his KGB cronies increasingly occupying key government positions, Putin set out on the path towards absolute control of Russia. The media was an early target. Already in St Petersburg, Putin had used his position for corrupt enrichment at the bitter expense of the people. Under Yeltsin the oligarchs that emerged were disdainful of the former KGB. When Putin became president, and his anti-democratic tendencies became apparent, some of the oligarchs opposed him. One of the wealthiest of these was Khodorkovsky. Eventually Putin had him arrested and his trial “changed everything in Putin’s Russia. The pressure Sechin had brought to bear on the judges, the speed of the appeal process, the lack of substance to the charges, had brought the court system irrevocably under the *siloviki* [the strongmen]” (303-304). It also brought the oligarchs quickly into line. Khodorkovsky spent ten years in prison.

Putin and his KGB colleagues recognized that communism had failed and blamed it for many of Russia’s woes. Indeed, one reason Putin became prime minister and then president was to prevent the communists recapturing the presidency. However, they needed a new vision to hold Russia together under their control. A threefold cord emerged in this regard: autocracy, territory and love of the fatherland, and ... the Orthodox Church. Before he became president, Putin broadcast his religious beliefs and the KGB men who came to power alongside him steadily followed him in his attachment to the Russian Orthodox Church. Belton notes that, “From the beginning, they were searching for a new national identity. The tenets of the Orthodox Church provided a powerful unifying creed that stretched back beyond the Soviet era to the days of Russia’s imperialist past, and spoke to the great sacrifice, suffering and endurance of the Russian people, and a mystical belief that Russia was the Third Rome, the next ruling empire of the earth” (258).



Christian Rohlfs, *The Temptation of Christ*



Peter Purves Smith, *The Diplomats*

This surprising attachment to the church seems to have been a matter of expedience. Putin, like Donald Trump, does not seem to know the Christian faith or the Bible well and Belton relates an illuminating story of Putin being taken to a service on Forgiveness Sunday. His friend informed him that he should prostrate himself before the priest and confess his sins. Putin replied in astonishment, “I am the president of the Russian Federation. Why should I ask for forgiveness?” (259).<sup>2</sup>

Belton published her book, of course, before the recent invasion of Ukraine, but she does discuss the pro-Western revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia. “It was the worst nightmare of Putin’s KGB men that, inspired by events in neighbouring countries, Russian oppositionists funded by the West would seek to topple Putin’s regime too” (271). In both cases lies and disinformation preceded Putin’s invasion of Georgia and the Crimea. The pretext of denazification is nothing new.

As with Browder’s *Freezing Order*, Belton explores the West’s failure to confront Russia with serious consequences for these invasions and the deeply disturbing ways in which Westerners enabled tainted money to pour into the West from Russia. She has a chapter entitled “Londongrad” and writes of London that, “The city was awash with Russian cash. But instead of Russia being changed through its integration

<sup>2</sup> The parallel with Trump is notable: “I am not sure I have,” Trump said when asked if he’d ever asked God for forgiveness. “I just go on and try to do a better job from there. I don’t think so,” he said. “I think if I do something wrong, I think, I just try and make it right. I don’t bring God into that picture. I don’t.” <https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-on-god-i-dont-like-to-have-to-ask-for-forgiveness-2016-1?r=US&IR=T>

into Western markets, it was Russia that was changing the West. ... It was as if a virus was being injected into it” (352). Indeed, Belton’s book started out as an investigation of the KGB takeover of Russia, but as her research developed something even more frightening came to the fore: “the billions of dollars at Putin’s cronies’ disposal were to be actively used to undermine and corrupt the institutions and democracies of the West” (15). She notes of the West that its “lack of principles has brought the West to the consequences it is experiencing now” (497). Prophetic words indeed.

The level of corruption that Putin presides over is staggering. The leak of the so-called “Panama Papers” and the work of activists like Browder (see *Freezing Order*) exposed some of the extent of the corruption and the collusion of Western institutions.

With his speech at the February 2007 Munich Security Conference, Putin put the West on notice when he attacked Nato, the West and America. Here he gave voice to the KGB mistrust of and hatred for the West. An irony, of course, is that Russian money tends to be held in the West and the oligarchs clearly revel in the most lavish Western lifestyles, top schools for their children, and the freedoms.

Belton’s final chapter is on the KGB network and Donald Trump. When the news came through to the Russian parliament in 2016 that Trump had won, the whole hall leapt to their feet in applause and celebration (476). Trump’s strange admiration for and deference to Putin remains to be fully explained. Belton argues that “in the impeachment probe and the 2020 presidential race, the clash between liberal values and a Putin-style corrupt authoritarian order was reaching a denouement” (488).

Belton’s narrative is profoundly disturbing, searing, and illuminating in so many ways. In one sense the Putin regime and the failure of the West are one massive example of the profound truth of 1 Timothy 6:10: “the love of

money is a root of all kinds of evil.” This kind of evil is by no means confined to the Putin regime, as demonstrated by the enablers in the West and those keen to feed at the Russian cash trough with no concern for where the money came from or how it was acquired.

A terrible grace of Putin’s invasion of Ukraine is that it appears to have awoken Western and non-Western



Vasily Vereshchagin, *The Apotheosis of War*

democracies from their slumber. Putin appears to have badly overreached this time, and we need to make sure he has. The rush of diplomacy before the invasion and especially the revealing of intelligence about Putin’s plans before he acted stripped away the predictable propaganda and false flag operations, flushing Putin out into the open so that we could see him for what he is. Let us not forget.

Some serious soul searching needs to be done by democratic nations for our complicity in what has led up to the invasion of Ukraine, and our most basic commitments and freedoms need to be rediscovered and shored up. Evil is real, including in politics, and whether it is in our midst or in Russia we need to be able to name it for what it is.

That the Russian Orthodox Church should be part of the Putin regime’s threefold cord is a tragedy. Jesus warned about the danger of his disciples losing their saltiness. In an incisive article titled “Toxic Patriarch: How Putin Weaponised the Russian Orthodox Church,” Mark Drew concludes of Patriarch Kirill: “May God grant him a merciful hearing before the dread judgment seat, as the Orthodox liturgy prays. But the judgment of history may not be so merciful.”<sup>3</sup> In

his *People of the Lie*, Scott Peck notes that evil is drawn to religion, because it can there most easily masquerade as the light. We should take note.

There is no fun or sense of triumph in naming evil. Unlike Putin and Trump, Christians in mainstream denominations like my own are forever confessing *our* sins. That is as it should be. We are the sick, we are those who too often are complicit in evil ourselves, and thus we are those who need the medicine of the gospel.

### ***Citizen K***

This is a film worth watching. In my review of *Putin’s People* I refer to the arrest of the oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky as an important turning point in Putin’s reach for absolute power. *Citizen K* is a 2019 documentary about Khodorkovsky. The documentary tracks his rise to wealth and influence and emerging confrontation with Putin as he started to recognize the importance of democracy in Russia. His resilience while imprisoned and the way in which prison formed him is notable. Khodorkovsky is the founder of “Open Russia.”

*Craig Bartholomew is the director of the Kirby Laing Centre.*



<sup>3</sup> *The Spectator* 16 April 2022, 14.

# The Never-Failing Light:

## A CONTEMPLATION OF TERRENCE MALICK'S FILM *A HIDDEN LIFE*

BRETT BRADSHAW

For the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

The fight for the future of Ukraine wages as I write. I see the gut-wrenching images in the news of men, women and children trapped in the wreckage of war. “That could be me,” I think, “That could be my family.” I read the reports of fierce gun fights and bombings. I watch President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s impassioned speeches to embolden Ukrainians to defend their country, to embolden the world. I pray.

When I first watched Terrence Malick’s film *A Hidden Life*, I thought it was a masterfully-crafted work of art based on true events in the past. The film portrays the life of Franz Jägerstätter, an Austrian farmer who refused to

swear allegiance to Adolph Hitler and fight for the Nazis in WWII due to his faith in Christ. After Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, I now see the film with visionary force for the present. *A Hidden Life* is a cinematic psalm bearing witness to the never-failing light of Christ in our present darkness.

Terrence Malick employs a cinematic method that calls for contemplation as one would study a psalm lingeringly, patiently waiting for meaning to emerge. *A Hidden Life* is, I think, a cinematic psalm, a visual poem. Like a Rembrandt painting, the form is a spiritual practice of attention akin to prayer, seeking to illuminate, not entertain, and enter the intersection

between “the God who sees me” (Gen 16:13) and human responsibility.

To watch *A Hidden Life* is to practise seeing with the eyes of the heart. As John Calvin says, “We cannot open our eyes without being compelled to behold Him.” Mountains, streams and fields meet the humble work of Franz and his wife Fanni Jägerstätter’s hands in St Radegund, Austria in 1939. They laugh and labour, play with their three young daughters, and love one another in what appears to be a happily mundane life in an Edenic mountain village. The beauty of creation and the seemingly ordinary of human life converge as symbols of God’s grandeur and intimate presence. A river is shown cascading down a cliff with the distant sound of rushing water. It is a symbol, I think, of the deep mystery of God’s sovereignty and a calling into the depths of human suffering: “Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls” (Ps 42:7).

The state secretary of the Reich Ministry of Justice Rolan Freisler wrote: “Christianity and we are alike in only one respect: we lay claim to the whole individual.” When faced with the impending call to fight for the Nazis as a loyal subject of the Reich, Franz’s pastor asks, “What are you going to do,



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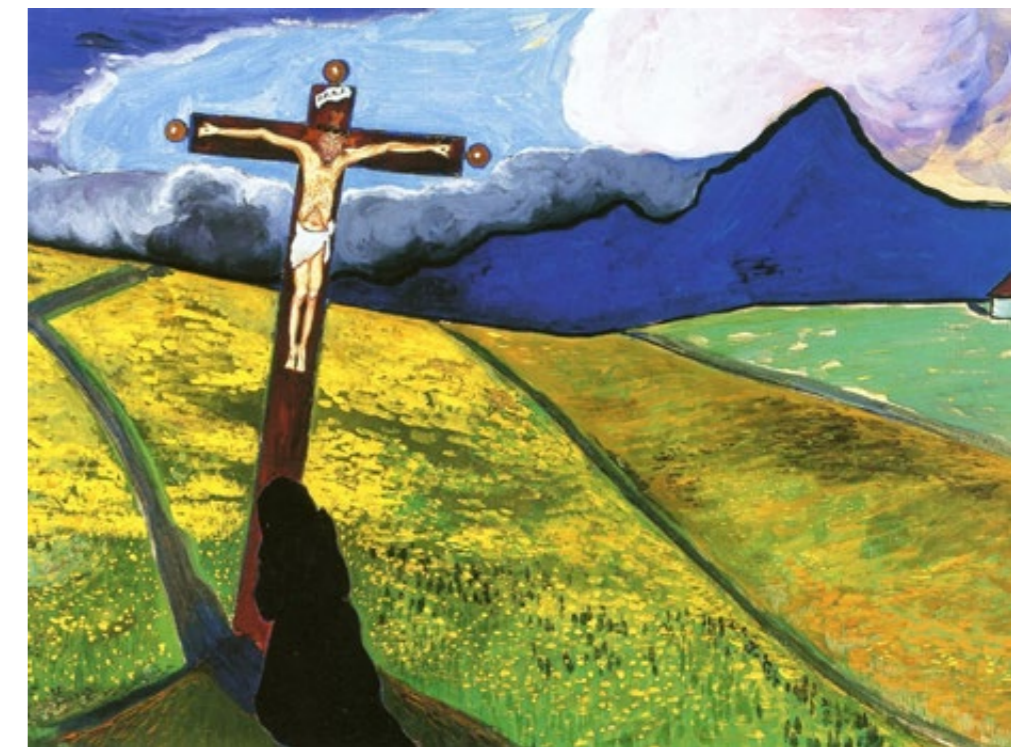
Alexei von Jawlensky, *Cornfields*

Franz? They ask you to take an oath to the Antichrist. Is this here the end of the world? Is this the death of the light?” Franz was a farmer, the sexton (caretaker) of the village church, a devoted husband and father. What did obedience to Christ require of him? What could he do to change the course of the war? Did his actions even matter? Who would care? The film witnesses to the mystery – a knowledge so great it must be revealed – between God’s call of grace and the human response of faith.

Here the example of the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt is resonant. The film employs Pärt’s composition *Tabula Rasa: II. Silentium* at the height of Franz’s struggle. Pärt composed the music with a method he is known for called *tintinnabuli*, meaning “bells” in Latin. Each note of the melody “rings” with a note from a harmonizing chord to resonate a sound for the call of God’s grace and the response of faith. “This is the whole secret of *tintinnabuli*,” Pärt says in an interview with Arthur Lubow of the *New York Times Magazine*. “The two lines. One line is who we are, and the other line is who is holding and takes care of us. ... the melodic line is our reality, our sin. But the other line is forgiving the sins.” Sound and story pair together in *A Hidden Life* to ring a bell-like resonance in search of touching the soul.

Reporting for the *New York Times* from Lviv, Ukraine, Marc Santora’s words demonstrate the power of music: “After seeking shelter while an air raid siren blared, I walked by the Lviv City Council and heard a lovely song, so I stopped to capture a moment of beauty. Then the siren went off again.” Here is a moment where sound became light in the darkness as, I think, Malick searches for through cinema. Once again, *A Hidden Life* is a work of art that points beyond itself to the never-failing light of Christ in our weary world.

Natural light flickers and flits upon gold foil in Franz’s hands, and the call of discipleship echoes in the words of the church painter:



Marianne von Werefkin, *Cross in a Landscape*

They imagine that if they lived back in Christ’s time, they wouldn’t have done what the others did. ... What we do is just create sympathy; we create admirers. ... We don’t create followers. ... Christ’s life is a demand. ... You don’t want to be reminded of it so we don’t

have to see what happens to the truth. ... A darker time is coming when men will be more clever. They won’t fight the truth. They’ll just ignore it. ... I paint their comfortable Christ. ... Someday I’ll paint the true Christ.

Once called up to fight, Franz refuses to swear allegiance to Adolph Hitler. He is imprisoned, tempted, tortured, and finally executed for his conviction “that I cannot do what I believe is wrong.” It was Franz’s fellow prisoner at Tegel, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who wrote, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

Fanni must also carry the cross of caring for their daughters and working

the family farm without the help of her husband. She is rejected and reviled by neighbours and church members. Even so, the film reveals Franz and Fanni united in Christ through prayer, and their marriage becomes, as the Apostle Paul describes, a living mystery of Christ’s love for the church. These are Fanni’s last words to Franz in

the film before his death: “I love you. ... Whatever you do ... whatever comes ... I’m with you ... always. ... Do what is right.”

On August 9, 1943, Franz Jägerstätter wrote a final letter to his family that read: “I thank our Saviour that I could suffer for him, and may die for him. I trust in his infinite compassion. I trust that God forgives me everything, and will not abandon me in the last hour.” He was executed by guillotine at 4:00 pm that afternoon.

The film shows Franz on a bench as one of three – note *three* – awaiting their execution, and the scene transforms into a vision. Franz is seen riding a motorcycle on his way home. The sun rises over the mountains. It is a vision of the new heavens and the new earth when the never-failing light of Christ that dawned on the cross and in the resurrection becomes full day. In the final scenes of the film, Fanni’s voice is heard saying:

A time will come when we will know what all this is for ... and there will be no mysteries. ... We will know why we live. ... We’ll come together. ... We’ll plant orchards ... fields. ... We’ll build the land back up. ... Franz ... I’ll meet you there ... in the mountains.



A Hidden Life (IMDB)

The words are drawn from a vision of the new heavens and new earth in Isaiah 65:17-25.

The camera zooms in on a tree veiled in shadow against the last light of day and lingers for a moment on a

It is a vision of the new heavens and the new earth when the never-failing light of Christ that dawned on the cross and in the resurrection becomes full day.

mountain river cascading down the cliff: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life ...” (Rev 22:1-2). The film portrays the way of suffering love and ends in the comfort of Christ’s return when, “He will wipe

away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore ...” (Rev 21:4).

Terrence Malick’s film *A Hidden Life* cannot stop the war in Ukraine. It

cannot ease the pain of human suffering and sin. It cannot tell us exactly what to do in our own time and place. But it does what great art is charged to do. *A Hidden Life* bears witness to the Way through this veil

of tears where a life hidden in Christ with God can become by grace a true sign of the never-failing light that has overcome the darkness.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Park Cities Presbyterian Church and the *Faith & Culture* ministry for giving me the occasion to contemplate Terrence Malick’s film *A Hidden Life*. I wish to thank Alan Jacobs and Joel Mayward for their insights into the film that enriched my own reflection. I too want to thank my friend Stephen Bell for introducing me to the work of Terrence Malick.

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Yates Thomson MS 10, *River of Life*



# Children Lead the Way

ELAINE DUNCAN

Then Jesus called for the children and said to the disciples, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children.” (Luke 18:16 NLT)

Children living in an orphanage near the Russian border in Ukraine had to leave to go into the bomb shelter just a few days after the Russian invasion began. Their carer said they could take one thing each with them. Once they were settled in the bunker, she asked them what they had each brought with them. I assume she expected to see a variety of favoured toys, games or something to cuddle. One by one they pulled out the same thing – the Bible they had



received as a gift at Christmas from a Christian mission working in their area. It is the Ukrainian translation of *The Jesus Storybook Bible*. They started to read the Bible and then one by one they went on their knees to pray and they prayed for a long time.

These 55 Ukrainian children knew a thing or two about the source of light, life and hope. In their fear and distress they turned to Jesus, the one they had heard about from the Christian group working in their area (often through puppet shows!). We might describe this as “difficult hope.”

We can often feel a bit overwhelmed by all that is going on in the world and we understandably ask questions like “Is God here?”, “Does God see?”, “Does God care?” We are not alone in asking these big questions. Many of the stories in the Bible reveal people in dire or confused circumstances who ask similar questions. Their stories go on to show

something of God’s love, mercy and care as he unfolds the mystery of who he is and how much he loves human beings.

Let’s take our lead from those children in Ukraine, keeping the Bible and prayer as priorities in our lives.

You will have your own story of how Jesus is your source of light, life and hope. That is a story worth sharing as so many around us are asking big questions about meaning and purpose in life. Our story connects with God’s story so let’s get the story out as much as we are able.



Édouard Vuillard, *Children Reading*

At the time of writing, the story of the 55 Ukrainian children continues as they have now reached safety outside Ukraine, experiencing miracles of provision along the way. May the memories of miracles begin to outweigh the difficult memories of fear these children will live with for many years to come and may the Lord Jesus bring healing for each and every one of them.

Elaine Duncan is the CEO of the Scottish Bible Society.

For more information about the charity working in Eastern Ukraine see: <https://hopelebedyn.org/>. For more information about the Scottish Bible Society see: <https://scottishbiblesociety.org/>.

Photograph of refugees queuing on a platform in Lviv Train Station by Vladyslav Sodel; supplied by the Scottish Bible Society.



The light  
in the heart

The power of rest  
and retreat

Moments  
of transcendence

Telling  
the indisputable

Truth in a time  
of deceit

Veracious visions  
of justice

Glimpses of hope  
and peace

Acquainted  
with grief

## Goldberg Variations



## Rhapsody in Blue



Views  
of reality

Steeped  
in deep thought

Reverberating  
waves of grief

Visiting  
the seaside

You will  
reap

The seeds  
you sow

The quality  
of mercy

Listening  
with compassion

BY JUSSI JAAKOLA

Jussi Jaakola is a film director, writer and poet, best known for the anthology film *60 Seconds of Solitude in Year Zero*, and is the author of *Saturday Night: Poems 1999–2011* and *Unconditional Love: Poems 2012–2017* ([jussijaakola.co.uk](http://jussijaakola.co.uk)).

Photographs: Pasi Jaakola, an excerpt from *The Four Seasons*.

I tend to be someone who is aware of my surroundings and I greatly enjoy nature, quiet and a contemplative setting. This makes sojourning in Origins Retreat Centre a “good fit” for me.

The buildings are understated: spaciousness dominates.

In the chapel, only a thin sheet of glass separates one from the extensive nature beyond and actually serves to provide a certain level of continuity with the general spaciousness. Nature enters the chapel – the odd bat, wasp and relentless call of the red-chested cuckoo that can last the whole duration of the silent meditation. And my exhalations join the air circulating the immediate and remote environment.

In the poplar grove, besides all the green life thereof, the intermingling of nature and human construction continues. Rust is claiming the exterior of the massive *Cross-of-Words* into a more restful ochre than its original metal glimmer; the face of the angel visiting Mary (one of the sculptures comprising the twelve stations of the life of Jesus incarnate) hosts a hibernating ladybird; the doves of another sculpture ascend and descend like a shower of leaves, trees playing host to their form.

And the image of God with extended hands invites me in.  
Us in.  
In.

“In Him we live and move and have our being,” we learn from the writings of Acts. And on the back of this particular sculpture, I find some spontaneous marks on the surface forming an imprint of a figure – myself by projection.

In Him indeed.

THE BIG PICTURE

# Origins

MARIT GREENWOOD



Origins photos: Marit Greenwood

Have I capacity left to further marvel, I can leave the grove and walk up to the apex of the *koppie* (small hill) behind the grove. This takes me over weathered, elephant-skin dolomite, fine ancient sedimentary rock and quartzite stained a deep sienna. Up, further into the conservatory lands of the Cradle of Mankind, of which Origins is part. Up, past aloes, white-throated swallows and *bobbejaanstert* (black-stick lily) plants no longer in bloom.

From the top of the *koppie* I can regain perspective, the understated



buildings now reduced in scale, even the *Cross* not visible behind the poplars and the chapel, as ritual place to meet quietly with God, now replaced by a vast, endless natural arena for worship. The focus of that worship now somehow with less definition, less boundary, not even just a thin pane of glass. More pervasive now, resembling more that part of the Trinity we name Spirit. Breath. Air. More immediate too as a sudden breeze refreshes me in the heat and as I breathe in the next breath of air, or is it the next breath of Spirit?

In Him we live. ... Where and how does metaphor roll over into reality?

Only after having written this last paragraph which refers to a blurring of boundaries and a taking into myself that which is external, do I realise that I had stepped experientially into what Peter Leithart in his compelling book of theological speculations, *Traces of the Trinity*, describes. “My connection with the world is a Celtic knot. Inside and outside form a Möbius strip that folds back on itself” (4).

Not only of the world, but also with its Source, the Triune God.

Indeed, my entire stay at Origins attested to this indwelling of so many things by each other in the created order, to a “perichoretic pattern” (144) fundamentally reflecting the circumstance that all such patterns are essentially “traces of the Trinity ... find[ing] their source and root in the fellowship of Father, Son and Spirit, each of whom indwells each other in a far more profound and exhaustive fashion than we find in creation” (136).

In. And my life depends on it.

*Marit Greenwood is an artist who is drawn to contemplative spirituality.*

# Choral Communion:

## A CASE FOR CHURCH CHOIRS IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ERA

RYANNE MCLAREN MOLINARI

As congregations return to regular gatherings, they are facing urgent questions of how to continue in worship, and churches with choirs are having to decide: Is choral singing too risky in a culture wary of contagion? Are the typical demographics of choirs too vulnerable? Are church choirs outdated anyway and COVID-19 their inevitable death knell? Perhaps contemporary styles are more pragmatic: a soloist can stand safely apart from the congregation and electronic instruments are certainly more sterile than human breath. Although choral ministries may seem impractical in the post-pandemic era, they remain important as reflections and reinforcements of communion. It is no coincidence that, in stifling the breath of its victims, COVID-19 revealed and aggravated ruptures in Christian communion, which Rowan Williams defines as “shared life in His holy breath” (Williams, *Tokens of Trust*, 94). It follows that, if we are to return to shared life following a diseased, distanced and digitalized era, we must breathe together once more. Composed of coordinated breath, choral singing offers a powerful manifestation of communion and may be a vital prescription for reviving unity in the body of Christ.

The Apostles’ Creed presents the communion of saints as emanating from the work of the Holy Spirit, and it is clear

Wassily Kandinsky, *The Ludwigskirche in Munich*



from Scripture that singing is an essential component of Christian life and community:

Look carefully then how you walk ... do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Eph 5:15-21 ESV)

Paul presents singing as the faithful alternative to drunkenness and disorder. He commands the Ephesian church to prioritize singing as an orderly, interpersonal practice that is at once a solution for and symptom of their community. Such singing testifies to the work of the Spirit in reconciling Christians to God and one another in communication, thanksgiving, submission and reverence.

In addition to the special revelation of God’s Word, the general revelation of God’s world testifies to the power of organized song. Group music making is considered one of the earliest marks of civilization because it indicates



and contributes to community building, and secular choirs often express that they achieve oneness through the “spirit of music” (Jonathan Arnold, *Sacred Music in Secular Society*,

Isaac Grünewald, *The Singing Tree*

43). Research also indicates that, as choristers breathe together, their heartbeats actually begin to synchronize, physiologically paralleling the work of the Spirit (<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00334/full#h6>). For believers, singing together not only indicates community but incarnates communion, becoming “the sounding image of the unified Church” (Steven Guthrie, “The Wisdom of Song,” in *Resonant Witness*, 284-85). Furthermore, harmonious singing demonstrates the submission commanded in Ephesians, for it requires vulnerability and sacrifice as singers share their very selves for the sake of mutual upbuilding, giving and receiving their breath as intimately and generously as though members of the same body. What could be more effective in reviving “shared life in His holy breath” than this?

As pandemic restrictions are lifted, the need to engage more people in live worship is increasing. Unfortunately, many who desire to serve may not be permitted due to limited places on praise teams. By contrast, choral ministries create opportunities for advanced vocalists to share their gifts, as well as for others to grow in music and relationship. While contemporary bands provide impactful leadership, choirs not only direct worship but demonstrate fellowship. As in the communion of saints, choirs admit no distinction or hierarchy other than those that generate beautiful harmonies and are beneficial to the ensemble as a whole. An excellent melody or talented individual can certainly glorify God, but harmony and mutuality may be more effective at exemplifying the diverse unity of Christian communion. In this, choral singing is not only participatory but anticipatory; as believers pursue unity, they themselves become the image of a living choir, joined in charity toward one another. Ignatius of Antioch writes that “Jesus Christ is sung” as saints grow in relationship with Christ and one another, and that, through this, they are transformed into “a choir ... harmonious in love” (Guthrie, 384).

Just as music moves through time toward a cadence that is not yet realized, singing together here and now reminds believers of their promised end: eternal relationship in Christ. Throughout the ongoing pandemic, many Christians have come to anticipate this future with greater expectation, but just as many may have lost heart due to division and disconnection. In choral singing, such dissonance must resolve as participants reunite physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually through shared



Ethiopian painting of an Orthodox Ethiopian Choir

breath and song. In this, singing together may inspire Christians to realize their certain hope as the body of Christ, in which every singer is gifted a unique part and all rejoice together in magnificent polyphony. Worshipping as a choir prepares participants for the life to come, serving as an earthly rehearsal for the celestial chorus of “Holy, Holy, Holy!”

If church choirs were merely a matter of musical taste, it would be reasonable to let them fade as echoes of the pre-pandemic era; they require people to stand too close, to breathe recycled air, and to sing increasingly unfamiliar repertoires. While style and execution must adapt to current health codes and comfort levels, choral singing should be reinstated as an essential component of worship and a potential incarnation of communion. To abandon such singing is to abandon a scriptural tradition, to dismiss it as inessential is to ignore its role in spiritual formation,

and to discard it as dangerous is to disregard it as an image of eternal life. Adjustments will have to be made, but it is worth preserving church choirs as a remedy for Christian harmony in a dissonant age.

Ryanne McLaren Molinari is a graduate of Biola University and the University of St. Andrew’s, a professional pianist and organist, and an avid writer with a growing body of work, much of which can be accessed on her site, [ABookishCharm.com](http://ABookishCharm.com).



Jan Van Eyck, *Singing Angels*, The Ghent Altarpiece (detail)

# EASTER at Histon Baptist Church

KATE FARMER

you stand back and see the full picture, they begin telling the passion narrative using bright tones and as you move on towards *Jesus Prays in the Garden of Gethsemane*, his arrest and crucifixion, the colours and tones get darker, mirroring that of the subject matter, only then to turn to vibrant colours as we move on to *The Empty Tomb* and *The Resurrected Jesus*. As a collection of work by multiple artists all working independently this was unplanned. It is a testament to the skill of the artists that they have caught the feel of each event, finishing with the “sunrise” colours of the resurrection, affirming the new life and bright hope for each day that we have in our risen saviour, Jesus Christ.

We have had a rota of Histon Baptist Church congregants sitting on the picnic benches next to the eggs, ready to engage with anybody who wanted to talk and find out



The “eggs” on the church lawn stem from a vision: to see Histon Baptist Church (Cambridge, UK) interacting with our community in a different way. Following the success of a Remembrance Day community project on the front lawn of the church, featuring a display of poppies created by various community groups, it was clear to us that this was a valuable way of reaching those we may not otherwise come into contact with. Our vision is to see Jesus’ Great Commission, to go into all the world and spread the gospel, in action. To get to know our community better so that we, as a church, might better know how to love and serve them. Another motivation fuelling this project is the desire to see Easter celebrated with the excitement and energy it deserves. In this post-Christendom nation we have lost, to a degree, the celebratory feel and recognition that Christian festivals once had. We want to see Easter celebrated with the energy and joy befitting the love that God has for us in sending his only Son and all that entails.

The eggs themselves are a collection of artwork from members of Histon Baptist Church’s congregation. The artists range in age, background and experience. Some of the eggs are completely original pieces and some are based on or inspired by other pieces of art. They all have a very different feel to them and are all unique in style. It is worth noting that, as

more about the artworks, who created them and why. We have heard the testimonies of those on the rota and have been excited to hear that some people have asked for prayer, some have spoken about their own experiences and history with the church, others have simply admired and enjoyed the work that has gone into the display. Whatever the response, much fruit has come from this installation already and we’re excited to see how else God can use the paintings this Easter.

*Kate Farmer and her husband, Chris, live with their three children in Histon, Cambridge, where Chris is the minister of Histon Baptist Church. Together, they seek to celebrate and show the love of God to their community.*



Photo: David Johnson

# Refusing to Monetize Joy

IN A SIDE-GIG CULTURE

JAMIE MYROSE

The inflation rate in America hit a generational high of seven percent in December, 2021. It is unsurprising, then, that many Americans have turned to “side gigs”<sup>1</sup> to help make ends meet. Pandemic layoffs and furloughs made this market more prevalent as people found themselves at home for long stretches of time without work. Any interest or hobby could become an opportunity to make a few extra bucks.

Side gigs, however, are not a result of the pandemic alone. In a capitalist economy, the demand for higher profits results in the pressure to monetize every hour and activity. This pressure means that hobbies are no longer just hobbies: they can (and should) be monetized to help one’s bottom line. Recreational activities gain a secondary purpose as forms of pseudo-employment, often leading to anxieties concerning one’s skill level. Being an amateur at an activity, which was previously fine for one’s personal use, may now keep

someone from being contracted. The worth of pursuing an activity becomes associated with its potential to produce income rather than for the love of the activity alone, an external rather than internal validation.

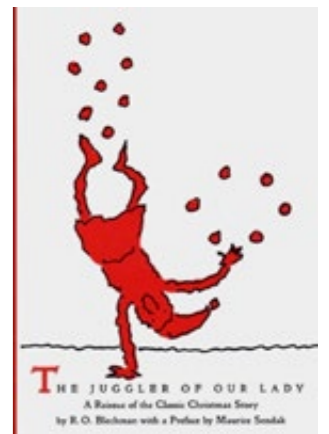
In 1 Corinthians 9, St Paul asks if ministers have the right to receive compensation for their work. Should the church in Corinth support his activity there, or should he seek out alternative employment to perform simultaneously? Though he ultimately chooses not to exercise this right, Paul answers his question with the former: as with any trade, ministers should be compensated for their work. Yet our modern, capitalist context invites the inverse of this question: does one have the duty to make a living off of one’s talents or skills? To what extent can talents remain just talents, distinct from the work of our livelihoods? Must they be monetized? Tales like *The Juggler of Our Lady* offer an insight to this question.

Published and illustrated in 1953, *The Juggler of Our Lady*, by R. O. Blechman, recounts the medieval legend of a hopeless juggler named Cantalbert who joins a monastery after failing to find an audience for his craft. Not sharing in the aptitudes of the other monks, Cantalbert is assigned to odd jobs around the monastery that no

one else wants to do. When it comes time to offer a gift to the Virgin Mary at Christmas, he despairs over having nothing prestigious to offer her like his brothers. Ultimately, he decides to give Mary the performance of a lifetime and juggles for her throughout the night. Come that morning, Cantalbert’s gift is Mary’s favourite.

The story does not end with Cantalbert leaving the monastery to return to a career in juggling. His joyous activity does not translate into his livelihood nor does it become a side gig. Instead, juggling remains the silly, beautiful, and gratuitous activity that it had always been for Cantalbert. *The Juggler of Our Lady* reminds us that the passions of our recreation, like the divine gift of our lives, are valuable without considerations of their usefulness. In a culture that monetizes everything, dare to do something priceless.

*Jamie Myrose is a doctoral student studying Systematic Theology at Boston University.*



August Macke, *Embroidering Woman*



Isaak Asknazi, *The Good and the Beautiful*

PREACHING THE BIBLE  
FOR ALL ITS WORTH

## Ephesians

Preaching through the letter of Ephesians is both a joy and a daunting task! There is very little that is NOT covered in the letter and there is a consequent danger of getting lost in the detail and missing the big picture. A few of the commentaries mentioned below fall into that trap, but remain useful repositories of information. Paul's overall concern in Ephesians is the building and filling of the new temple founded on Christ and constituted by God's people. The filling of this "dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Eph 2:22) to manifest the presence and character of the Triune God to the nations depends on individual and corporate "learning Christ" (Eph 4:20). The multiple themes of Ephesians (for example, unity, love, grace, witness, wisdom, etc.) integrate in this larger purpose and the various commentaries below can help the preacher to better understand the details. The challenge remains – as ever – to preach in such a way as our hearers are brought into the presence of the Triune God and are captivated by his perfections and works.

The first group of commentaries help primarily with the exegetical task and require some familiarity with Greek. Clinton Arnold's volume for the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary series is an excellent guide to the letter, diving deep into the numerous exegetical challenges of Ephesians, but keeping an eye always towards contemporary application of theological insights. If a preacher had time for only one commentary, I'd recommend this. In a similar register would be Thielman's Baker Exegetical Commentary or S. M. Baugh's more recent *Evangelical Exegetical Commentary*. All these three are written within the last 15 years, come from a broadly evangelical perspective and engage deeply with the Greek. They are helpful for the deep dive into particulars. (More technical, but nevertheless useful, is Merkle's *Ephesians* volume from the Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament series. For those who like structural analysis of a passage with phrasing, Merkle will be especially helpful in unpacking and making sense of Paul's longer sentences.)

On a more popular level, it's hard to surpass Stott's BST volume for packing a huge amount of insight and scholarship into concise and accessible prose. For those who want to see how Ephesians has been preached exhaustively verse by verse over the years, Lloyd-Jones's six-volume series on Ephesians (published by Banner of Truth) will inspire, though it needs cultural translation now.

Amongst many others, Hoehner's *Exegetical Commentary* is a treasure trove of word studies and detail, though it often misses the bigger picture of the literary features of the letter and their theological significance. Though by no means agreeing with all of Markus Barth's or Ernest Best's interpretations (they are both good examples of commentary shaped by their own contemporary cultural assumptions and concerns – easy to see with decades of hindsight, but perhaps more difficult to spot in ourselves?), they were both deeply engaged in the text of Ephesians and are provocative and stimulating company. Barth is especially helpful in considering wider background and literary relationships of the letter. Lincoln's Word Biblical Commentary remains a standard technical commentary, though, like Barth and Best, not all readers will agree with his interpretations. He is most provocative in suggesting the author's rhetorical strategy (he doesn't believe it was Paul). Delving further back in time, John Eadie's 19th-century commentary is wonderfully rich and deep and doxological and will repay a visit. Further yet, Chrysostom's homilies are fascinating.

Lastly, and most recently, Michael Allen's Theological Commentary on Ephesians seeks to reflect many of the theological concerns of the late John Webster, who was working on this commentary before his untimely death. Allen's theological astuteness and rich reflections on Ephesians will benefit any preacher and will be a necessary complement to the more detailed exegetical works (though Allen is clearly deeply engaged with the text).

There are three more resources that will help a preacher, though they are not commentaries. The temple theme in Ephesians is important and relatively neglected. Anyone seeking an introduction (though a many hundreds of pages introduction!) to the theme, should get hold of Greg Beale's *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*. For those who want to mine the treasures of John Owen and do the hard work of translating into our vernacular, his *Communion with the Triune God* takes as its starting point Ephesians 2:18 and will hugely enrich any preaching of this theme of Ephesians. Lastly, though not concerned directly with Ephesians, because the concept of union with Christ is so important to preaching the practical implications of the

theology of Ephesians, Grant Macaskill's *Living in Union with Christ* does a great job of contemporary prophetic critique and theological reflection that would provide a solid framework for any preacher's attempts to bring the message of Ephesians to their flock today.



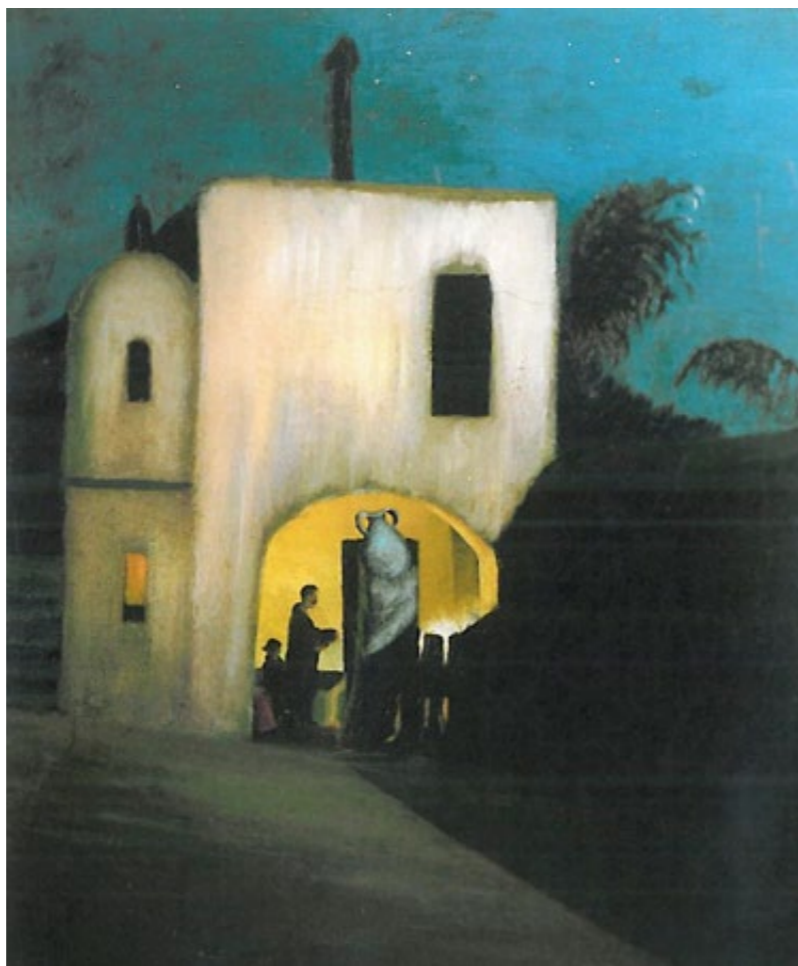
Wassily Kandinsky, *Tree of Life*

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Antonio Carneiro, *Ecce Homo*; Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka, *Oblation*





# Public Libraries as Places of Hope

RICARDO CARDENAS

to do so, you would find that far from simply being a storehouse for books (an important task, of course), the modern public library is so much more than this.

You would find, for example, community hubs devoted to providing early literacy programmes which lay the building blocks for future learning and flourishing for our youngest in society. You would also encounter library staff thinking deeply about how to offer care and dignity to people experiencing homelessness in their communities – even if this means providing a place to simply exist, free from harassment, during cold winter months or in the heat of summer. You might also find intentionally planned learning experiences for adults with cognitive and intellectual disabilities – one of few places offering such programming in our community.

Beyond this, you would find access to technology for those who have no access elsewhere, opportunities to build new relationships through book clubs, and in some libraries you may

I did not plan to start a career in public libraries. In fact, when I applied for a job at my local library, my only intention was to make a bit of money during my last semester of seminary before jumping into “real ministry.” Of course, in his providence, God’s lessons and plans for us are always far more gracious than we deserve.

– when I entered the world of public libraries. What was this place filled with wonder, curiosity and optimism? Who were these people who nurtured the imaginations of young and old alike? What was this bastion of resources available to folks from all walks of life – regardless of their social, economic or racial background?

Similar, I’m sure, to many young seminarians entering their final stage of graduate studies, my perception of the world was a bit lopsided during this phase of life. In some sense, I may have viewed the life and work of the church as superior to the work of other parts of society. I likely had an overly important view of myself and my calling from God to be a pastor. As a result of this inflated view of the “sacred” work of the church, you might say I also suffered from a deflated view of the way God works through other spheres in society – spheres that some might consider merely ordinary or perhaps “secular.”

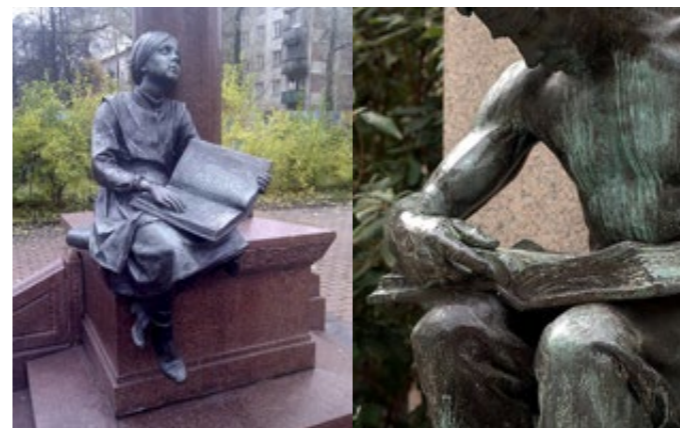
Given these presuppositions, you can imagine my surprise and delight – even if mixed with some disorientation



Anythink Library (Photo: Ricardo Cardenas); Sculpture at *Westfälische Nachrichten*, Münster

If you are well acquainted with the work of today’s public libraries, I am likely describing nothing new to you. But if you, like me prior to entering into this work, are unaware of the fruitful labours of these institutions, perhaps you might consider wandering into one soon. If you were

even encounter places to meaningfully discuss issues as difficult and diverse as racism, civic engagement, or the Vietnam War. All of these services, and more, are always offered free of charge to the community. This is a mere snapshot of the work of many public libraries today.



*Blind Girl Reading*, Grot Stela monument; Daniel Chester French, *Labour Reading* (detail)

Upon first discovering this strange new world, my initial inclination was to engage with a posture of reserved observation. Although my background was not one of a sheltered Christian upbringing, nor was my theological education from a fundamentalist institution, my mostly evangelical convictions still required some sharpening and refining in order to make space for such a place in society. There were questions that needed answering.

How should Christians make sense of “secular” institutions that do so much that is objectively good in society? What role does the church have in addressing the various challenges in a community? Is my work as a pastor of a tiny congregation less meaningful than the abundance of good accomplished every day in our community’s libraries? In what way is God at work, if at all, in an organization whose mission is not explicitly Christian?

There are various trajectories I could have spun off towards in this theological quagmire, but over time I am thankful to have stumbled upon the deep well of resources offered by the Kuyperian tradition and the concept of God’s common grace. It is through this tradition that I have been helped to see a God who is big enough to bring good through all spheres of society, and a Christianity

that is grounded and secure enough not to be threatened by such good gifts found in these places. It is also through this stream that I have encountered the reality of a grace from God that operates and restores from deep within creation, rather than only working against or from above creation. If, as Abraham Kuyper argued,

God’s grace is such that its roots penetrate into the joints and cracks of all of life, then there is great joy to be found, and meaningful work to be done, in all spheres of life – in the church, of course, but also in our schools, in local government, and as clearly shown above, in our public libraries.

Of course, this does not mean that the work of public libraries is perfect. This sphere of society (just like any other) is not exempt from the effects of the fall, nor is it exempt from various “culture-war” type issues encountered in other places in society. But today’s Christians can benefit tremendously from a theological framework that helps us see the good ways that God is at work in the world around us, even in places not traditionally viewed as such. In times of intense political division and cultural polarization, it is not uncommon to see Christians fall into despair, hopelessness, or fear at the “secularization” of the world around us. In such an environment, many are tempted either to retreat completely

from society, or to dig in their heels in opposition to the culture around us.

At such a time as this, I would like to invite brothers and sisters in Christ to consider an alternative posture toward the world around us – one that is more hopeful, more joyful, and, I would argue, more robustly biblical. Indeed, I would like to invite you to visit your local public library. Browse its collection – filled with books you agree with and many that you may not. Observe the people. Look at what programmes are being offered. Take a deep breath and ask yourself this question: “What good can I see here?”

Surely, there is much that is good. Then consider these words from James to the church in the diaspora: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (Jas 1:17). Indeed, God is the giver of all that is good in this fallen world, regardless of where we encounter this good. If this is true, then there is always hope to be found in almost every place you might look. Not a shallow or superficial hope, but a hope that is grounded in the God who is sovereign over every square inch of creation.

*Ricardo Cardenas and his family reside in Commerce City, Colorado, where he is the branch manager at Anythink Library and the lead pastor of Calvary Commerce City, a new church plant in their community. He is an Associate Fellow of the KLC.*

Anythink Library (Photo: Ricardo Cardenas); Mike Leckie, *Reading Girl*



# From Eden's Bowers:

OTTO BAM

## WANDERING & HOMECOMING IN GEORGE MACDONALD'S *PHANTASTES*

Photo: Johannes Plenio (Unsplash)

J. R. R. Tolkien said that “Fairy Land is full of wonder but not of information.”<sup>1</sup> I am attempting to write about a great Fairy Story. My aim is to explain the effect the story might have on the reader. This is dangerous. It is dangerous to try to explain anything about Fairy Land because you run the risk of explaining it away. Tolkien called himself a mere wanderer in Fairy Land. I suppose we all are. And that seems to be just about the best thing to aim at being in Fairy Land.

George MacDonald's hero in *Phantastes* is the quintessential wanderer. His very name, Anodos, can be translated from Greek as “pathless.” The story begins with an inheritance – that is to say, it does not begin at all. It is without beginning, and its opening points to the ancient origins of every human story. Anodos had just turned 21 and had been handed a key to a secretary desk. He opens the cabinet, hoping to perhaps learn about “my father, whose personal history was unknown to me” (6). He finds, instead, a fairy who tells him that he is about to discover Fairy Land. Instead of finding the past of his father, he finds the *path* of his fathers. He enters into the wandering life of exile from Eden.



The morning after he had received the fairy's oracle, Anodos wakes to the sound of the marble basin near his bed overflowing, forming a stream that runs into a forest. As the fairy had foretold,

1 J. R. R. Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories,” in *Tree and Leaf* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), 3.

Marie Balian, *Glimpse of Paradise*

he has found the path into Fairy Land. But hardly has he found the path into Fairy Land, before he, “without any good reason, and with a vague feeling that I ought to have followed its course,”<sup>2</sup> veers off it. He is pathless, bound to follow the way of Cain – the original wanderer.

References to Genesis are plentiful in *Phantastes*. Not least in a poem that appears at the beginning of Chapter 10:

From Eden's bowers the full-fed rivers flow,  
To guide the outcasts to the land of woe:  
Our Earth one little toiling streamlet yields,  
To guide the wanderers to the happy fields.

The first half of this poem echoes the exile from the garden. Genesis chapter 1 describes the four rivers that flowed out of Eden.<sup>3</sup> Almost prefiguring the path out of the garden that the first pair were condemned to follow.

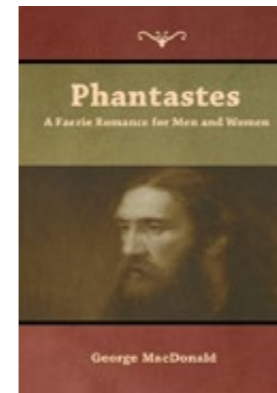
The second half of this poem, however, gestures towards the reemergence of these streams in the barrenness of the exilic life. To follow them is to move towards, and once again find, “the happy fields.” This presents the appropriate occasion for acknowledging the second meaning of Anodos's name: “ascent.”

This second meaning of his name carries the notion of pilgrimage, of a journey directed at a particular destination. The association between ascent and glad rivers that spring up in the wilderness, as seen in MacDonald's poem, features strongly in the prophecies of Isaiah and the psalms. But perhaps the clearest example is Psalm 84:

2 George MacDonald, *Phantastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 10.

3 “A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.” (Gen 2:10-14 ESV)

Blessed are those whose strength is in you,  
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.  
As they go through the Valley of Baca  
they make it a place of springs;  
the early rain also covers it with pools.  
They go from strength to strength;  
each one appears before God in Zion.  
(Ps 84:5-7 ESV)



The dual meaning of the protagonist's name, “pathless” and “ascent,” points to the sense that his journey is – despite his constant and almost obstinate propensity to leave what might be considered the “right” path – somehow *directed*. Ascent recalls the journeys of the Israelites towards Zion to keep the great feasts.

Like Anodos's name, *Phantastes* presents us with a world characterised by contrasting and intermingling experiences. Pathlessness and sovereign guidance. Sorrow and redeeming grace. Death and resurrection.

One of the most moving passages in *Phantastes* appears when the hero is in a state of utter exhaustion. He had entered a cottage which he had been warned to avoid and opened a door that he had been told not to open. A great shadow had rushed out from the abyss beyond and had become a fiend plaguing his every step. In this hopeless, helpless and pathless state, Anodos wanders into a desert region. Here he notices a spring “bursting from the heart of a sun-heated rock, flowing Southward” (64). The stream may be regarded as the first faint sign of a restored Eden. The stream grows into a river, and its banks are eventually lined with lush vegetation. Amid great sorrow he finds great comfort:

At length, in a nook of the river, gloomy with the weight of overhanging foliage, and still and deep as a soul in which the torrent eddies of pain have hollowed a great gulf, and then, subsiding in violence, have left it full of a motionless, fathomless sorrow – I saw a little boat lying. (66)

*Garden of Eden*,  
Saint Turibius Chapel

Such moments of eucatastrophe, to borrow Tolkien's term, though occurring in a land of fantasy, offer a strangely real vision of the world. Indeed, this is the great power of *Phantastes*. Not that it offers an escape from reality, but rather, acting as a mirror, it reflects our own, perhaps stranger, world back to us. It calls forth the imagination in those who have forbidden the imagination to inform their conception of the real. It reawakens what G. K. Chesterton described as “the most wild and soaring sort of imagination, the imagination that can see what is there.”<sup>4</sup>



Nicholas Roerich, *Traces (Mountain Wanderer)*

At the end of the *Phantastes*, Anodos returns from Fairy Land. Back in the familiar land of his father's estate, he remembers an old woman “who knew something too good to be told” (184). Perhaps that is the gift offered by George MacDonald's *Phantastes* – not merely the comforting communion of a character who shares the acute grief and disorientation of life, but also an inexpressible sense of having met someone who knows of something inexpressible. Like the old woman, *Phantastes* seems to know about an unimagined good, and allows us to feel on our faces, to borrow C. S. Lewis's metaphor, a cool breeze from a land we have never yet seen.

I have said that the best thing to be in Fairy Land is a wanderer. It may be more accurate to say that the best thing to be in Fairy Land is *in it*. If we are willing to look into the mirror that is *Phantastes*, we will see that we are.

*Otto Bam is a South African musician, writer, and student of literature. He is a member of KRUX, Stellenbosch ([www.krux.africa](http://www.krux.africa)) and holds a master's degree in English Studies from Stellenbosch University.*

4 G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (Connecticut: Martino, 2014), 10.

# Two Kinds of ASCETICISM

DAVID MCILROY

*The Golden Legend* is a compendium of lives of the saints which was very widely read in the late Middle Ages. It portrays many saints as seeking out the crown of martyrdom and as priding themselves on abstaining from sex, from food and from any other kinds of worldly

pleasure. Wearing hair shirts and flagellating themselves, some are even praised for seeking out discomfort and pain. Read through modern eyes, such practices seem masochistic, evidence of mental health issues rather than proof of godliness. Something seems to be wrong.



Ruizanglada, *Light in Solitude*

God made a good world, full of good things for human beings to enjoy. Refusing to enjoy those gifts, preferring dark to light, cold to warmth, pain to pleasure, can amount to a rejection of God's gifts or a denial of the goodness of the world. In contrast to Plato's thought, the Bible affirms the goodness of materiality. Jesus sanctified our bodies by becoming incarnate.

On the other hand, Christian teaching is full of warnings that if we indulge our bodily appetites they can get out of control, with lust, greed and gluttony making up three of the seven deadly sins. The disciplines of chastity, simplicity and fasting counteract these temptations by bringing our appetites under our control. Pornography and fornication ultimately dull our sexuality. Greed traps those who chase after money in a never-ending competition to catch up with or to overtake our neighbours in our displays of wealth. Gluttony harms the body which food is supposed to nourish.

It was a repeated theme of Augustine's teaching that Christians need to learn to love things in the right order (*On Christian Doctrine*, I.27-28; *City of God*, XXII.22). In his Sermon 335C, he said:

"I am not saying that you should have no loves; I simply want your loves to be properly ordered. Put heavenly things before earthly, immortal things before mortal, everlasting things before transitory ones. And put the Lord before everything, and not just by praising him, but also by loving him. It is easy enough to give him preference when it comes to praise. But then temptation comes along. Then, I ask you, do you show different priorities in your love from the preferences you showed in your praise?" (Translation from Atkins, E. M., and Dodaro, R. J. eds., *Augustine: Political Writings* (CUP, 2001))

It is in this light that we have to understand Jesus' difficult saying in Luke 14:26, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even their own life – such a person cannot be my disciple." It is not wrong to delight in our family and friends, to rejoice in the good gifts of creation that give us bodily pleasure, to thank God for material pleasures, so long as these things enhance our gratitude and worship of God and do not become substitute objects of worship in their own right.

Instead of mortification of the flesh as an end in itself, Christians should be learning a rhythm of abstinence and celebration, one which sensitises us to the richness of the gifts which God has lavished on us. Chastity leads to intimacy; simplicity to rediscovering what we really need, and fasting to the joys of feasting. These disciplines humble us and so open us up to true fellowship with others. Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* remains a classic guide as to how to build these disciplines into our lives.

Let us, therefore, rejoice once again in the Christian disciplines, not because we are trying to score spiritual points by rejecting the pleasures God has given us to enjoy, but in order that through chastity, simplicity, and fasting we may open ourselves to intimacy with God and fellowship with others.

*Dr David McIlroy is Chair of Trustees at KLC. He is a practising barrister and author of The End of Law: How Law's Claims Relate to Law's Aims.*

Alexander Taleev, *Summer*



MICHAEL WAGENMAN

Music often gives voice to difficult hope. It expresses the tension between beauty and brokenness, celebration and lament. Many musical genres express this through social criticism, a critique of the status quo. The best are heralds of wisdom for creation's flourishing.

The rise of progressive rock in the 1960s put words to the hope and lament of a generation caught between idealism and reality. Psychedelic rock went one step further. It sought a multisensory immersion into another, better world. No band achieved this better than Pink Floyd.

One topic that stretches across the half-century career of Pink Floyd – as well as the solo musical careers of band members – is war. Pink Floyd's catalogue is strewn with songs that protest war's destruction, devastation, and dehumanization – as well as the corporate greed and political narcissism that fuel it.

When Roger Waters left Pink Floyd in the mid-1980s, the band had reached the stratospheric level of cultural critique, influence, and impact. *The Wall* album (1979) was not only a huge commercial success but when Roger Waters re-toured it from 2010-2013 it became the highest-grossing tour by a solo musician ever. Pink Floyd have a unique ability to create an imaginative space where one more clearly sees the brokenness of the world but simultaneously the need (and hope) for renewed justice and compassion.

Since much of Pink Floyd's cultural influence is related to the theme of war, it isn't much of a surprise that, when war recently broke out between Russia and Ukraine, it was this tragedy that regathered the band to release "Hey, Hey, Rise Up!" as a fundraiser for Ukrainian humanitarian aid.

The song is based on an old Ukrainian folk song, "Oh, the

Red Viburnum in the Meadow" which had been recently sung by Ukrainian musician Andriy Khlyvnyuk from Sophia Square in Kyiv and posted to Instagram. When David Gilmour, lead guitarist and vocalist of Pink Floyd, heard it, there was an immediate personal connection to this war in Eastern Europe as his daughter-in-law is Ukrainian.

The original folk song is composed of five stanzas; each portrays a Ukraine besieged by sorrow but animated, ultimately, by hope and restoration. That restoration does require courageously "marching forward ... into a bloody fray" if there is to be "free[dom] ... from hostile chains." The concluding image is of Ukrainian soldiers staked out in

battle positions between furrows of wheat. The song celebrates that "early wheat" which will be harvested; it is not doomed to destruction. Neither is Ukraine if we come to her rescue.



Christian Rohlfs, *Sunflowers*

This is the world that Pink Floyd calls us to: life may seem to be only "Echoes" (1971); the sun may be "Obscured by Clouds" (1972); the status quo may conceive of humanity as nothing more than "Us and Them" (1973); we may feel that above our entrance to a dehumanizing corporate world there hangs a sign that says, "Welcome to the Machine" (1975)

run by "Dogs" and "Pigs" (1977); leaving us with only the panic that we must "Run Like Hell" (1979); with life amidst "The Dogs of War" reducing us to "Sorrow" (1987).

But that's not all. If we "Keep Talking" we might find ourselves and the world around us "Coming Back to Life" as our imaginations are inhabited by "High Hopes" (1993). Pink Floyd, sounding almost like biblical prophets, are summoning us ("Hey, Hey") to do our part in living rightly so that God's creation might flourish for all ("Rise Up!").

*Dr Michael R Wagenman is Senior Research Fellow and Director of Postgraduate Studies at the Kirby Laing Centre for Public Theology.*



# Poor Bishop Hooper:

## MUSIC FOR THE WEARY SOUL

**JOSH RODRIGUEZ interviews  
Leah and Jesse Roberts**

captivated by the power of story. Combine that with Leah's deep love and knowledge of the Bible, and we find ourselves consistently coming back to singing the beautiful and honest stories of the Scriptures. The Lord has affirmed this "mission" over the years, whether through sharing the crucifixion story with our Golgotha ministry and seeing the impact that narrative has on those who encounter it, or telling the Christmas story through the eyes of the people who took part first-hand, or simply resinging the songs of the Bible with EveryPsalm.

**JR: Another project, called [The Golgotha Experience](#), is shared around the US each year during the Lenten season. How did this come about and what do you hope to accomplish through this liturgically-rooted music?**

**Jesse:** Golgotha came about quite unexpectedly. We'd been asked to take over the Good Friday service for our church, and having always appreciated the stations of the cross, we thought it might be nice to add some sort of musical element to the largely visual tradition. We went away to the woods, and ended up writing all fourteen songs in three days. It was crazy. Kind of like a spiritual download. When we came back, we first shared the music with our own community, but immediately sensed that there was something more to be done with it. Over the past eight years it's developed into the primary in-person expression of our music. Our personal backgrounds have informed how and where we share it, and we do our best to go to underserved places – prisons, rural communities, etc. We've seen the power of the gospel do mighty things in those places and beyond! Often during Lent it's easy to fly through the suffering part and focus our time and energy on the resurrection. Not that that is bad of course. But we know that when we take a minute, or in Golgotha's case an hour, to ponder Jesus' suffering and sacrifice, we find deeper appreciation and gratitude for the gift of grace that is consistently and abundantly ours.

**JR:** Another fascinating project is [Firstborn](#) which includes a surprisingly moving musical exploration of Jesus' lineage. Apart from Estonian composer Arvo Pärt's choral setting ("[Which was the Son of ...](#)"), I'd never heard a musical setting of Jesus' lineage. I'm wondering, Leah, what drew you to this passage in particular?

**Leah:** Again, giving a nod to the traditional church calendar, we structured the whole of Firstborn around the common weekly themes of Advent (hope, peace, joy, love). When we came to "Christ," we couldn't think of any better way to communicate the power and importance of the birth of Jesus than singing his lineage. Generation after generation of broken and messed up people, yet through it all staggering prophetic fulfilment, beauty, and eventually the very Son of God! Musically it was a bit tricky, mainly figuring out how to take such a long section of Scripture, with no chorus per se, and make it interesting. But one night in the studio it all came together, and ever since has been a meaningful song to many.



Chaïm Soutine, *Still Life with Violin, Bread and Fish*

**JR: Are there any theological ideas or doctrines that especially shape your music and approach to music making?**

**Jesse:** We recently recorded an album for Psalm 119 as part of our EveryPsalm project. With it, we've been further encouraged by the psalm's aim

to encourage the reader to know and love God's word. We believe that the Scriptures bring so many benefits to our lives. "Great peace have those who love your law, nothing can make them stumble" (Ps 119:165). So right now, our approach to music making is being shaped by holding to the preeminence of God's word in our lives, and in turn, singing it.

**JR: Are there any lessons you've learned through your particular relational dynamic – being married and working in ministry together?**

**Leah:** It's absolutely amazing being married, having three children, and getting to do what we do. There are of course hurdles and difficulties all the time, but it's so very worth it. When we first started writing together, we quickly realized



our different leanings and preferences, and started to see how to support each other's strengths. Jesse tends to be the lyric writer, I tend to shape the melodies and harmonies. Jesse owns the production and mixing side of things, I often bring the chord structures and arrangements. We've definitely learned where to let the other take the lead! Nowadays with our family of five, we've had to get more creative with our writing and recording time – we certainly can't do as many late nights in the studio!

**JR: Is there something unique to the arts or to your creative activity that has impacted your faith?**

**Leah:** Our extensive time in the psalms has definitely shaped our faith over the past three years. Not only do the practicals of EveryPsalm cause us to read the psalms more than ever before, but the music and melodies are helping us memorize more of God's word. Aside from that, we've been recently drawn further into a growing love and appreciation for God's creation. Both through traditional music and the writings of William Quayle specifically, we've found ourselves increasingly drawn towards and strengthened by nature. All that God has created, his natural revelation in its seasonal beauty, brings us hope and steadfastness for the journey.

**JR: Are there any dream creative projects that you'd like to accomplish in the coming years?**

**Jesse:** We often discuss what we're going to do after EveryPsalm, and there are far more ideas than we'll likely ever have the years to complete! We've kicked around everything from tackling large portions of the Old Testament in narrative form concept-esque albums, to focusing on specific themes or ideas, say trees, and following those through the Bible story. The list goes on. Who knows? Thank you Holy Spirit for your guidance into right endeavours in the right times!

*Josh Rodriguez is composer-in-residence of the [Corona Symphony Orchestra](#), and Associate Professor of Music Theory and Composition at the [Collinsworth School of Music](#), California Baptist University and an Associate Fellow of the KLC. Listen to his music [here](#). Learn more about Poor Bishop Hooper at <https://www.poorbishophooper.com/>.*

# IN THE STUDIO

with  
Maryke van Velden

HEIDI SALZWEDEL  
interviews Maryke van Velden,  
visual artist and curator.

*Breathing Prayer (2021)*

**Heidi Salzwedel:** What has been the path, artistically and spiritually, that has led you to where you are today?

**Maryke van Velden:** In short: growing up in a rather eccentric missionary household, with a theologian father and a singer-painter mother. In my childhood home one would likely smell oil paints, linseed oil and genuine turpentine. But at the same time this is where I experienced first-hand what practical theology looks like. This instilled in me a reverence for liturgy as well as deep appreciation for the arts.

The privilege of having grown up outside of South Africa (in Malawi) pre-1994 only dawned on me long after we had left there. From a very young age I was integrated into multicultural, multiracial and multireligious communities and befriended people across ideological boundaries. Sadly, I would most likely not have had this opportunity in my home country at the time due to the difficulties posed by the apartheid government. I do believe that this experience kindled in me esteem for people from various cultural

backgrounds and a lifelong desire to bridge divergent sectors of society, whether through social networking, the arts, or the church.

**HS:** Tell us a bit more about your educational background?

**MvV:** After school, and a gap year spent in Europe, I did a degree in fine arts at Stellenbosch University, followed by a master's degree in illustration at the same institution (2012, *cum laude*). I have since taken part in a few group exhibitions (mostly local), worked in curriculum development for deaf learners, lectured drawing at various tertiary institutions, and am currently working as creative director and curator at a nonprofit cultural centre in my hometown, Stellenbosch. I continue to produce art when time allows.

I am tremendously grateful to have found my "artistic and spiritual" feet by joining a small local community of artists and biblical practitioners, called "40 Stones." This initiative

has brought into being a series of professional and thought-provoking art exhibitions of works by biblically-led artists in recent years; the last of which was the *Transept* show which featured in *TBP*, Issue 3. In this social space I feel safe to think about, question, and deliberate on matters pertaining to both the arts and the Christian faith.

**HS:** What were your experiences of the pandemic and what artworks did you produce during the pandemic in response to them?

**MvV:** More than anything the pandemic brought to the surface various layers of loss. Initially, my experience was acute isolation and intense personal loss. As the period of strict lockdown subsided in South Africa, and various national regulations were loosened, personal loss made way for a realisation of the immense communal loss of our country and the globe. Hence, intuitively a lot of what I produced artistically since the start of 2020 has touched on experiences of loss.

It has always been the contemplative physicality of the art-making process that I've been most drawn to and which is often of most value to me as a maker. At the start of the pandemic, I turned to art making partly as a means of processing loss, and partly as a way of keeping busy and centring my thoughts. I briefly discuss three works from this period, each rather different in nature.



*I sat and I saw: it is good (2020)*

During Easter weekend, 2020, I made a series of drawings of my "surrounds in captivity," using red wine. One of these is titled *I sat and I saw: it is good*. This drawing represents a photograph I took at my then home: an empty plastic garden chair in the autumn garden. At the time South

Africa was undergoing a strict national lockdown, which confined residents to their homes. The garden became a space of tranquil retreat, which I frequented. Making this drawing was a way of submissively embracing the imposed solitude, and also of escaping the ensuing anxiety. Through subtle symbolic references this work became both a prayer of anguish and a voice of comfort.



*Body Becoming (2021)*

In response to the strangeness of social distancing and the reshaping of the nature of interaction, I went on to create a life-sized self-portrait of mourning. The composition comprises overlapping layers of scriptural text (primarily from Genesis 2) with varying intensities of toner, depicting my bare back as I lie in a foetal position.

The opening chapters of the book of Genesis were written to Jewish exiles who, under new rule, had begun questioning their identity. These passages touch on themes of birth and death, redemption and responsibility; all elements that revolve around relationships. During the period of solitude in which I created this work, I attempted to revisit the nature of my own relationships: with myself, with others, and with my maker.

As the pandemic prolonged, I ruminated on the suffering I witnessed in the lives of friends and acquaintances who had lost loved ones due to COVID-19. Moved by the poignant *New York Times* cover graphic on 21 February 2021, just over a month after having lost a close friend to COVID-19, I decided to draw a meditation in memory of all the South Africans who had lost their lives to COVID-19 during the one-year period since the first recorded death in the country. From 28 March 2020 to 28 March 2021, 52 663 COVID-19 related deaths were officially recorded in South Africa.

I ventured into a drawing process that would last for weeks: through keeping meticulous count I shaped two enormous lungs out of tiny dots of blood; each representing one death to COVID-19 during the year that had passed. *Breathing Prayer* reflects on individual and communal loss.

**HS: You use a variety of media – what motivates your experimentation and can you explain a bit more about how you used these different media in the three artworks?**

**MVV:** As a particularly tactile-sensitive person, I find that I am often as intrigued by the media used in a work of art, as I am by the content represented. My art making has both an intuitive and a conceptual approach. I find that the choice of medium not only stimulates sensory intrigue, but it also challenges the viewer to consider it as a meaningful substance itself, instead of simply the transparent carrier of a message. My own uses of divergent media such as red wine, toner and blood – all which had originated from play and experimentation – are thus hermeneutical considerations.

The use of red wine (in *I sat and I saw: it is good*) for a work made during Easter has of course the obvious liturgical connotation of the body of Christ. I wanted to accentuate the solitude I experienced during Easter (2020); a time annually spent in devout reflection and among loved ones. The use of wine during this particular period seemed even weightier due to the national prohibition on alcohol sales at the start of the lockdown in 2020. I manipulated the density of the wine by both heating it and by diluting it in order to develop a broader range of monochrome tones.

Working with toner (in *Body Becoming*), which is used in laser printing, is a process I liken to a type of tactile exegesis; biblical text metamorphoses first into illegible texture and finally takes on an alternative form which asks to be read in a new (i.e., visual) language. Most of the knowledge we gather through reading is absorbed via printed text,

and thus through toner. The slow physicality of continual manual “re-texting” echoes for me the narrative of biblical creation through God’s Word; toner becoming a mimicking substance from which “life is called forth.”

In *Breathing Prayer*, it was my intention to create something intricate and beautiful through the use of the deeply personal medium of blood, often considered to be impure. The use of blood seemed even more fitting as the resulting image would portray a vital organ. However, in this body part the passage of blood flow is absent; the metaphoric vines are indicated by negative space which ultimately merges with the central void. It is particularly the juxtaposing of this bodily substance with the silent mystery of a great unknown which I find significant.

**HS: Is there anything you take from lockdown and the pandemic that gives you hope?**

**MVV:** There is, indeed. The gruelling months of strict lockdown offered time (if not so much space) to process death and loss in various forms. For the first time after many dormant years, I felt almost forced to turn (back) to making art. This opened a space of rediscovery for me, for which I’m grateful as an artist.

I felt particularly encouraged by an experience I had during the time my *Breathing Prayer* work was exhibited at *Transept*, an exhibition in Somerset West (SA) in September 2021. The exhibition was held in a newly-built, modern church building. My piece, ironically, hung in the “cry room.” This intimate space, an annex to the atrium, became almost chapel-like: I installed a shelf with hundreds of small candles next to the framed drawing, inviting viewers to light candles for lost loved ones. The candles mirrored the thousands of dots of blood from which my adjacent artwork is composed. I had dedicated the piece to a friend who lost both parents to COVID-19 during the first week of 2021. This friend visited our exhibition with two of her sisters. After lighting two candles, they took seats in the room and spent a considerable time there, in silence. Later, they shared stories with me about their mother and father. We laughed and we cried together in front of the artwork.

This was truly encouraging: that a work of art can bring people together in such a way and that, through the aesthetic curation of a rather utilitarian space, these visitors felt comfortable to share so intimately. It was holy.

*Heidi Salzwedel, a graduate of the Stellenbosch and Rhodes Universities, is an art and design educator, and an artist/writer who lives and works in Cape Town. She met Maryke in the Cape Winelands.*

# Drawing with the Virus

TWO YEARS ON – APRIL 2022

WALTER HAYN

Shortly after the onset of COVID-19 in the UK, I fell ill with the deadly virus which necessitated a three-week period of self-isolation.

In fits and starts, despite feeling listless and miserable, I completed the three charcoal drawings seen here: *Brace*, *Hunker* and *Barricade*. They seem to summarise the desperate measures being taken against the spreading virus. But the months that followed my recovery while in lockdown, proved to be a period of intense artistic output. I obsessively went about making art, to try to unravel the unnatural condition depicted by the three drawings, within the pressure-cooker atmosphere of a soaring daily death count and an uncertain future.

Recently I came across a pen and ink drawing completed during this time, that I had disturbingly titled *The Church of the Dispossessed*. The concept grew out of looking at photographs of informal housing in the poorest areas of my motherland, South Africa. I was particularly burdened by the crazy logic of mandatory indoor self-isolation, for people living together in



*Brace*, 23 March 2020; *Hunker*, 24 March 2020; *Barricade*, 25 March 2020.

it had become a barricaded edifice. I was perplexed and horrified by the result.

The structure seems to act as an indictment against the

overcrowded one-room shanties, as, in a bizarre about-turn, Covid regulations were locking people in, and churches and businesses were forced to lock people out. So, my aim was to design a church for squatter camps, constructed out of the same refuse and discarded junk which, (out of sheer necessity), is used to build dwellings in these places. I modelled it on an ancient Orthodox Eastern European church, but somehow the drawing resolved itself into an austere sealed structure. Instead of an accessible beacon of hope and worship,

church at large, as now, everywhere I look, things are strangely at odds with one another. For example, recent floods in South Africa have destroyed informal dwellings and left thousands of people bereft of shelter and belongings; and streams of refugees from the war in Ukraine are crossing borders into harbouring countries. These people are equally vulnerable and dispossessed, with no homes or churches to return to. It is as if the ravages of the Covid “flood” have laid bare the secrets and “inward-looking” myopias that the earlier drawings are hinting at. Political leaders have been found wanting, and the problems outside of our braced “bubbles” have become a dire problem within all of us: A ticking time-bomb!

(See “Drawing with the Virus” in the KLC October 2020 issue of *Sibylline Leaves*: <https://kirbylaingcentre.co.uk/sibylline-leaves/>.)

*Walter Hayn is an artist and a part-time art teacher who grew up in South Africa, but now lives in South East London. Please visit [walterhayn.com](http://walterhayn.com) for high-quality images.*

*The Church of the Dispossessed*, 2 August 2020



THE BIG PICTURE



*Breathing Prayer*  
(2021, detail)

# After Difficulty?

REITZE RODSETH

I've never seen someone die like that.

His blood oxygen levels are low from the COVID infection. I have him on a 100% oxygen rebreather, but it won't be enough. I used the last ventilator 30 minutes ago, and all the high-flow oxygen machines are in use. His blood oxygen saturation falls to 75%, and he's sweating. He can't speak, barely able to breathe. Eyes wild, pleading. His blood pressure starts to climb as his body tries to drive more oxygen to his brain. He knows he's dying.

I circle the unit looking for a ventilator. The lady in bed 12 is dying. Despite the 100% oxygen and the aggressive vent settings, her saturation is 48%. If she holds on for another hour or two it will be too late for him. I wondered if she could die now. Ghoul.

His nurse calls me back – "Mr H is restless." Confused from a lack of oxygen he starts trying to pull off his face mask. We restrain him. Saturation in the 60s, and his blood pressure climbs. He's been sick for two weeks, 42 years old. He got COVID from his daughter, who was at home because of the lockdown. Despite all the medication, he didn't improve. Our treatment attempts have failed as well.

I'm so tired of people dying. The last time I signed this many death certificates was 20 years ago while working as a medical intern in paediatrics. Then it was young babies and toddlers dying from AIDS. Every night that I was on call, at least one died, and every night I would speak



Theo van Hoytema, *Dood Roodborstje*

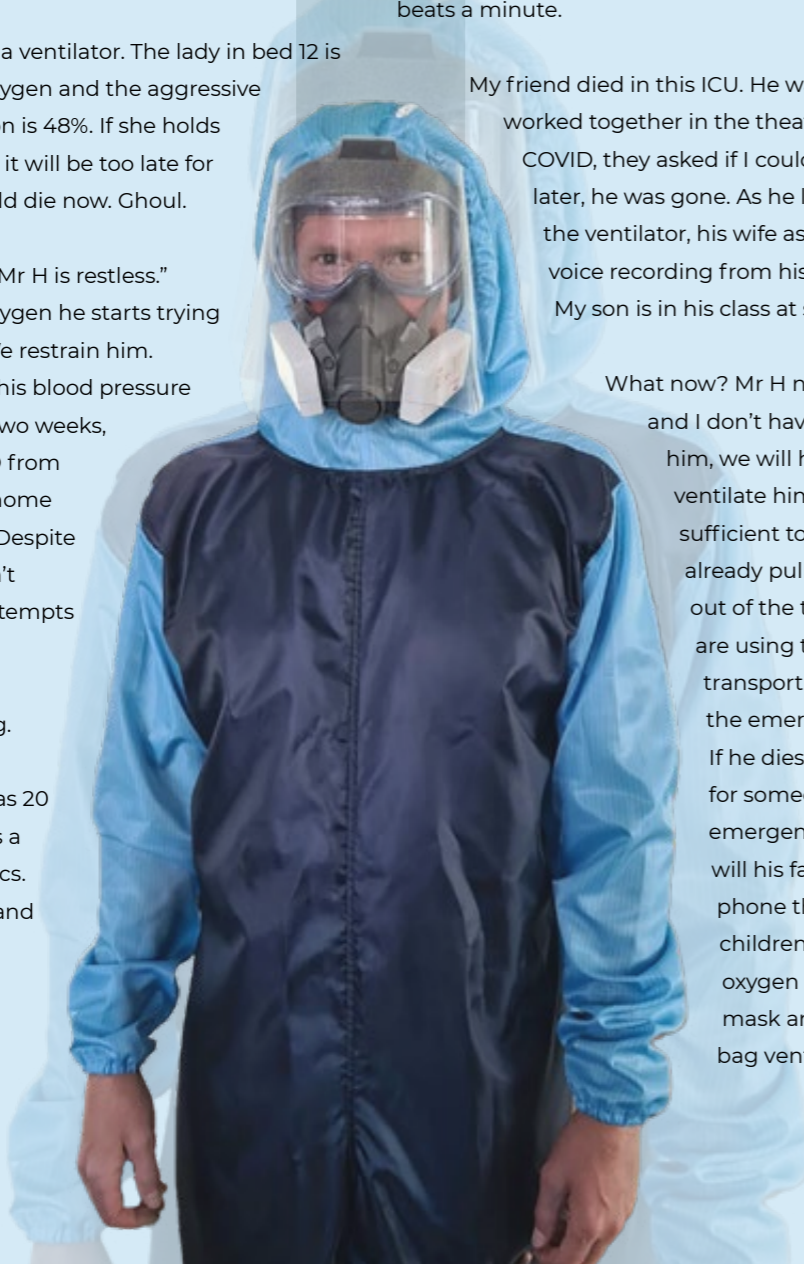
to a mother to tell her that her child had just died. I abandoned paediatrics and instead trained in anaesthesiology and critical care. Now, at the peak of South Africa's second COVID wave, it's three or four certificates a day. I wonder if I'll abandon this once it's over?

His fear starts to recede as he slips into unconsciousness. Hemingway comes to mind: "... slowly at first, then all at once."

His breathing slows, saturation into the 30s, and then the convulsions start. Blood pressure 280/140, heart rate 150 beats a minute.

My friend died in this ICU. He was a surgeon. We worked together in the theatres, and when he got COVID, they asked if I could help. Eight weeks later, he was gone. As he lay unconscious on the ventilator, his wife asked me to play him a voice recording from his three-year-old son. My son is in his class at school.

What now? Mr H needs a ventilator, and I don't have one. If I intubate him, we will have to hand ventilate him, and it won't be sufficient to keep him alive. I've already pulled four ventilators out of the theatre, and we are using the two reserve transport ventilators from the emergency department. If he dies, we have a space for someone waiting in the emergency department. How will his family react when I phone them? Does he have children? I try to get his oxygen levels up using a mask and a hand-held bag ventilator.



I remember phoning a wife to tell her that her husband had died from COVID. He only spent three days with us. She didn't pick up the phone. After 30 minutes I had tracked down her work number. They told me she died that morning on the way to the emergency department. They gave me her daughter's cell number.

His heart stops. I don't do CPR – there is nothing more we can do. Forty-five minutes later, as I'm writing out his death certificate, the next patient arrives. Her saturations are in the low 70s.

To call this a difficult time is a grand understatement. It felt hellish. But, as I think back, I find myself unable to recapture the intensity of those experiences – the sharpness of the memories blunted by time, yet also adding something more to them.

I remember the pain of my friend's death. But I now also remember how his wife stopped the funeral procession, got out of the car, and came over to hug and thank me. Through

the tears, I remember seeing the nursing staff walking behind the hearse, singing and dancing in his honour, as it drove out.

I remember the hopelessness and despair as our medical team worked and

Käthe Kollwitz, *Woman with Dead Child*

worked and worked. But I now also remember the deep character and commitment of those who worked beside me. Colleagues who have become real friends. Friends with whom I now share my own medical struggles.

I remember the 80% mortality rate of our ventilated patients. But I now also remember Mr A, who, once in a while, phones me to tell me how he's doing. We looked after him for six months, five of them on a ventilator. He's just started walking without home oxygen. I get a hug from his wife every time I see her.

I remember where I sat as I completed the death certificates. But I remember how our nursing assistant now smiles at me and stops to chat as she walks past that desk. Her 64-year-old mother went home after four months in

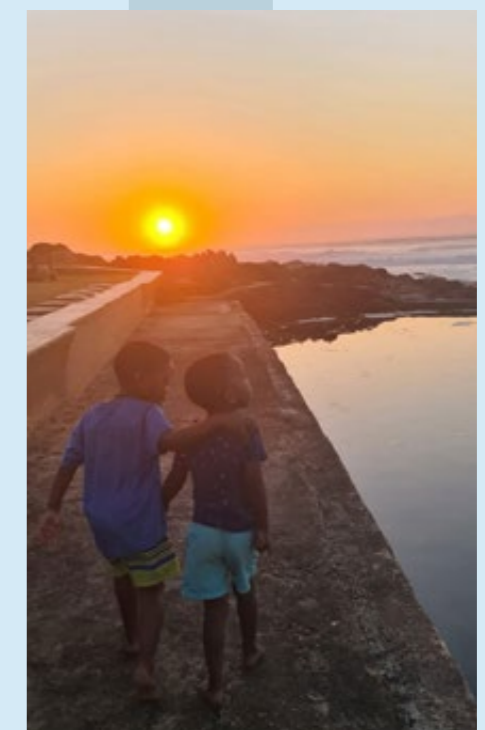
the unit. When her mother cooks for the family over the weekend, I sometimes get a special delivery on Monday.

Of course, I got COVID, together with a litany of complications. I had to stop exercising. Then I had to stop working for a few months, and then I resigned from our medical practice. I've been sleeping so much that my kids think I get paid for it. After taking my morning tablets, I'm so full I only get hungry again at 10:00.

When I think about my current state of health, it's difficult. I feel hopelessness and despair. But I now also remember those who did not make it through the infection, and I'm deeply grateful. E. M. Forster wrote, "Death destroys a man, but the idea of Death saves him." Facing death has driven me to a deeper search for God's transcendent value. To find his meaning and purpose in even the most mundane.

As I hobble around on my crutches, I feel pain and fear. But I now also remember those who did make it through the infection, and I'm grateful. Scott Fitzgerald wrote that "there was no difference between men ... so profound as the difference between the sick and the well." The life scars on my body and mind remind me that there are no "well." The divide between the sick and the healer is artificial. The patients who see my scars now welcome me as one of their own. As they share their stories, I too welcome them.

I now remember that in my weakness, his grace was sufficient. I now remember that in my weakness, his grace is sufficient. Now, after my difficulties, I dimly see how I might delight in my difficulty.



Prof Reitze Rodseth is an anaesthesiologist and critical care specialist working in private practice in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

Photographs by Miranda Rodseth.

The Rodseth boys

# HANS'S STORY

DEREK SCHUURMAN

They say that when you get married you not only join a spouse but a whole family. When I got married to my wife Carina, I gained several new siblings, including a new brother-in-law named Hans.

Hans is the youngest in the family, only 12 years old when Carina and I were married. He was a healthy boy, growing up on their family farm and aspiring one day to be a farmer himself. He was also extremely social, able to strike a conversation with almost anyone. And he often did.

Shortly after our wedding, I came home to find my wife in tears. She had just received a call with the tragic news that Hans had been diagnosed with a brain tumour. We were shocked and we feared the worst. Throughout the scans and tests that followed we were encouraged by a great cloud of believers who were praying for Hans.

In the following months, my in-laws navigated a confusing labyrinth of medical options and opinions, special diets and anti-seizure medications (some of which came with difficult side-effects). Despite the precarious location and shape of the tumour, the decision was made to operate. After a long and complex surgical procedure, we received the news: the tumour was partially removed but the prognosis going forward was uncertain.

Hans eventually returned to school and regular life; his ability to return to regular activities was an answer to many prayers. But our prayers continued with the uneasy fear of the tumour growing. Along the way, Hans endured various challenges including issues with his memory.

But there were also times of joy. Hans graduated from high school and then agricultural college. He met a young woman, Rachel, and they were soon married. Just as he always dreamed, Hans took over part of the family farm near Peterborough, and soon two children came along.

As the years passed, however, Hans endured increasing memory loss and seizures. In time, the seizures became more frequent and accompanied by other symptoms, like narcolepsy. One day in 2017, a scan revealed bleeding around his tumour and doctors recommended emergency brain surgery.

Throughout Hans's journey, I had been bewildered with how he remained upbeat and unwavering in his faith. As he waited for surgery, I had a conversation with Hans, expressing respect for his faith which I had observed through many times of challenge.

That turned out to be the last conversation I had with Hans. The surgeon emerged with grim news – the delicate procedure had been challenging, and Hans did not appear to be very responsive. We could see that something was not right.

Since that day, Hans has only been able to communicate using a few occasional words and limited gestures. He is no longer able to walk and lives in a long-term care facility. Regular visits from his wife and family reveal occasional glimmers of recognition, but it's hard to know how much he understands. As a sociable person, Hans is now trapped in a body with a limited ability to communicate.



Hans, photographed by Hannah Oussoren

Events like this make one question the *Heidelberg Catechism* which declares that "health and sickness, riches and poverty, indeed, all things come not by chance, but by His fatherly hand" (Q&A 27). I am comforted that things "come not by chance," but does Hans's situation really come "by His fatherly hand"?

We have fervently prayed for Hans's healing, but he remains in a nursing home. I have found the words of Daniel 3:18 instructive: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego declare that God can save them from the fiery furnace, but they conclude by saying "even if he does not," they will still trust in God. I know God can heal Hans, but even if not, we need to continue trusting God.

Although I can't ask him, I believe that Hans's strong

faith persists through his challenges. Perhaps Q&A 27 of the *Heidelberg Catechism* is best understood in the light of Q&A 1, that "I am not my own, but belong body and soul, in life and in death to my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ" and that somehow, "all things must work together for my salvation" – a salvation that will include the complete restoration of our bodies. May God grant us, and Hans, that hope and comfort.

**Postscript:** On Tuesday, March 8, 2022 in Owen Sound, Ontario, Canada, a few months after this piece was written, Hans Oussoren passed away.



*Derek Schuurman was Hans Oussoren's brother-in-law, is a husband to Carina, and an Associate Fellow of the Kirby Laing Centre. This story originally appeared in Christian Courier ([www.christiancourier.ca](http://www.christiancourier.ca)).*

## Gert Swart: *Nkosi*

(Zulu:  
King, Chief, God.)

CRAIG G. BARTHOLOMEW

For most South Africans the apartheid era was one of unrelenting dusk. Hope was a fragile commodity. Paradoxically the anthem of liberation was one of great hope: "Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika," a Christian hymn calling for God to bless Africa amidst the pain and struggle. Fragile hope amidst terrible

pain, it is powerfully evoked in Gert's *Nkosi*. The young vulnerable bird is wearied and almost overwhelmed by the obstacles to its normal growth and development. The pathos is tangible. The head is bowed beneath the weight of the struggle and yet it is slightly turned upwards as if to

refuse to relinquish the possibility of redemption. Few works capture so integrally the terrible juxtaposition of pain and hope in human (note the hands) experience.

*This extract from Gert Swart's 1997 Tatham Gallery exhibition catalogue Contemplation was posted in an ArtWay Visual Meditation February 4, 2018 ([www.artway.eu](http://www.artway.eu)).*



# When Hope is Difficult

CARRIE VAUGHN



Jewad Selim, *Untitled*

## Difficult to hope

“In this land, it is better to be a stone than to be a girl.” Homeira Qaderi, in *Dancing in the Mosque* (New York: Harper, 2020, 156), tells of her Afghan family’s experience of Soviet occupation in

the 1980s and then of Taliban rule in the 1990s. An entire generation came of age under war and instability. Hope was the currency exchanged for survival, especially as a female.

Then came their daughters. From 2002 until August 2021, many girls experienced relative freedom throughout Afghanistan. There was still internal fighting and oppression, but comparatively speaking, life was better. They were raised between the bookends of extreme female oppression.

In between Taliban rule grew clusters of Afghan women taught to hope. Unshrouded from many of the restrictions their mothers learned to accept, these women inhaled their independence and stockpiled hopeful futures. These mothers taught their daughters to hold on tight to every day of education given them. Raised by devastation, fear, and oppression, these mothers prioritized their daughters’ education. Unbuckled from Taliban harassment, many in this generation of girls would have choices. Education would narrate their futures.

Some of these young Afghan women now find themselves refugees in America. As I sip tea with them, I hear stories of hopeful resistance. They sit in university classrooms studying economics or international business, knowing their country needs their hearts and minds. There’s a sense of preparation and diligence stirring among these women. They recognize that with every test they pass, it’s a statement to the Taliban that Afghans will flourish despite them. Right now, millions of women in Afghanistan are hiding under heavy burqas and heaving oppression. The burqas are merely the cover representing the ultraconservative Islamic reign of the Taliban. These refugee women in America have sisters who are forbidden

to continue their education back home. Women’s days are now filled with washing dishes, but their minds resist by reciting maths lessons or reviewing French verbs. Resistance is fuelled by hope.

But, with each passing day, hope back home gets more difficult. School doors have been closed to women; windows of opportunity shuttered. Food lines grow short as food ceases to be distributed. So, while hope is difficult, it’s all that these women have. Some might wonder whether hope is just well wishing. Then again, if hope is not difficult, is it really hope?

## Difficult with hope

To honour their families languishing in Afghanistan, they study long hours, save money, and hold on to difficult hope. They often express to me that they *must* hope. Their families are depending on these girls to *resist through hope*.

Through my relationships with these women studying here, I’ve discovered how much of my hope is not in the Lord but rather in the American economy. As a culture, we’ve taught our kids to hope in consumerism, the relative stability of the American dollar, and democracy, as if hope is naivety and hard work ensures success. While I might complain about rising prices at the grocery stores, at least grocery stores still sell food. Lines at the bank are long, but they’ll hand me money from my account. I flow fluidly throughout my day assured of my provisions. My hope has become lazy, misplaced and misused. Urgent is the hope of these Afghan women. They’ve been tasked with not just holding onto hope for themselves, but also for the good of an entire country waiting to hear their voices.

These women anchor themselves to the hope of their education and of rescuing their families from the strangulation of the Taliban. As a Jesus follower, I know this: “We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek “ (Heb 6:19-20).

Hope is where Jesus is found.

When we engage with hope, we encounter the holy. The kingdom narrates our hope. These women show me that each day can be difficult, but that it’s difficult *with* hope.

*Carrie Vaughn serves refugees in Phoenix, Arizona.*



Marta Shmatava, *Hope*



Ydi Carstens, *Feet on the Concrete*

# Kingdom Hope and Resilience

CORLI KROHN

The world may just be stitched together with RESILIENCE.

Countless stories of resilience thread through the ages – a fundamental expression of our humanity. What is more, these stories prove resilience to be a complex expression of diverse competencies; resilience is not a single skill. Perhaps what is most common and enduring in all these stories, is the embodiment of hope.

Most of us are aware that the Western world has become digitally captured, convenience addicted, pathologically distracted, and risk allergic. Even so, a belief in the right to have and be anything we desire, permeates. In reality, our lives are often a disillusionment. Certainly for many,

especially in the midst of the current upheaval across the globe, life seems futile and hope defeated.

As God’s people – Spirit-renewed sons and daughters – we are called to hard and holy things in this world. It is a great calling; one that asks for undaunted hope, for he who promised is faithful (Heb 10:23).

How do we as citizens of the kingdom live out our hope in times like these, when we are increasingly faced with the brutality of the world, the chaos of history and human capacity for evil?

One small answer is found in resilience. When we practise resilience, we practise truth inside of difficulty. A battle-hardened confidence in

what is true toughens our hold on hope. Such a practice has the power to sabotage evil, sing in the darkness, and choose to live another day.

Five aspects of resilience are worthy of our attention: Overcoming, Quick Learning, Withstanding, Tears and the Work of Joy.

## 1. OVERCOMING

Human beings are surprisingly well suited to exertion and hard use. There is something in us that longs for challenge and sacrificial service. In biblical terms, kingdom dwellers are called to be hard-wearing farmers, soldiers, and athletes; a life of difficulty and dedication. At the same time, the world is invested in pleasure, and discomfort is avoided reflexively.

The resilient do not shrink from discomfort. Resilient people have learned that the obstacle is the way. The truth is that humans often do not rise to the occasion, but rather sink to the level of what they usually do, or worse. Life bends in the direction of our habits. Those who are resilient have come to embrace a daily practice of difficulty. They have built a steady habit of leaning into obstacles and discomfort, and have found it to be a wholesome and fortifying discipline. Few things in life feel as good as doing what needs to be done.

Now of course, this could be taken too far. It is important to desist when necessary. Nonetheless, Christ-followers, like athletes, are pledged to a race and a crown. Discomfort wakens us to our greater purpose. We have to take action, as intention alone does not bring change. Every moment we are alive is made up of choices we make; small, insignificant choices that alone do not mean much, but combined together, mean everything.



Artur Grottger, *Evening Prayer of a Farmer*

**2. QUICK LEARNING**

Resilient people know, in addition, that no plan survives contact. Resilience learns, absorbs, shifts, adjusts – the resilient are responsive, not reactive. As God’s people living securely inside of Romans 8:28, we have a sure basis for this kind of resilience. Like determined farmers who persist in the face of failure and disaster, we do not give up on the harvest. We keep learning and



Egon Schiele, *Small Tree in Late Autumn*

showing up. We take captive every catastrophic thought, and preach the gospel to ourselves. We trust when the story takes unexpected turns. We learn to face the world with good humour.

At no point does any of this necessarily become easy. Long-term resilience means getting up and trying again, day after day. The only failure is to lose patience with it all. Not losing our patience and not giving it up becomes a hallowed counter-act in a world full of tragedy and chaos. When instead, we learn what we have to, we change; we become exceptional in our own way.

**3. WITHSTANDING**

The resilient, furthermore, have learned that everybody has a frontline. A lot of modern freedom is really rooted in fear. It is not so much a commitment to the rules of law, as a timidity before responsibility. The gospel agenda in the world is neither conservative, nor is it liberal; it is transformational. Consequently, sooner or later, it will call on us to have the courage to go against the grain. This kind of withstanding might translate for us, at times, into some arduous, uncomfortable, countercultural living.

As we embody Christ in the world, our fight truly is not with flesh and blood, but against evil and darkness itself. Like soldiers living in enemy territory, armed with the full armour of God, we take up our part in the resistance. Every one of us has a contribution to make. We do not, and should not, all have the same line in the sand. It is God who assigns us our burdens to carry in life. Each assignment is holy before the Lord.

We have been freed from the tyranny of the world, the flesh, and the Evil One. Let us therefore faithfully and resiliently partner in the disruptive work of the good kingdom on earth. Our small actions matter. They are an embodiment of the hope we profess; and hope, this side of eternity, is subversive. We can live loud without making a noise.

**4. TEARS**

There is a necessary counterweight to add to our discussion of resilience, and that is the significance of tears. It is vital to make room for our human anguish in the face of the wretchedness and the suffering in the world. Life can be unspeakably hard, and at the end of the day, most are not Spartans or stoics or navy SEALs. In our faith history, even David, king of Israel, made his couch swim with tears. The prophets and the ancient fathers tore their clothes. Job sat in the ashes. Jesus wept.

Human tears are fundamental. It is the flowing of sad tears of futility that undergird adaptability and resilience. These tears have the power to bolster, calm, and renew us, and to relieve pain, grief and stress.



Ruizanglada, *Obra NXXX097 Campesino*

How extraordinary for us as kingdom people, cosmic orphans no more, that we pour forth our tears not in isolation, but before the God of the universe whose ears are attentive to our cries? Brought low by discouragement and distress, we come to a place where we may be reminded that God sees us, God hears us, and he knows us; our tears in a bottle, our prayers in a bowl (Ps 56:8; Rev 5:8).

The Lord is near to the broken-hearted. He saves those who are crushed in spirit. He will not extinguish a smoking wick, or snap a bruised reed. God’s power is made perfect in our weakness. Even as we boast in our tears, the power of Christ dwells within us. It is he who gives us beauty for ashes. We walk by faith and not by sight. God is our hiding place, our very present help in trouble. It is in the vale of tears we learn that we are continually surrounded by songs of deliverance (Ps 32:7).

Let us sing our freedom then, also in the darkness. As we sit on the ashes, waiting on the Lord, may our courage be renewed as we make room for our tears, and for the tears of others. May we remember there is “no need to be ashamed of tears, for these bear witness of the greatest of courage, the courage to suffer” (Viktor Frankl). In the darkness are treasures to be gained that no one can take away from us (Isa 45:3). It is here where our hope becomes stubborn.

**5. THE WORK OF JOY**

Resilient people are thankful to be alive. Adversity focuses the reality that another day is a gift not to be taken for granted, and also, that each day brings its own gifts.

The resilient are in the habit of paying attention.

These words are from a friend within the climbing community, after he lost his leg, his dreams, and very nearly his life to a massive, rogue boulder:

“‘Awe is the seed of love.’ I’ve chosen to carry this line with me to remind me to look for beauty. It reads as an instruction from me to me. Shudder before the beautiful ... The act of being humbled by beauty opens us to the seed of love, and there is comfort in the seed of love.”

As Christians, we live and move in the love of God. It is everywhere, when we open our eyes to see it. G. K. Chesterton said, “There is no way in which a person can earn a star or deserve a sunset.” Let us hunt these gifts, and notice and pay attention to every shred of beauty and goodness and serendipity in the world. This matters, because our weapons are not only our suffering and truth and perseverance, but also beauty and joy, dance and merriment. Evil knows nothing of such things. It is not capable of honest mirth and ordinary joy. It is not comforted by the beautiful. It has no sense of lightheartedness, no inclination to laugh at itself. It has nothing of substance to offer.

As the people of heaven, it is our privilege to fight the good fight not with grim faces, but with our joy. The joy of the Lord is our strength, and our deadliest weapon against evil. Diligently opening our eyes to joy changes

everything. It works, even when we do not believe it will. When we faithfully mark every good thing in and out of days, we propagate resilience exponentially. Our attention bends to the actuality of God’s ever-present love for us, personally and specifically. It becomes an ongoing and manifest affirmation that we are seen, that our life matters, that being is good; an asseveration that every given day is a grace to be received, humbly, in trust, even with joy.

It is the persevering work of joy that paves the way to a hope that is defiant. The one thing we need to do when times are hardest, is to live another day.

Resilience overcomes, learns quickly, withstands, embraces tears, and makes earnest work of joy. It is kingdom work; and it upholds a hope which is subversive, stubborn, and defiant, as well as glorious; a hope that is equal to the weighty work before us. This hope is our birthright and our muster as new creations in Christ. Let us be who we are, even as we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered, and we are captives in his train.

*Corli is an insatiable collector of individual stories of being. She and her husband serve on the KRUX team in beautiful Stellenbosch, South Africa, where they and their five children live.*



Hai Knafo, *Starlight Sower*

# Liberating Women:

## Difficult Hope in Egypt

DAVID BELDMAN

When we think of people in the Bible who faced the prospect of difficult hope, the names that come immediately to mind might be Daniel, Esther, David, Abraham, Jeremiah or Moses. But what about the names Shiphrah and Puah, two Hebrew midwives; what about the name Jochebed, a mother, and the name Miriam, a young daughter/sister? These are the names of remarkably ordinary and remarkably extraordinary women. In contrast to the individuals in the former list, these women had no apparent status or favour in their contexts, did not experience a divine encounter or promise, but powerless though they may have been, they acted with courage and resolve, defying a powerful Egyptian empire despite the risk.

Shiphrah, Puah, Jochebed and Miriam appear in the opening two chapters of Exodus. This monumental book of the Bible that narrates the miraculous call of Moses, the epic contest between Pharaoh and Yahweh, Israel's liberation from Egypt and the Red Sea crossing, the divine gift of the law from smoke-enveloped Sinai, the glory of God descending on the tabernacle – the book that includes all these starts with Shiphrah, Puah, Jochebed and Miriam. It's as though the author is trying to make this point: You're going to see some pretty incredible things in this book, including miraculous displays of divine power, but it all starts with Shiphrah, Puah, Jochebed and Miriam.



Alexey Tyranov, *Moses' Mother*

The actions of these women are the first acts of civil disobedience recorded in the Bible (and certainly the first that according to Exodus 1:20-21 receive divine approval). What compelled Shiphrah and Puah to defy Pharaoh's explicit order to kill the Hebrew boys born under their care? What compelled Jochebed and Miriam to engage in the scheme to set their baby boy/brother down the Nile in a basket? Compassion and human decency seem the obvious answer and certainly play a part in motivating these women; however, that is not a given as history attests that in circumstances of extreme oppression, self-preservation can tragically override these kinds of virtue. The narrator of Exodus mentions the midwives' fear of God as a cause of their defiance, and we can probably assume the same for Jochebed and Miriam.

Two careful and creative readers of Exodus provide another possible motivation for these women's acts of rebellion. First, Carmen Imes classifies them as "freedom fighters": "together they defy injustice, refusing to align themselves with the oppressive policies of the empire. They hold no weapons but their own courage. They refuse to let a powerful dictator redefine what is good."<sup>1</sup> Second, Leon Kass says that in Exodus 2 we encounter women (including Pharaoh's own daughter) engaged in a "conspiracy of the compassionate."<sup>2</sup> We might wonder what possible outcome these women thought they could achieve against such a tide of unthinkable evil and paranoia. This is where Wendell Berry's essay, "A Poem of Difficult Hope," from which this issue of *The Big Picture* gets its theme, is instructive. He notes that acts of resistance and protest often do not depend on success, that individual protest rarely is of any "use." Rather, he posits, "Protest that endures, I think, is moved by a hope far more modest than that of public success: namely, the hope of preserving qualities in one's own heart and spirit that would be destroyed by acquiescence."<sup>3</sup>

1 Carmen Imes, "Pharaoh's Daughter, Hebrew Midwives, Miriam: Freedom Fighters of the Exodus," *Biblical Mind*, November 16, 2020. [biblicalmind.org](http://biblicalmind.org)

2 Leon R. Kass, *Founding God's Nation: Reading Exodus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 43.

3 Wendell Berry, "A Poem of Difficult Hope," in *What Are People for?* (New York: North Point Press, 1990), 62.

Shiphrah and Puah could not have hoped that their resolve to be instruments of life as opposed to death would stop the machinations of Pharaoh. (In fact Pharaoh devised a much more comprehensive "solution" when his plan with

the midwives failed.) Jochebed and Miriam could not have hoped that their determination to save their baby boy/brother would stop the murder of other Hebrew boys. They had difficult hope: hope that the evil dictator's inability to extinguish their humanity and implicate them in his horrible plan actually mattered. Their difficult hope was more powerful than the death-dealing Pharaoh. Little did they know that Yahweh, the



Anselm Feuerbach, *Miriam*

God of their ancestors, was their partner in the conspiracy of the compassionate, orchestrating events such that their seemingly useless acts of resistance would foster life and liberation. The author of Exodus was convinced that the names Shiphrah and Puah, Jochebed and Miriam were worthy of remembrance, their difficult hope worthy of retelling. Let's remember them too.

*David Beldman is scholar in residence at the Surge Network, Phoenix, and the director of KLC North America.*

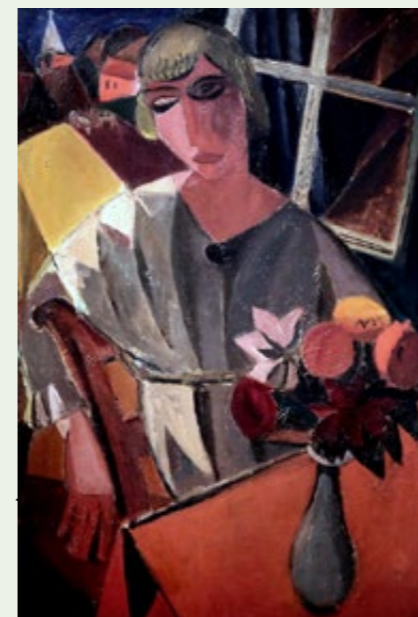


*Moses from the River*, Dura Europos fresco

## When This is Over

FIONA STEWART

When this is over, we say brightly,  
We can return to how things were  
Pick up where we left off  
Get back to normal



But  
  
These days I wonder  
Can we?  
Will we?  
For we will not be the same,  
You and I,  
When once more we meet, face to face,  
And tentatively begin again.

Each passing day reminds us  
That this break is not a halt,  
But a narrower path  
on  
which  
there is  
no room  
to turn around  
And no going back  
to normal.

When we meet again we will not  
Pick up where we left off  
Because anything dropped  
Is now lost,

Gustave de Smet, *Woman at the Window*  
by Jean Louis Mazieres licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Left behind in that other country.

When we meet  
There will be wounds to tend  
And stories to tell  
Of what has passed.  
There will be deeper silences  
in which to dwell,

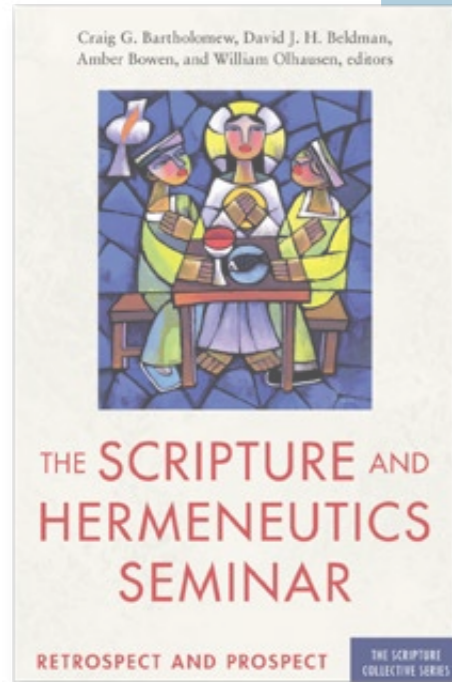
As looking back to that narrower path,  
We at last see clearly  
That we have emerged  
into sunnier meadows.

Because one day the path will widen  
So we can stand side by side.  
Shoulders touching  
We will pause to embrace,  
Abiding in silent appreciation  
Of where we find ourselves,  
Watching the clouds together

And breathing deeply again.

*Fiona Stewart is a writer, performer and creative consultant. ([www.fionacstewart.com](http://www.fionacstewart.com))*

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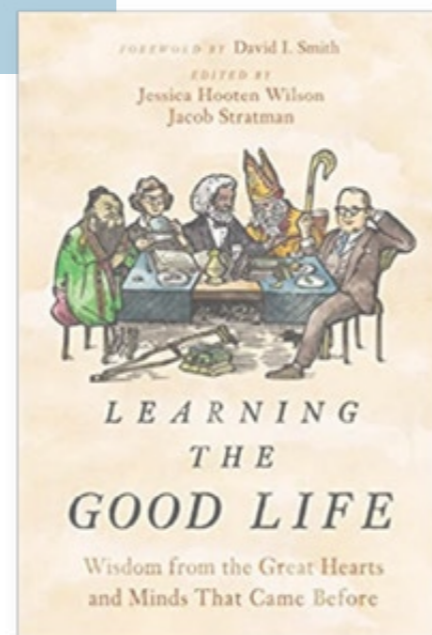
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**JOHN DONNE**

Batter my heart, three-personed God, for you  
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;  
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend  
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.

I, like an usurped town, to another due,  
Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end.  
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,  
But is captured, and proves weak or untrue.  
Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,  
But am betrothed unto your enemy:  
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,  
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,  
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.



Daniel Heller, *Creation 2*

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\*From Matthew 4:4

But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

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