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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.

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The Centre Cannot/Can Hold and the **URGENT NEED FOR TRUTH**

EDITORIAL by CRAIG G. BARTHOLOMEW



Amadeo de Souza-Cardosa, *Windows and Hatches*

Yeats wrote his poem "The Second Coming" in 1919, just after World War I, around the start of the Irish War of Independence and the flu pandemic of 1918–1919. We have experienced nothing like World War I but it all, nevertheless, sounds a bit

familiar. Little wonder that he writes "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold."

Even as, DV, we emerge from the pandemic, there seems little time to rest and recover. The sounds of war continue to resonate in Europe – Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine has now been going for eight months, the January 6 Committee will continue to hold its searing hearings about the attack on the Capitol in Washington DC while the Big Lie continues to be perpetuated, energy prices are soaring and the cost of living increasing. On and on it goes. I confess to feeling from time to time that "the centre cannot hold."

It may be that the centre/s of Western life cannot hold. The modern world has brought many gifts that none of us would choose to be without. However, to a significant extent the modern West is built on human autonomy, and the catastrophes of the 20th century and, in academia, postmodernism were sure signs of its unravelling. Human autonomy, with religion and tradition erased or marginalised, was meant to provide a solid foundation on which to rebuild the West from the ground up. Trust in reason and science has produced remarkable goods but its

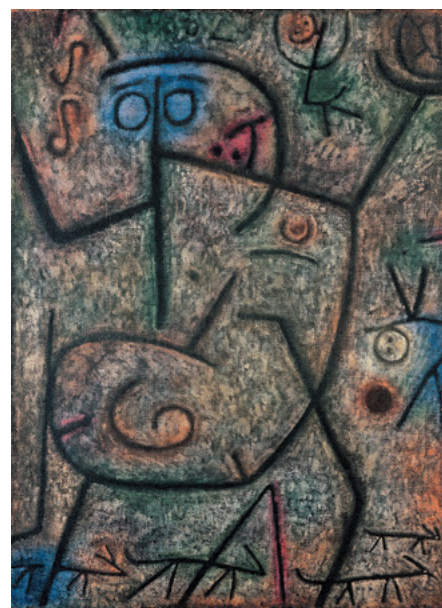
shadow side has grown. Postmodernism, with its important insights, taught us to question the very possibility of truth, and – certainly in retrospect – fake news and alternative facts were never far away, leaving us only with naked power.

Power without truth is exceedingly dangerous. *The Washington Post* reports that Donald Trump made 30,573 false or misleading claims over the four years of his presidency. Putin brazenly assured

everyone he would not invade Ukraine. As we witnessed on January 6, lies have a horrible habit of developing legs and running into history with catastrophic results. And we witness the enormous cost of Putin's duplicity on a daily basis.

The Ten Commandments have been evocatively described as the ethos of the good neighbourhood. The ninth commandment – you shall not bear false witness – is all about the importance of truth in such a neighbourhood. No society can remain healthy when truth is lost and we are left only with the will to power. It is particularly dangerous when superpowers succumb to this disease.

At its best, the Fourth Estate, namely journalism, provides a bulwark against the demise of truth. Social media bring many benefits but are in danger of subverting just the sort of investigative journalism we so need. Due to generous donors, KLC has been privileged to have Dr Jenny Taylor as our Research Fellow in Media, Journalism and Communication for several years. Few things would help our cultures at this time as a revival of healthy, investigative



Paul Klee, *Oh! These Rumours!*

journalism, journalism that we could trust to tell us the truth. I am very grateful to Jenny for curating the main articles on journalism in this edition of *The Big Picture*.

I find myself regularly impressed with just how powerfully the Bible speaks to our cultures today. Paul encourages us to speak the truth in love. Taken with the ninth commandment, we have the ingredients to revolutionise journalism and public life. Even as we work in this direction, we should not forget that this is the path of the cross.

Investigative journalists are regularly murdered in their quest for truth, and we have seen the price Liz Cheney has already had to pay for refusing to go along with the Big Lie. Nevertheless, even as we take up our crosses, let us be encouraged; truth will always have the final word.

As we go to press the sad news of the death of Queen Elizabeth II came through. In an age of self-centredness she stood out as someone resolutely committed to a life of public service undergirded by her Christian faith. The impact of her life on so many has been amply demonstrated by the hundreds

of thousands who queued in London for many hours in order to walk past her coffin. For the next edition of *TBP* we invite reflections on the life, faith and contribution of the Queen. She will be sorely missed. In relation to her Platinum Jubilee, I wrote about her dignity and humanity manifest in her video with Paddington Bear which is readily available online. It was moving to see how many Paddington Bears were left amidst the flowers around the gates of Buckingham Palace, to the point where the public had to be asked not to keep bringing them. The Yorkshire artist

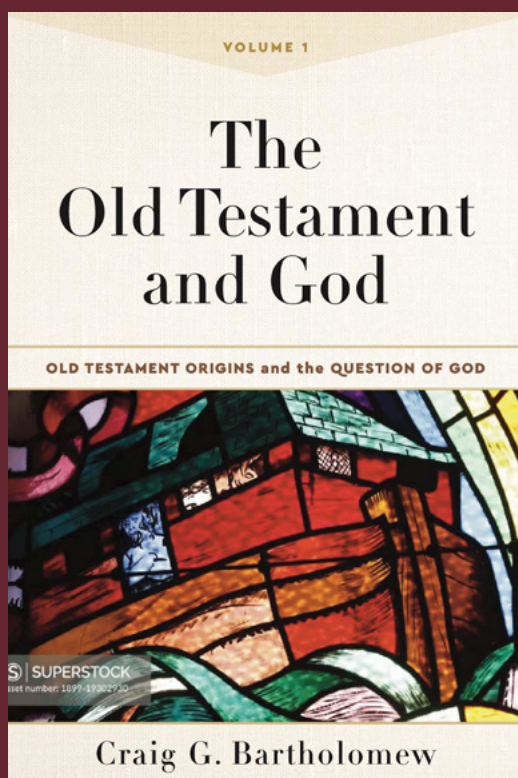
Eleanor Tomlinson has produced some delightful drawings of the Queen and Paddington Bear which can be ordered on Amazon.

In addition to reflections on the Queen the next edition of *TBP* will attend to the theme of *the nurture of nature*. During the pandemic many of us found nature a great comfort and we invite reflections on this. Additionally we are called to care for nature, and we welcome explorations of this theme as well.

Craig Bartholomew is the Director of the Kirby Laing Centre for Public Theology.



Green Park Floral Tributes



The Old Testament and God

OLD TESTAMENT ORIGINS AND THE QUESTION OF GOD, VOL. 1

by Craig G. Bartholomew

Craig Bartholomew's *The Old Testament and God* is the first volume in his ambitious four-volume project, which seeks to explore the question of God and what happens to Old Testament studies if we take God and his action in the world seriously. Toward this end, he proposes a post-critical paradigm shift that recentres study around God. The intent is to do for Old Testament studies what N. T. Wright's *Christian Origins and the Question of God* series has done for New Testament studies.

Craig Bartholomew brings his wide knowledge and insight to the question of God in the Old Testament. His training and sensibilities as both an Old Testament scholar and a philosopher are on full display here. This book, the first of four, is a big book in the best sense of the term. He considers the most important questions and utilizes the best approaches to our study of the Old Testament. In my opinion, Bartholomew sets the study of God in the Old Testament on its proper foundation.

- Tremper Longman III

Real News:

USE IT OR LOSE IT

GUEST EDITORIAL by JENNY TAYLOR

The British Library's important *Breaking the News* exhibition draws to a close this autumn. A good time then to ponder, with Paul Glader, in this *The Big Picture*'s journalism edition, the bleak story of a changing – many would say failing – news industry in the US: It's the same story in the UK where sales of local papers fell by roughly half between 2007 and 2017, with 6,000 newsroom jobs lost in twelve years. Pretty much everywhere in the Western world digital media are colonising the traditional income streams of the so-called “legacy press,” particularly the locals, either putting it financially out of business,¹ or rendering it irrelevant as readers go online. And where the press itself manages to adapt to the online world, reader experience becomes disembodied and disengaged. Anxieties surround the digital revolution much as they did when print supplanted scribal culture in the sixteenth century, and triggered thirty years of war.

Digital overload and trivialisation are certainly destroying our “palate” for news, especially local news. Now we can live everywhere at once, nowhere matters particularly. All boundaries blur, particularly the line between news and infotainment. Local news has traditionally fed and fed from, a sense of place. But our identities are no longer reinforced by local knowledge or local accountabilities. A recent Ofcom survey in the UK showed that 18–24-year-olds get their “news” from Instagram, or TikTok, or from their families.² At the same time as horizons have narrowed almost to vanishing point, they have paradoxically also gone global. “The sheer scale of these platforms – Instagram now has more than a billion users – means that there is a small



country's worth of accounts for every personal interest,” says the UK *Independent*.³

But you won't, as you might expect, find stories about bin collections or court cases. And this matters. Glader quotes Paul Starr in a 2009 essay, that journalism is “our eyes on the state.” Jackie Harrison, Professor of Public Communication at Sheffield University, UK, edited the British Library's *Breaking the News* exhibition catalogue, in which she writes of “the civil ideal of news.” It is significant “because it provides the civil sphere with a powerful symbol of itself – a symbol based upon two critical and related elements (a) trustworthiness and (b) liberal ideals,”⁴ she writes. Dame Frances Cairncross in her 2019 Review, *A Sustainable Future for Journalism*, lamented the “democratic deficit” caused by the loss of court and council reportage. Indeed, Facebook has taken over much of the funding for local reporter training in the UK, the US and around the world.⁵

Underlying the problem of press attrition are huge questions of truth and trustworthiness and four eminent journalist academics look at the problem for us from different perspectives. If truth is “what's true for you” – or “your truth” in Oprah Winfrey's immortal words – we have lost the big story by which little local stories are selected and told. It is impossible to say what matters or should matter, so how do editors operate? Instead, we get either a scatter-gun approach – too much at once – or else a stupefying “moral mania,” with one story flogged to death for weeks on end. Robin Aitken, a broadcaster who worked for many years for the BBC's current affairs flagship programme *Today*, until he was scandalously pensioned off for raising difficult questions about editorial bias, describes the loss of alternative narratives at the UK's public service broadcaster.⁶ Marvin Olasky in Washington points up the challenge for Christian reporters of maintaining a “biblical objectivity,” especially about scandals involving fellow evangelicals. And senior ethicist Dr Anna Abram, Principal of the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology in Cambridge, provides some clues as to how Christian journalists might “do truth” in the post-truth era. We hope you will be stimulated to value your news producers more, and pray into the growing gap.

Dr Jenny Taylor is a Research Fellow in Journalism, Media and Communication at the KLC. The Breaking the News cover image is used by kind permission of the British Library.

3. Young people now read the news on Instagram – and it's changing the way they see the world | *The Independent* Accessed 26/07/2022.

4. Jackie Harrison, *The Civil Power of the News* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 31.

5. *The Cairncross Review: A Sustainable Future for Journalism* (London: DCMS, 2019), 41.

6. See Aitken's *The Noble Liar: How and Why the BBC Distorts the News to Promote a Liberal Agenda* (London: Biteback, 2018).

1. Google and Facebook between them had captured 54% of UK online advertising revenue by 2017. <https://www.emarketer.com/Article/Digital-Duopoly-Remain-Dominant-UK-Ad-Race/1016481>. Accessed 27/07/2022.

2. “People get bored quickly”: how UK teens turned to social media for their news | Young people | *The Guardian*

CHRIS'S COLUMN: *Fathering Lies*

Boris Johnson's time in No. 10 Downing Street came to an ignominious end in July with his own party and many cabinet members no longer able to tolerate the repeated scandals in which transparency, truth and honesty were prime casualties. His successor, Liz Truss, has declined to say whether she will appoint a new ethics advisor to replace the two who resigned under Johnson, claiming, "I always act with integrity." Which one might faintly applaud with some mental reservation, "That's what they all say, including your predecessor." When our whole public and political culture is increasingly corroded by falsehood and corruption, we need more, not less, of the protection provided by independent scrutiny and accountability.

What does the Bible say about integrity (and the lack of) in public life and the plight of the poor?

O Lord, what is shocking is not the extinction of dinosaurs and other animals; it is the
disappearance of godly men
and women (v. 1).

That is the arresting opening line of Yohanna Katanacho's meditation on Psalm 12.¹ The psalm itself is equally

1. Yohanna Katanacho, *Praying Through the Psalms* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library,

emphatic in its opening complaint, and sweepingly hyperbolic in scale.

Help, LORD, for no one is faithful anymore;
those who are loyal have
vanished from the human race
(Ps 12:1 NIV).

We might detect an Elijah-complex here, when he thought he was the only faithful Israelite left on the planet and God had to correct his arithmetic with the knowledge of at least 7,000 others who had not succumbed to the ambient idolatry (1 Kgs 19:14, 18). Nevertheless, we resonate with the sentiment: we seem to be drowning in an ocean of untruth, struggling to find a single truth-telling life-saver in the world of public, and especially political, discourse.

For Elijah, the problem was people worshipping false gods. For David the problem was people embracing falsehood itself – which is much the same thing in effect. For as Paul points out in Romans 1, the original sin of humankind is idolatry, and the original trigger was when we chose to believe the serpent's lie. Lies are the devil's fingerprints from the dawn of history.

2018), 23. Dr Katanacho is a Palestinian Israeli Langham Scholar and the Academic Dean at Nazareth Evangelical College.

David lamented them in his little kingdom and we now discern them in global ugliness.

2 They utter lies to each other;
with flattering lips and
double heart they speak.

3 May the LORD cut off all flattering
lips,
the tongue that makes great
boasts,

4 those who say, "With our tongues
we will prevail;
our lips are our own – who is
our master?" (Ps 12:3–4
NRSV).

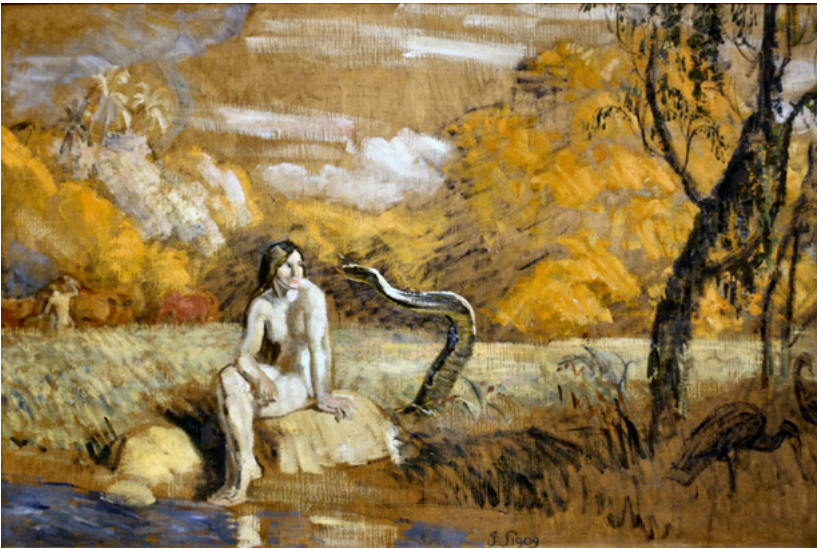
Derek Kidner, with his usual trenchant economy, captures the destructive nature of such ingrained habits of speech.

Empty talk, smooth talk and double talk are here [in v. 2], followed by the boasters, [in vv. 3–4] whose policy sums up that of their fellows: to manipulate the hearer rather than communicate with him. *Lies*, here, are more accurately "emptiness," a term which embraces falsehood but also its fringe of the insincere (Ps 4:16) and the irresponsible (Ex 20:7), which cheapen and corrode all human intercourse. *Flattering* talk is literally "smooth": all the deadlier for the pleasure it gives and the addiction it creates (Isa 30:10) ... A *double heart* ... significantly traces the double talk to its source in "double think" – for the deceiver becomes one of his own victims, with no truth to unite his character.²

2. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester: IVP, 1973), 75.



Elihu Vedder, *Prayer for Death in the Desert*



Joakim Skovgaard, *Eve and the Serpent*

Could one find a more depressingly accurate portrayal of the world of political speech, which, in recent years has become a relentless war on truth, along with narcissistic and idolatrous boasting and exaggeration? Even Kidner's last sentence stings with acute perceptiveness, for it does indeed appear that some of our political leaders are virtually compelled to believe the falsehoods that their incessant propaganda puts forth, even while knowing "inside" that they cannot be true, and having that pointed out repeatedly. Such intentional embrace of duplicity and dissimulation must wreak havoc with anyone's character. "With no truth to unite," what hope is there for any meaningful integrity? David realises this connection elsewhere: "I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name" (Ps 86:11 KJV). The determination and the prayer are integrally essential to each other.

Lies come in all sizes. On the one hand, we confront various incarnations of the Big Lie. Propagandists of all tyrannies have known that if you tell a big lie (the bigger the better) often enough and for long enough, people just come to believe it – and act upon it with devastating results, as the Second World War demonstrated.

It is astonishing to learn that around a third of US citizens believe the 2020 election was fraudulently stolen, no matter what the courts and all reputable observers have affirmed. And the divisive and corrupting effect of this big lie on American politics for years ahead is frightening. It is, I suppose, some relief to learn that Alex Jones, one of the most egregious peddlers of conspiracy theories, was fined massively for his cruel lies about the Sandy Hook massacre being a hoax. But the power and pervasiveness of such conspiracy theories, and the jaw-dropping propensity of so many people to assert them, and of social media to propagate them, is mind-boggling. The old adage that a lie can circle the globe while truth is getting its boots on has never been more apt. The devil capitalises on it.

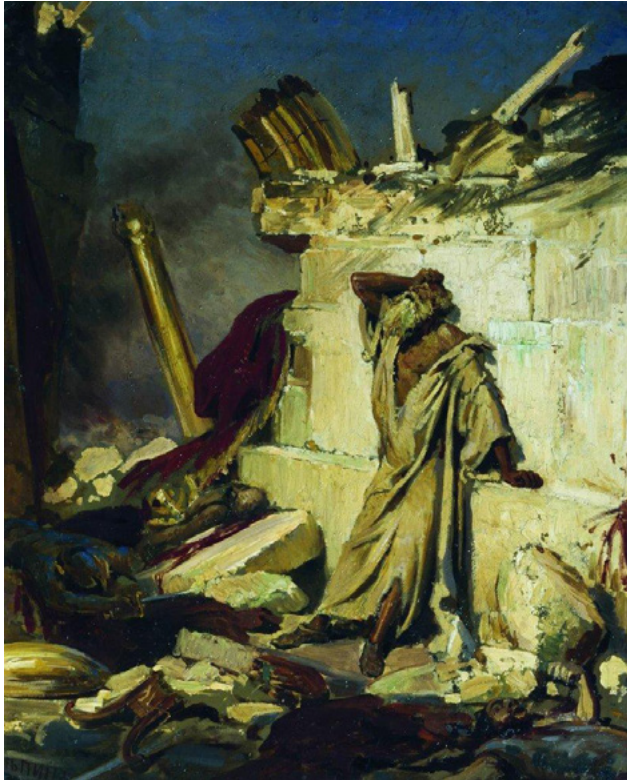
On the other hand, there is the corrosive cumulative effect of habitual smaller scale lying. At first we were shocked by the daily falsehoods and exaggerations from the mouth and tweets of Donald Trump, the "alternative facts" and "fake news." But by the time they were being recorded in tens of thousands, "post-truth" politics was being shrugged off

as numbingly normal. There is little doubt that the repeated falsehoods about the European Union that Boris Johnson concocted as a journalist over many years as a kind of trademark jocularly were one contributory factor to the mood that swung the Brexit referendum, while the Leave campaign itself included blatant lies that were exposed but never retracted. Johnson had been previously sacked twice for lying, but this proved no obstacle to a "successful" political rise (which says something very sad and sick about our politics). Indeed, the phrase used to justify his party's selection of him as leader and the country to elect him Prime Minister, was that this characteristic mendacity was knowingly "priced in" – a price worth paying to win an election, until it became a price too high, and his repeated evasions and excuses could no longer be tolerated even by those who elevated him.

Coming back to the Old Testament, it is striking how passionate the God of Israel is about truth and integrity in public life and how their



Giovanni Bellini, *Four Allegories: Falsehood (Wisdom)*



Ilya Repin, *Cry of the Prophet Jeremiah on the Ruins of Jerusalem*

opposites arouse his wrath. The ninth commandment prohibits not only lying in general, but specifically false testimony that corrupts judicial integrity (Ex 20:16). The severe penalty for perjury would have been a major deterrent (Deut 19:16–21). If only the aspirations of David in Psalm 101 had characterized the governments of Israel in the following centuries (if only they could be true of our own political leaders today ...). Sadly, the prophets witnessed a nation in which political lying was not only shamelessly practised, but shallowly popular. Isaiah saw a people who crooned to the prophets, “Do not prophesy of what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions” (Isa 30:10). Jeremiah complained not only about a whole culture of lying in public discourse (Jer 9:3–6), not only about a ruling class that had lost all shame and even the ability to blush (Jer 6:13–15), but tellingly about a populace that was content to be lied to: “The prophets prophesy lies ... *and my people love it this way*” (Jer 5:31; my italics) – a

diagnosis that might have been written for electoral politics in my own country today. The smirking photo-op soundbite that seems to say, “I know I’m lying, and you know I’m lying, and I know that you know I’m lying. But I don’t care, because you don’t either.” Collusion in deceiving – active and passive – betrays an advanced stage of terminal cultural decay.

Meanwhile, the poorest in society suffer for the idolatry, injustice, folly, and profiteering of the greedy and powerful. And sometimes, as Psalm 12 recognizes, there will be little or no help from human capacities. Only God can and must act, for which the psalmist bids us pray – especially as the cost-of-living crisis impacts swathes of the population and many of our Christian sisters and brothers. Arise, O Lord, as you promise.

“Because the poor are plundered and the needy groan,

I will now arise,” says the LORD.

“I will protect them from those who malign them.”

You, LORD, will keep the needy safe and will protect us forever from the wicked, who freely strut about when what is vile is honoured by the human race (Ps 12:5, 7–8 NIV).

Calvin reputedly said, “When God puts a nation under judgement, he gives them wicked rulers.”³ By that yardstick, the lessons of Old Testament Israel, where God’s judgement on his increasingly depraved people took the form of increasingly demented rulers leading the nation into a reality-denying downward vortex into exile, are playing out again in modern Western cultures where the symptoms of divine judgement portrayed in Romans 1:28–32 are all too evident.

The lesson of the Old Testament also, of course, is that beyond judgement lay redemptive hope – as we know it still does for our world too. But whether it will come in some longed-for return to truth and integrity in this earthly body politic, or only in the glorious new creation that will have no place for “all liars ... and everyone who loves and practises falsehood” (Rev 21:8, 22:15) – only God knows.

Rev Dr Chris Wright is Global Ambassador and Ministry Director of Langham Partnership (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.

3. So runs a popular meme. What he actually said, in his commentary on Romans 13:3, is: “a wicked ruler is the Lord’s scourge to punish the sins of his people”; and “they who rule unjustly and incompetently have been raised up by him to punish the wickedness of the people” (*Institutes*, IV.20.25).



The Judgement of Babylon from the Beatus Facundus

Wisdom Journalism Flourishes

WHILE OTHER JOURNALISM LANGUISHES

PAUL CLADER



Ultimately, quality news must help minimize our foolishness and maximize our wisdom.

NEW YORK – The news about the news industry, once again, rang grim this summer. The facts were clear and not heartening. And they pointed to a distinct set of problems.

Viewership on Cable TV channels plunged 19 percent in the first half of 2022 compared to 2021. Traffic on the top 12 most popular news apps was down 16 percent in the same time period. Engagement with news articles on social media also dropped 50 percent in the same time period according to a firm called NewsWhip.

Americans are increasingly sounding like the poet in Ecclesiastes when he says in chapter 1, verse 2,

“Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.” It could be that the book of Ecclesiastes is one we should return to when considering our news and information quandaries.

Other studies this summer of 2022 show citizens turning more nihilistic on the news, less

to local news. In late June, research showed that 360 more newspapers in America, almost all of them weeklies, closed shop since 2019. That’s on top of the 2,500 newspapers closed since 2004 in an earlier survey by Penelope

Muse Abernathy at Northwestern University. Vulture-investing hedge funds are buying up the carcasses of some newspaper chains. Newsroom employment has gone from 114,000 in 2008 to 85,000 in 2020 in the United States. And nearly 1,800 communities across America have no local news outlet, leaving them veritable news deserts.

BUSINESS JOURNALISM AS A REFUGE

Amid the carnage, it seems business journalism is a slightly safer place for reporters and publishers. The jobs tend to pay better, roughly \$66,204 in median salary per year for reporters, nearly \$100,000 for editors, according to the 2022 study from the Donald W. Reynolds National Center for Business Journalism, based in Phoenix. Circulation and revenue also seem more stable. Business readers often have corporate credit cards to expense subscriptions as they need accurate news and information to do their job.

Mitchell Stephens, a journalism professor at New York University, points to business journalism as a beginning of the news business in his book, *A History of News*. Humanity emerged from the oral storytelling tradition of Ancient Greeks, tribal societies and European town criers in coffee shops and public houses. Commerce became an early topic for written news. In the 16th century, Venetian merchants received written reports of the spice trade from India to Portugal. They also learned of movements of the Turkish



Jonathan Griffiths, *Trivial Pursuit* (Melancholia I)

interested and less engaged with news media products. Blame Covid-19 fatigue! Blame the war in Ukraine! Blame the increase in tribalism in America. Blame gender ideology that increasingly alienates conservative and religious audiences. Blame social media platforms that create an amalgam of “content” that often confuses, misinforms, addicts and wearies readers who slog through the endless stream of information.

The impact of this disinterest from American consumers seems to be most pronounced and dire when it comes



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Café in Davos*

fleet, which threatened their trade business. Early banking entities from Italy such as the House of Fugger used private written reports and correspondents to provide key information in finance and business as well as movements of the Spanish armada. News sheets emerged in continental Europe (present-day Germany) with Johannes Gutenberg's letterpress spawning printed products in religion, commerce and other topics.

Such innovation continues into the 21st century. While many local news outlets are collapsing, business journalism appears to be flourishing. Outlets such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Economist*, *Financial Times*, Bloomberg, CNBC and Forbes continue serving massive audiences in the millions and employing journalists by the thousands. Several new players have emerged including Quartz, Insider, Cheddar, The Information and Axios. The latter, started by founders of Politico and named after the Greek word for "worthy," launched their newsletter-driven platform with a dramatic manifesto on Medium in 2016:

All of us left cool, safe jobs to start a new company with this shared belief: Media is broken – and too often a scam. Stories are too long. Or too boring. Websites are a maddening mess. Readers and advertisers alike are too often afterthoughts. They get duped by headlines that don't deliver and distracted by pop-up nonsense or unworthy clicks. Many now make money selling fake headlines, fake controversies and even fake news.

WHAT AILS OTHER PARTS OF JOURNALISM?

Since Axios launched, the problems ailing the news industry have come into even sharper focus. Many news outlets, particularly in the United States, strayed from core principles of fairness, neutrality and fact-based rigour. Instead, some are lulled toward the principles of fundamentalist woke-ism: the notion that journalists should only report news that fits preconceived narratives on racial oppression, gender ideology and anti-capitalism.

In so doing, such outlets are aligning with identity politics or partisan politics and find themselves adrift from early American ideals of free speech, free press, religious freedom and overall pluralism.

President Donald Trump was a lightning rod who channelled some of these forces, speeding up the causes and effects. He attacked the news business and, at times, called it the "enemy of the people." Some of the mainstream media in turn dropped the gloves and called him a liar in their news pages. And some journalistic institutions on the

left are doing the same things they despise in journalistic institutions on the right such as Fox News and Breitbart.

A few lone voices in American journalism, such as publisher Walter Hussman at *The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, continue defending basic journalism principles such as labelling opinion and pursuing objective, fact-based reporting in the news pages. "Americans clearly see too much bias in reporting," Hussman said in an April speech at The King's College in NYC, where I chair the journalism programmes. "They also think inaccuracies are either intentional distortions or fabricating news."

Hussman champions good old-fashioned "objectivity" as one of the core values at his newspaper company, which he believes helps his staff report rigorously in the public interest and which helps his readers trust the newspaper. "It would seem tempting to write a story to convince others to our way of thinking.



Ethel Spowers, *Special Edition*

But that is the very reason reporters need to resist those normal human instincts in order to tell the story as straight as possible, to keep our emotions, prejudices, and politics out of covering the news. Those core values of journalism help us do just that," he said.

A RETURN TO CORE VALUES?

If a set of factors caused distrust in news – technology disruption, ideological agenda-driven journalism, and an abandonment of core principles – it would be logical to consider those problems while brainstorming solutions.

Already, across the US and world, a host of news media start-ups and associations such as Zenger News, SmartNews and LION Publishers and others are pursuing new approaches to provide quality news. Products such as OpenWeb and the Coral Project aim to improve the experience of comment boards. Companies such as Piano are helping news outlets launch paywalls and grow subscribers. A product I built called VettNews Cx, a division of Vett Inc., is helping news organizations improve their



Giovanni Boldini, *The Newspaper*

methods for receiving reader feedback and corrections requests.

Indeed, a good starting place for entrepreneurship is to champion some of the core values that caused newspapers to have high trust and impact in past decades. Paul Starr, a Pulitzer-Prize-winning sociologist at Princeton University, wrote about newspapers

in a 2009 essay in *The New Republic*, describing them as, “our eyes on the state, our check on private abuses, our civic alarm systems.”

One problem with Cable TV news in America is an incessant desire to ring the civic alarm system with “Breaking News” banners to the point that the term “Breaking News” becomes meaningless. CNN once used the “Breaking News” banner on a segment about the 102nd anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic. New leadership at CNN this year said they would scale back the use of such banners.

Ultimately, citizens will vote with their feet, their eyeballs

and their pocketbooks. Already, many are growing tired of the plethora of content across a range of social media apps and platforms. People, again, seem to echo the poet in Ecclesiastes in chapter 1, verses 8–11:

All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, “Look! This is something new.”?

Quality information in the future may involve more data, more numbers, more hard logic. It may involve a mix of robots and algorithms working alongside humans to surface rigorous information while telling compelling stories. Ultimately, quality news must help minimize our foolishness and maximize our wisdom.

As we ponder a future for news media in the 21st century, perhaps we should think more about the poet’s words from Ecclesiastes on the role of knowledge and wisdom. In chapter 8, verse 8, he asks, “Who is like the wise? Who knows the explanation of things?”

Paul Glader chairs the Journalism, Culture and Society programme at The King’s College in NYC. He is also executive director of the international nonprofit organisation, The Media Project, and its award-winning, nonprofit news outlet, ReligionUnplugged.com.

Instrument

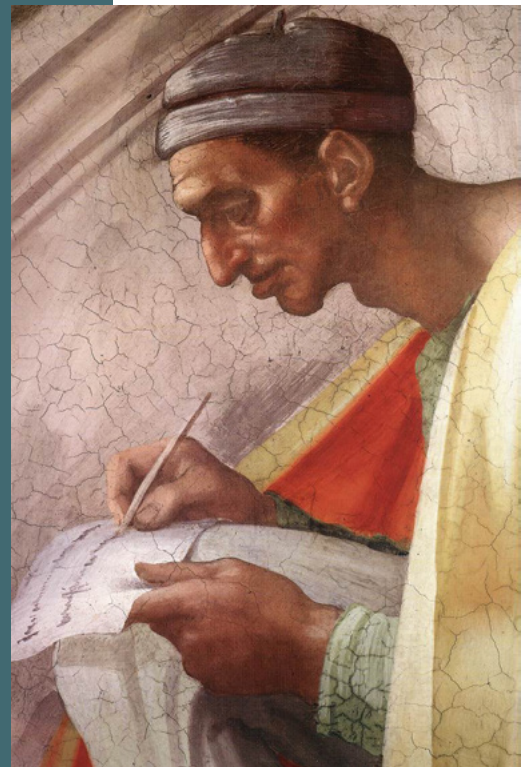
RYANNE MCLAREN MOLINARI

Do you look upon me as an unused pen
Or an instrument prepared and poised to write
The words and works that speak of such a life
Made pleasing and productive in your sight?

Or am I still a stone that holds within
The unspilled waters of the unstruck spring,
The unloosed letters of the stopped-up ink:
A well-filled well that hoards its saving drink?

Make me with each line ready to again
Pour forth upon the page before me set
The blood which you yourself lovingly let,
And to birth words as you, the Word, beget.

Pray, do not leave me an unquickened quill
But, by your hand, wield me to write your will.



Michelangelo, *Asa* (detail from the Sistine Chapel)

More about Ryanne: See ABookishCharm.co

Constructing the News:

HOW BIAS IS BUILT IN

ROBIN AITKEN



When I was young, before I became a journalist, I had a very naïve understanding of news, what it is and how it is created. It seemed to me then that “the news” was something ordained from on high; immutable, obvious and universal.

I believed that the day’s headlines were akin to holy writ – they were handed down to the audience, and could not be challenged because they reflected an underlying reality. They were like the laws of physics, or the rules of mathematics; the news of the day seemed to me solid, dependable and unchallengeable.

I was, of course, completely wrong. As I came to understand, “news” is a construct; it is always open to challenge, it is always contentious, and it is always contested. My youthful misconception owed much to my very restricted intake: at home my parents generally watched or listened to the BBC; the newspaper my father favoured was the *Daily Telegraph* and, to me, this seemed the natural order. I was blissfully unaware that there were other news organisations that followed very different agendas, and I was largely incurious about the disparities. It was only when I started learning my trade that I came better to understand the real nature of news and what it is that journalists actually do – which is to “create” news rather than merely observe and report it.

Once this fundamental point is understood the world becomes, paradoxically, both easier to make sense of but more complex and less straightforward. As soon as you realise not only that *The Guardian* and the *Telegraph* inhabit different “news worlds,” but that every news organisation follows its own agenda, you are on the road to personal enlightenment. For many this is a daunting prospect: most people, busy with their own lives and personal concerns, do not have the time or inclination to parse the news. But if you really want to know what’s going on you must try to unpick every carefully constructed narrative to find the underlying reasons for what is being reported. Because there’s always a reason and there is always a political agenda that lies, often heavily disguised, behind the headlines.

Some years ago, when one of my daughters was doing her

English “A” level, I was invited by her teacher to give a talk about news and journalism. At the time I was working as a reporter on the *Today* programme,¹ and I set them a task which I hoped would give them some insight

into the news business. I had collected, on a particular day, wire copy on a wide selection of stories both national and international. I selected stories on many different topics – politics, the environment, human interest, showbiz, etc.; everything under the sun, in fact. I then distributed details of all these stories, in *precis* form, to each girl and asked them to imagine themselves as the editor of the *Ten O’Clock News*² and to draw up a running order.



Sigrid Hjertén, *Homework*

The result was illuminating. There was no clear majority view about which was the most important story, and no two girls had the exact same running order. Then I revealed the actual *Ten O’Clock News* running order from the day in question: none of the girls had put the stories in the same order as had actually appeared. All of which I hoped would go to show that our own view of what is important is a highly subjective thing. In that classroom exercise I was dealing with a group of intelligent sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds. At that age, most young people have a relatively unsophisticated understanding of journalism and the wider

1. Flagship current affairs programme on BBC Radio 4. Required listening by government ministers et al.

2. Evening TV news slot on BBC 1.

world, and most will not have a clear and fixed political stance. Their selections were driven by their own, unalloyed, priorities probably guided by emotion and their own ethical sense.

I have never repeated the exercise but, supposing I could gather together that same



Francis Luis Mora, *Subway Riders in NYC*

group of now adult women and ask them to do it all over again, my guess is that the result would be very different. I suspect that, in the intervening twenty years, they would have “learned” what news to think of as important. I suspect the result today would show much more uniformity of selection – and that itself is a reflection of how our exposure to the “news agenda” as constructed by professional journalists “educates” us about what is important and what is not. And there are many important lessons to be drawn from this simple exercise, not least about how an entire society can be groomed by the mainstream media into re-ordering its priorities.

I should enter a proviso at this point: occasionally, news events really do dictate the headlines in a way that it is difficult to disagree with; 9/11 would be a classic example.



Niklaus Manuel Güdel, *9/11*

No Western journalist, on that fateful day, was ever going to give anything but top billing to the destruction of the Twin Towers. But that was the exception; most days are not like that; most days the men and women in the newsroom are confronted by a cascade of information which can touch on every kind of human activity; love, war, business, religion, sport, etc., – there will be stories about all these things and many others besides. It is the job of professional journalists to “curate” this avalanche into digestible form for the audience. And this is where the fix goes in.

Take the BBC – the news organisation I know best – as an example. It bills itself as “the world’s most trusted broadcaster” and promises its audience news “which is impartial, balanced, fair and honest.” However, what is striking about the BBC’s news coverage is how scrupulously selective it is; when you examine its output in detail (something I have done over many years) it becomes very clear that the BBC has a well-defined news agenda from which many voices and many viewpoints are wholly excluded. As a result the BBC has become one of the primary carriers of a political ideology which styles itself as liberal and tolerant but which is, in reality, neither of those things.

The mechanics of the thing are easy to explain; on any given day, in any given BBC newsroom, the journalists will be picking up a pre-existing news agenda; that is to say, there will be “meta-narratives” – overarching stories which might have been running for days, weeks, months or years. So the journalists are not facing a *tabula rasa*; rather they are picking up from where the previous day’s news left off. Once stories become established in this way, they can run on almost indefinitely – sometimes to the infinite boredom and irritation of the audience! The key question is why some stories achieve this prominence and longevity whilst others don’t figure at all.

All journalism is a matter, finally, of selection. This starts at editor level; the editor decides which story he/she wants to cover and then, further down the food chain, news editors and reporters will decide how to fulfil the editors’ wishes. At each stage of this process there will be crucial selections to be made. Which interviews do we need? Which part of which interviews will we use? And what “line” are we taking; whose side are we on? Set out in this way it becomes clear just how carefully “constructed” news is.

A news bulletin is not a random thing; it is deliberated and carefully fashioned and it will faithfully reflect the passions and prejudices of the journalists who make it. Which is why, in this context, “impartiality” is such a bogus concept;

in a BBC bulletin there will certainly be some effort made to adhere to the creed of “balance.” This will mean that, almost always, there will be one speaker for and one against and this is seen as fulfilling the duty to be “fair.” But those subjects *not* chosen for inclusion, those voices *not* given a platform – these are things which cannot be “balanced” as they have already been excluded. Stories which achieve prominence are ones which accord with the BBC’s own internal political culture; a culture which is liberal, secular and driven by the fashionable concerns of its staff.



Pascal Fiechter, *Arch Balance*

As an example, take abortion. The BBC’s approach to this issue has been dictated by doctrinaire social liberalism; it always reports, in tones tinged with disapproval, any attempts to restrict or limit access to abortion anywhere in the world. In doing so it has nailed its colours to the mast and any protestations that the BBC is “impartial” in the matter should be treated with disdain; it is not impartial but, rather, a campaigning partisan with massive clout and influence.

There is, though, a problem with alleging “bias” against the BBC – or any other news organisation for that matter. The rejoinder to anyone who makes the allegation is “well that’s just your opinion” – and it’s true: “bias” is very much in the eye of the beholder, it is a subjective thing. It is very difficult to amass objective data on the subject because the only way of doing so is to monitor (i.e., listen, read or watch) a media organisation’s output over a sustained period and then, using objective criteria, analyse it. This is time-consuming and expensive so is rarely done. However, the BBC’s output on one subject – Brexit – has been subject to exactly this type of scrutiny.

A group of rich, highly motivated supporters of Brexit, fed up with what they perceived as BBC bias against them, commissioned a monitoring exercise which has now been

running for nearly twenty years. This subjected BBC output on the European issue, at key times during the debate, to minute scrutiny; typically this was done in the run-up to a general election or elections to the European Parliament. The results were both revealing, and for the BBC, highly embarrassing. The monitoring demonstrated a clear and consistent bias, over many years, towards the pro-EU position and against the Eurosceptics. There are now reams of statistics on this subject³ but one will perhaps suffice to show the strength of the bias; in the decade between 2005 and 2015, of 4,275 guests invited on to a selection of important BBC news programmes to talk about the EU, only 132 (that’s 3.1%) supported leaving the union. Statistics like this are hard to argue with: they are not “subjective” but hard evidence of partisanship.



Pascal Fiechter, *Pure Balance*

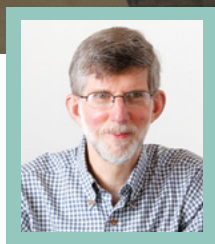
The mainstream electronic media – basically TV and radio – presents itself as a neutral facilitator of democratic debate but the more closely you look the less convincing that claim becomes. Our media is no mere conduit; it is, in truth, a powerful and opinionated participant. Though I have written here about the BBC, what I say applies equally to all the other mainstream British media outlets like Channel 4 or ITV; they all broadly subscribe to the same values. Under the Broadcasting Acts, the broadcasters are supposed to be politically neutral; for anyone who wants to see the country return to traditional, Christian moral values it is essential to understand that they are not. Social conservatives must know their enemy if they are to stand any chance of turning the tide.

Robin Aitken trained on newspapers and then worked as a BBC reporter for 25 years including as an editor on the BBC Radio 4’s flagship current affairs programme Today; he now works freelance. He has written a number of books about media bias, the most recent being The Noble Liar: How and Why the BBC Distorts the News to Promote a Liberal Agenda (Biteback, 2018). He was made an MBE in 2014 for charitable work.

3. <https://news-watch.co.uk>

Journalism is Not PUBLIC RELATIONS

MARVIN OLASKY



Thirty-five years ago I wrote about left-leaning newspapers and magazines downplaying religious news. I called that trend “spiking the spiritual,” after the metal spike that copy editors used to impale their rejected articles on. Now that evangelicalism and right-wing politics are fraternal twins, it’s time to examine conservative tendencies to “spike the controversial,” when it reflects poorly on “our side.”

Let me explain.



The Storyteller, International Storytelling Center, Jonesborough

Some background: In the late 1960s and early 1970s I worked on the *Yale Daily News*, *The Bulletin* (Bend, Oregon) and *The Boston Globe*, and picked up a PhD in American Studies. Those institutions at that time valued the intellectually-independent pursuit of truth. Then for five years I wrote

speeches for top executives at the DuPont Company, where a strict hierarchy prevailed, and all written materials had to cleave to the corporate line.

Du Pont was generous to me, but I preferred institutions that allowed more freedom of expression. In 1983 I became a professor at the University of Texas at Austin, and wrote there an academic book on the history of public relations, as well as books on the history of journalism. Until 2008 I taught journalism and history to students but also passed

on some practical advice born of my experience: Live below your salary so you are free to resign if your employer tells you to do something that violates your conscience.

In the early 1990s I also began to edit *World*, a fledgling news magazine with big ambitions and a small subscriber base. After my DuPont experience I was particularly concerned that *World* emphasize truthful reporting and avoid public relations. That was challenging, because the magazine derived a good chunk of advertising revenue from Christian publishers and colleges. We were evangelical but didn’t want to be part of the “religious right.”

In those days we investigated evangelical powers and lost their advertising. We ran critical stories about evangelical leaders like Ralph Reed who was involved in a gambling scandal, and criticized politicians on the right and left. We embraced our independence. We shunned entangling alliances.

I said the Bible should be our plumb line but not a Ouija board nor a device to trot out when useful to affirm our prejudices. With a little knowledge of whitewater rapids, I used the rapids-rating scale (class one, gently down the stream; to class six, a likely-to-be-fatal waterfall) as a clear metaphor for a Christian reporter’s analytical task: On class one issues the Bible is clear, by class six we’re on our own – and probably the best we can do is to balance subjectivities.

For example, *World* was unapologetically pro-life because the Bible portrays God as the author of life and shows the child in the womb to be part of the human family. But *World* often treated particular policy proposals as classes four or five: How did history or a sense of human nature affect what was wise in a particular case? My goal was to avoid partisanship and treat everyone as an image bearer of God, even when – especially when – I disagreed with them.

In 1999 we created a World Journalism Institute to train potential reporters in this philosophy that I called “biblical objectivity,” an attempt to emphasize the facts of God’s

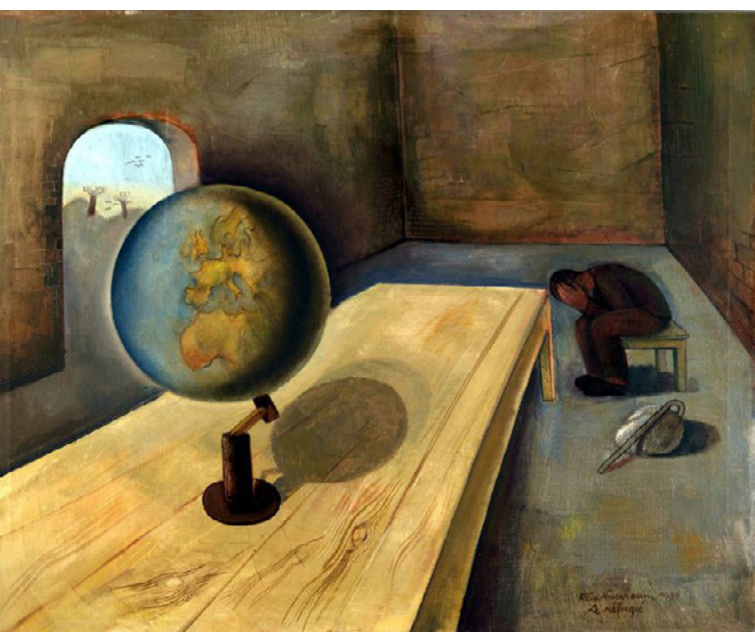


William McElcheran, *The Conversation* (detail), Calgary, Alberta

world, and not a vehicle for personal opinion. Some of our memes were: “Street-level, not suite-level, reporting.” “Sensational facts, understated prose.” “The heavens declare the glory of God, the streets proclaim the sinfulness of man.” Methodology was also important: Reporters learned that all investigative stories had to go through layers of editing and fact checking. Underlying all our stories was this commitment: “We don’t do public relations.”

That commitment continued through my 27 years as editor in chief, during which we ran two hundred or so investigative stories, including dozens critical of evangelical powerhouses. Even *The New York Times* recognized how unusual this was: A *Times* article in 2014 stated, “Evangelical Protestant journalism is generally more public relations than reporting; *World* stands out as an exception.”

Another unusual aspect of *World* was reporting based in the clear biblical teaching that God cares about the “uns,”



Felix Nussbaum, *The Refugee*

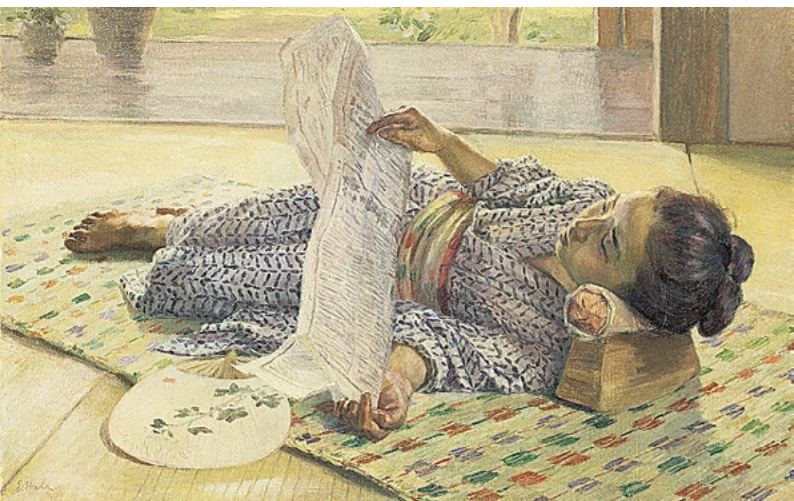
those who lack power. This includes the un-born but also those un-employed or un-educated, as factories closed down and schools became more like day care centres or prisons. It includes those “un-settled,” to use a word once used more in geography than psychology. Today in America that encompasses the domestic homeless, and also immigrants stuck at the US-Mexico border.

World reporters covered the “uns” without worrying whether this focus hurt Republican politicians. But some members of *World*’s board of directors did worry. That concern grew in 2016 when I believed *World* should treat the immoral history and talk of Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump as we had treated Democratic president Bill Clinton in 1998, after his sexual activity with intern Monica Lewinsky. Since a *World* cover story then had declared Clinton unfit to be president, I felt bound to do the same regarding Trump, and all our senior editors and reporters agreed.

The board and more than one thousand *World* readers vociferously disagreed, but our editorial processes did not change during the next four years. In 2020 a *World* correspondent who was also an MD wrote articles citing the medical evidence that supported vaccines and mask wearing. *World* continued to bring out the human stories of homeless Americans and would-be immigrants. *World* reported the unethical behaviour of a Republican Congressional candidate, Madison Cawthorn. Those stories engendered some criticism from the business side and the board of directors.

Early in 2021 *World* examined the evidence for Trump’s “stolen election” charge and concluded it didn’t hold up. A *World* cover story on “The Insurrectionist Heresy” dealt critically with the January 2021 invasion of the US Capitol, which Trump encouraged and then defended. Suddenly *World*’s journalistic model was under threat, not from outside organizations that disliked our coverage, but from inside, as *World*’s business leaders wanted us to prioritize opining over reporting.

The basic divide within the organization was on three issues. One was: With what size should we be content? *World* was doing well financially as an \$11 million organization, but what if it could become a \$100 million power? The second, partly connected to the first, was public relations vs. journalism: Should *World* become a conservative movement publication affirming the biases of most readers, or should it aspire to publish articles that challenged right-wing assumptions?



Wada Eisaku, *Girl Reading a Newspaper*

The third, partly connected to the first two, was audience. For years I had wanted *World* to seek new readers among seminary students and racial/ethnic minorities. But *World's* CEO responded to one of our Asian-American reporters hoping for the latter, "Our mostly white, mostly conservative audience is what God has given us. I am burdened to care for that audience properly." Perhaps others would come, someday.

I'll refrain here from a blow-by-blow description of what happened next. (Those interested can read about it in articles by *New York Times* and Religion News Service reporters.) Here's the upshot: The business side, without informing anyone on the editorial side, created and heavily funded a new division, World Opinions, that aligned *World* with the partisan right. To make sure the message carried

through to all editorial products, board leaders told me the CEO was *World's* "general" or "quarterback," charged to lead, execute and enforce this new vision. The board chairman said my mission was to "sell it to your team." When



Reginald Gray, *Group with Newspaper*

I couldn't in good conscience do that, I became "insubordinate."

The changes alarmed *World's* editorial staff. Three senior editors and reporters quickly resigned. Then I resigned, while making it clear that the remaining three senior staffers should decide for themselves what to do. They too resigned.

By July 2022 *World* executives were still giving lip service to biblical objectivity, but in practice the news organization has become Social Conservative World, focusing its reporting and opinions on a few non-controversial topics among evangelicals: LGBT issues, abortion, and religious liberty. Conveniently, those are topics where "the enemy" is out there. As to the problems within evangelicalism, including the growth of white Christian nationalism: mum's the word. Regarding immigration, scandal-plagued Republican candidates, or facts discomfiting to conservatives: zip lips.

My background made me conscious of the divide between public relations and journalism, between a command/control organization and entrepreneurial reporting, between partisanship and truth telling. I don't know whether biblical objectivity will be possible within the new *World* order. I hope others will pursue it.

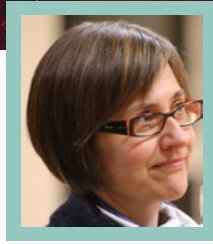
Dr Marvin Olasky, a senior fellow of the Discovery Institute, now writes a weekly column for Fix Homelessness and a monthly OlaskyBooks newsletter. For more about biblical objectivity, see Olasky's Reforming Journalism (2019). For a discussion about ethics in religion journalism: Ken Waters, "Competing Moral Visions: Ethics and the Stealth Bible," in Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 2001, Vol. 16:1, 48-61. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327728JMME1601_5.



John Stanton Ward, *The Newspaper Boys*

TRUTH MATTERS

ANNA ABRAM



TRUTH

We are familiar with the question “What is truth?” asked by Pilate during Jesus’ trial. This question is also key to the Socratic method of engagement with ideas. When philosophers speak of truth they see it as a variety of things including knowledge or self-knowledge or the knowledge of facts, or as logical, systematic, moral, semantic, scientific truth, or truth of being (ontological truth), or as acts of speech corresponding to realities, or the virtue of truthfulness.



Nikolai Ge, *What is truth? Christ before Pilate*

Without a doubt, truth is one of the hardest ideas to define, harder than peace or justice. Its genealogy is difficult to trace. For example, philosophers Bernard Williams in his *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton and Oxford:

Princeton University Press, 2003) and Wolfgang Künnle in his *Conceptions of Truth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003) offer different accounts of how our thinking about truth has evolved. Still, neither Williams nor Künnle answers the question of what truth is. Williams believes in the idea of everyday truth. His concept of truth is “everyone’s concept of truth.” He encourages his readers to recognise that truthfulness is necessary for successful human interactions. For him, human beings cannot live without truth because truthfulness together with trust are cornerstones of cooperation and living together. Even in a basic society “sharing a common language, with no elaborate technology and no form of writing” there are some recognisable truths such as “Watch out! Here comes a bear” (Williams, 41).

According to Williams, there are two virtues of truthfulness: accuracy and sincerity. Accuracy has something to do with investigation and deliberation before assenting to a belief; sincerity is about being genuine in expressing to others what one in fact believes. Williams says that “in relying on what someone said, one inevitably relies on more than what he said” (Williams, 100). Sincerity is closely connected with authenticity which is about beliefs that one is committed to “holding true in the context of his deliberation” (Williams, 196). Williams believes that if we lose truth, we lose everything. For him, valuing the truth requires “training.” He doesn’t tell us what kind of “training” he has in mind. However, his description of the value of truth gives us some hints of what it might involve. For him, activities associated with truth are: finding out about the truth, holding on to it, and telling it – particularly to oneself.

Thomas Aquinas has a lot to say about these activities. Aquinas believes that human beings can find out true propositions (basic truths) thanks to our natural disposition or a gift of reason. Natural disposition requires practice and learning so that we can distinguish between truth and falsehood. Aquinas recognises that falsehoods (lies or in today’s language “fake news” or mis-/disinformation) are tricky as they have appearances of truth; therefore it is not always easy to separate what is true and what is false,

Henry Ossawa Tanner, *Nicodemus coming to Christ*



especially if untruths are used for the “good cause.”

JUST LIE

Is it right to tell a lie for a good cause? Maureen Ramsay in her co-authored book, *The Politics of Lying: Implications for Democracy* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000) suggests that at times when national security is concerned lies and deceit are permissible. She recognises that there are legitimate and illegitimate uses of a falsehood in the same way that there are legitimate and illegitimate uses of force when it comes to conflicts between nations. She uses the just war criteria to examine the ethics of lying. On the first criterion of just cause, the justice of a lie would depend on the cause for which it is undertaken. One would need to know whether there were other means available to achieve the just end; whether the harm caused by the lie is outweighed by the good achieved; and whether there is a reasonable chance of success in achieving the end through these means. Moreover, the means would have to be justified, not only because politicians would be acting in our name and in our interests, but because the public would have to consent to the deception in advance, in order to comply with democratic principles.

Journalists who follow courses on ethics as part of their training are probably familiar with the “just lie” theory. One of the problems with this theory is the potential legitimisation of the culture of deception. We see the consequences of this in contemporary Russia, especially with regards to the invasion of Ukraine. Ramsay herself acknowledges that “even if secrecy and deception could be justified to protect a vital interest, the costs in terms of the toll they take on democratic principles alone could be said to outweigh their benefits” (Ramsay, 35). Deception and lies are not only problematic because of their detrimental impact on democracy, they affect relationships and personal communication. Aquinas again has something to say about this.

TRUTHFULNESS AS A VIRTUE

In article 1 of the 109th Question in *Summa Theologiae* (London, New York: New Blackfriars, 1963), Aquinas speaks of truth as a virtue; he is concerned with a moral skill or a habit by which a person makes speech truthful. Making speech truthful is at the heart of Aquinas's understanding of the purpose of communication. He believes that without the communication of truths there can be no society at all,

there would be no shared plans, no common way of acting, no mutual pursuit of goods. In the absence of a willingness to communicate truths honestly and accurately, or in the absence of trust that others will participate in the ordered communication of truths, there can be no stable society.

It is worth noting that Aquinas's virtue of truth is connected to the virtue of justice. Aquinas also speaks about “communication of oneself,” “that truth [pertains to this virtue] whereby a man, both in life and in speech, shows himself to be such as he is, and the things that concern him, not other, and neither greater nor less, than they are” (*ST* II-II, q. 109, a. 3, ad. 3).

There are many similarities between Aquinas's and Williams' approaches to truth. Both emphasise truthfulness



Hans Thoma, *Christ and the Samaritan Woman*

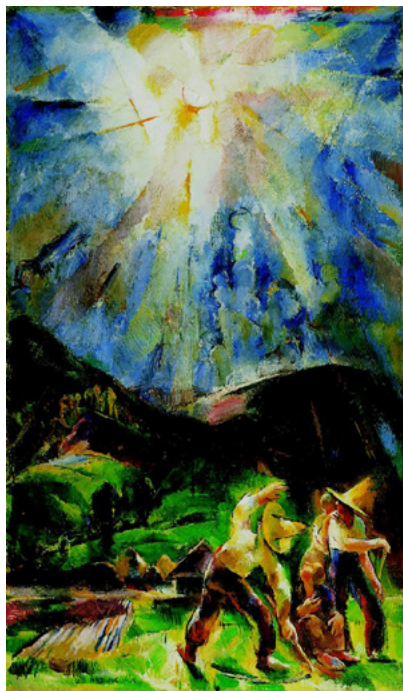
and trust as conditions of living in society. They see sincerity (Williams) or simplicity rather than duplicity (Aquinas) as necessary for truthful communication of the “self.” In other words, truthfulness is essential for social well-being, and this is provided by people whose words align with their beliefs rather than “showing one thing outwardly while having another in the heart.” To put it simply, telling lies, promoting falsehoods and living a lie are neither good for the individual nor the society.

CONCLUSION

It is not surprising that in a culture that does not value accuracy and does not consider duplicity as a problem, fake news thrives. Neither Williams' nor Aquinas's notion of genuine communication belong to the contemporary paradigm of misinformation or manipulation of truth. These thinkers provide us with a warning that if such a paradigm

is predominant, goods of society are hard to preserve. Social relations are bound to be damaged. How to find oneself in the environment in which truth is not valued or is dismissed as a category?

Pope Francis in his message titled "The Truth will set you free (John 8:32): Fake News and Journalism for Peace" (24 January 2018, Communication Sunday) suggests that the antidote to the "virus of falsehood" is "purification by the truth." He says "we need to discern everything that encourages communion and promotes goodness from whatever instead tends to isolate, divide, and oppose." So, building bridges, resisting division and opposing fragmentation seem to be key conditions for dealing with falsehoods. For Francis, journalists have a unique mission in this project.



Vilmos Aba-Novák, *Light*

The current war in Ukraine brings to light the consequences of taking this mission seriously as we witness the sacrifices of many journalists for the sake of truth. The same war also shows the damage done by the culture of fake news and manipulation of truth. We must not underestimate the power of propaganda. There is no easy way of protecting ourselves from false ideology and knowing that we are living in truth. For Christians, the clue is the person of Jesus Christ, his life, character, death, salvific action on behalf of all, and resurrection. For journalists and their readers and listeners, Christian or not, the desire not to be fooled is still strongly present. Truth still does matter.

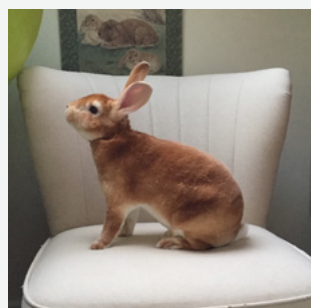
Dr Anna Abram is Principal of the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, Cambridge, UK. Her academic field is Christian ethics.

Below, Anna shares an update on her inspiring companion, Beau, who hopped into our hearts when he was introduced to us in Issue 2 of TBP. Anna's photographs of Beau appeared in the 22 July 2022 MBIT newsletter and are used here with her kind permission.

BEAU: SHEDDING THE OLD COAT

As I write this note, Beau is going through a rather heavy spell of moulting. Shedding an old coat is uncomfortable. It makes him look more like a hedgehog than a rabbit. He is

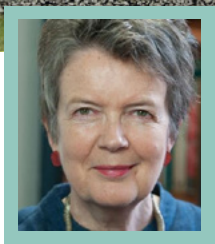
a bit moody though still lovely and a source of wise insight. I am struck how, despite the discomfort and a frequent desire to clean himself and escape from me whenever I try to intervene with a hairbrush, ultimately he collaborates with nature. In his rabbitry way somehow he knows that coats and seasons have to fit together. Greeting a new season in the old coat doesn't make sense in the way that putting new wine into the old wineskins doesn't work (Mark 2:22). I wonder what "old coat" I should shed so that I am better prepared for the new season?



From top left, clockwise: *Aim High, Pray, Find Time to Stay Still and Contemplate, Be Curious, Stretch and Relax.*

URBS IN RURB

JENNY TAYLOR



I wrote what follows for my own amusement, then I read the following passage, which perfectly illustrates a chapter on historicism, in Oliver O'Donovan's *Resurrection and Moral Order*, and realized how prophetic it was:

The burden of proof has shifted, so that it has to be borne by those who would let alone rather than those who would intervene; and they have to discharge their burden by arguing, in quite alien terms, that letting alone would be the most effective *form* of intervention in this case. To see how letting alone can also be a form of intervention, consider the phenomenon of the "wilderness park," well known on continents that have seen a rapid expansion of human civilization in the last century. An area of previously unbroken wilderness is marked out on a map; a fence is built round it, a gate gives access to it, and a road, with car-parking facilities, brings traffic to the gate. Inside it, professional gamekeepers "manage" the stocks of wildlife and ensure the maintenance of a properly balanced wilderness ecology. Thus even wilderness becomes hominized. True, the bush is still as thick, and the bears are still as wild as ever they were before; but the thickness and the wildness now no longer confront

mankind as an independent good. They flourish as man's work of art, existing only to serve that route of cultural fulfilment that he has mapped out for himself.¹

Each time I walk the path, it's different. More public. Less mysterious. Animals slip away for good when too many

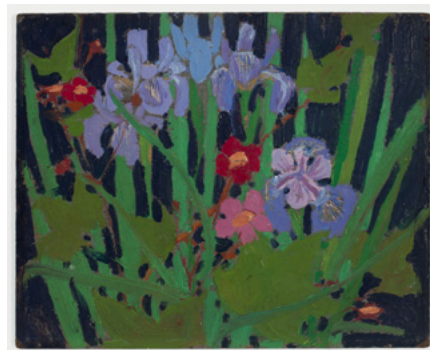
people come. You sense their absence though you have no data. And that affects what grows there too, of course. Though I am no botanist, I am aware things are changing. I was born here 65 years ago and I have come home from the city, perhaps a tad overwrought, full of longing. As I try to walk my past back into the present, along ways once so hidden, I know something has gone for good.

Down into the marsh I go, over the clumpy fallow soil of the smallholding Dad worked since the mid-1950s, through the gap in the trees and over the place where fifty years ago he had had to dump his unsold tomatoes. Tons of them, grown for Covent Garden Market, a market that was destroyed by EEC-subsidised imports. Follow the muntjac tracks through the sedge grass under the bat willow, I tell myself, noticing how dry it is underfoot this year. There has been no rain for months. Then on to the duck board which is springy with such over-use that the struts have started to shift. It was not there when we grew up. An EU agricultural "land management" grant paid for it together with signposts no-one had ever needed before. But now the path is on the web, and cyclists from anywhere in the world can use it, and unsurprisingly to all but the towny-bureaucrats, it has worn badly.

I cross the small stream where the flag iris are just beginning to bloom again. I saw a heron here once, lifting itself majestically on great grey wings and flapping away as if in slow motion. A stile here has long since rotted and gone: the little arched brick bridge long since collapsed. It was replaced prosaically years ago by sacks of cement that solidified with the rain. Its back was broken again latterly by machines brought in to harvest the willow that will be used for cricket bats. Such are globalised economics that it is cheaper to



Reed beds in East Suffolk



Tom Thomson, *Wild Flowers*

1. Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 68–69.

send the vast tree trunks to India for seasoning.

I turn when I hear two walkers behind me, talking in loud voices. Very overweight, she in tight-fitting lycra shorts, he in loose-fitting shirt and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* bush hat, with a small dog on a lead, though there are no sheep for miles around. They are clearly strangers here.

I keep on irritably now, up through the meadow towards the dewpond, the rosebay willowherb and meadowsweet thrusting up their green fronds, not in flower yet, but promising their summer scent of honey. The dead elm still stands, branches stripped and bleached in the white rictus of a lightning strike against the greying sky. My brother and I long ago witnessed by moonlight a barn owl emerge from its nest there.



The clanging gate

I glance behind me. The strangers are still coming noisily as I open the first gate then the second, taking care not to let them clang behind me. I wonder whether city people cannot “hear” the silence of this wild place, so attuned are they to competing with the noise of traffic. I accelerate up the hill past the pheasantry. They are through the gate now. It clangs, inevitably, startling some red-legged partridge that whirr away out of sight. Oh how selfish I am, wanting it all to myself again, as I used to, half a century and more ago, when it all belonged to those who lived here, farming and living off the land as we had done for centuries when the path was not there for pleasure-seekers, but linked two villages, two churches, one eternal-seeming way of life.

Far across the greening fields of potatoes and barley, I spot through my binoculars a herd of roe deer on the edge of the



Raja Segar, *Deer*

wood. Two Siberian Brent geese fly northward overhead towards the creek, their calling raucous.

I glance back, willing the walkers to turn off, to leave the landscape and its memories to me. A skylark flutters dizzily up and away singing its wild song of love.

But they come on. I hasten my steps towards the village now in sight, past the exquisitely scented lilac bush, and wait on a wall. I watch the house-martins, swooping in as they always have, under the eaves of the two cottages with morsels for their squealing young – and wait while the strangers pass, not acknowledging me. In the old days, a man would tip his hat politely and say “Morning.” As a baby my word for “man” was “morning.” No one tips their hat any longer.

The strangers walk on, and I wait before setting off again, binoculars tucked back under my arm. I wave at Pat, with whose sister I went to primary school. The little school was built by the clergy family who owned the living for a hundred and fifty years.

A hundred yards down the road, opposite the ancient flint and brick-repaired church, I see them again, opening SUV car doors, removing day-glo day-packs, revealing shirt-backs damp with sweat. The verge is now a car park. Someone’s put a QR code on a post so you can pay for parking there.

“There. 4.8 kilometres,” I hear the sweaty man grunt triumphantly as he consults his gadget. He might as well have just done half an hour on a treadmill, seeming oblivious to anything beside the achievement of exercise. But I’m probably biased. Perhaps he’s the CEO of the RSPB.



Sticking it to ‘em: the QR code

And what is that strange bloom of red and white in the field beyond?

A Costa Coffee cup from the new shopping estate five miles away has been tossed carelessly into the hedge.

Dr Jenny Taylor is the Fellow in Journalism, Media and Communication at the Kirby Laing Centre for Public Theology. She has had a distinguished career in journalism, both as a newspaper reporter, and as Director of Lapidio Media, a “philanthromedia charity” pioneering religious literacy for the mainstream media in the post-9/11 era. Her book, Unacceptable Truth: The Christian Origins of Journalism, will be published next year by Lion/SPCK.

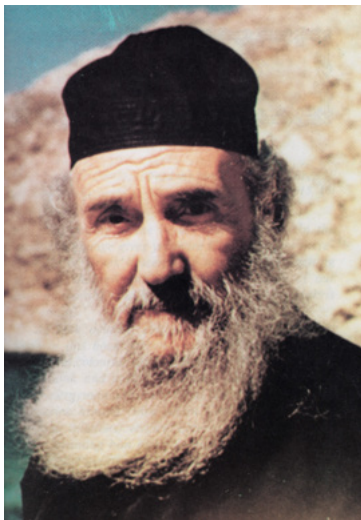
Photographs by Jenny Taylor.

“Love the Trees”

An Ecological Saint for Our Time

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRITUAL AND MATERIAL IN LIFE,
AND THE LEGACY OF ST AMPHILOCHIOS MAKRIS

IOANNA KNIGHTS



St Amphilochios Makris of Patmos

The recently canonised St Amphilochios Makris (1889–1970) grew up on Patmos, one of the Greek islands in the Aegean that make up the Dodecanese. The island is imbued with the spirit of St John, who, in 95 AD, was exiled here.

In the late 19th century, when St Amphilochios was

born, and through to 1970, when he died, the island was fully self-sufficient in the necessities of life. Born into a family of shepherds and farmers, growing up and living in such an interconnected, interdependent, microcosm of the web of life of our planet, must itself have been a great source of learning for this young man.

In 1088, the island was gifted to St Christodoulos to establish a monastery, and, at the age of 17, Amphilochios went to live in this monastery. While receiving no advanced education, he taught himself palaeography to read the remarkable manuscripts in the monastery’s library. He loved to read the *Philokalia* for its theory, and the lives of the Desert Fathers for inspiration for practical Christian living.

At the age of 23, Amphilochios was sent to the neighbouring island of Kos to be ordained Deacon. Instead, he sailed to Egypt, arriving penniless, determined to visit Jerusalem with the desire to become a guardian of the Holy Sepulchre. Since he acted without the blessing of his monastery, this young rebel was sent back, and given two years’ penance – to live in a remote hermitage with a monk who maintained the strict hesychastic practice of the Jesus

Prayer. He was later to say of this time: “What was inflicted on me as punishment, turned out to be the greatest blessing of my life – it deepened my love of stillness.”

Amphilochios grew to become a man of both *courage* and *sensitivity*.

In 1935, at the age of 46, he was elected Abbot, at a time when the island and the entire Dodecanese were under Italian occupation. He fiercely resisted both the rule of the

occupiers and their attempts to obliterate the traditions of the islands, setting up secret schools to ensure that the Greek language and Orthodox faith continued to be taught to the children, and professing monks without the approval of the Italian authorities. He showed formidable determination and was labelled “a dangerous rebel”; no longer a rebel according to his own wishes, now a rebel in the service of the island, its people and the occupied Dodecanese. Soldiers finally entered the monastery, armed with bayonets, and took Fr Amphilochios away into exile, where he continued his missionary work.

Coupled with this courage, Fr Amphilochios was a most sensitive person, sensitive to the human heart. The saint’s spiritual heir, Metropolitan Amphilochios (Tsoukos), said of him:

Besides people he had great love for all the other



The young Fr Amphilochios giving water from St Christodoulos Spring to children

creatures of God. He especially had great love for trees and flowers and was the first to bring the big pine trees to the island of Patmos. Patmos had no trees before the Elder. And he had this wisdom, when a person would come and confess to the Elder with a grave sin, as a penance he would tell the person to plant a tree, and thanks to this, Patmos Island today has many trees. His example was followed by his students from the ecclesiastical school, so now we have this little woodland in this area.



Woodland path to the Monastery of the Cave of the Apocalypse

It was by this very woodland, in a cave, that St John, in earlier times, heard the word spoken by God: “And he that sat upon the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new’” (Rev 21:5). Few visions have had more impact on later generations than this record of God’s purpose revealed to man.

Nineteen hundred years later, by the very cave in which St John received his vision, in the woodland planted by Fr Amphilochios, Metropolitan John of Pergamon spoke the following words:

We are used to regarding sin mainly in anthropological or social terms, but there is also sin against nature. The solution of the ecological problem is not simply a matter of management and technicalities, important as these may be. It is a matter of changing our very worldview. For it is a certain worldview that has

created, and continues to sustain, the ecological crisis.

“Sin against nature ... a matter of changing our very worldview.”

And this worldview begins with how we see ourselves. To the degree to which we have severed links with our material environment, with the soil from which our bodies are made, are instructed to care for, and to which our bodies will return, we cease to express our true character. Fragmented and detached from the matter of which we speak, the temporal moment is lost, the link with the body is lost.

The sacrament of confession was a vital and central part of St Amphilochios’s life. As a confessor, he was exacting – saying that the confessor should weep and suffer more than the other. Taking a long time with each person, he wanted there to be a real opening of the heart. He aimed to give courage and hope, showing solidarity towards his spiritual children; if he imposed a penance, then he would very often also fulfil the penance himself. He cried with those who cried and rejoiced with those who rejoiced. In this way, he created a closer bond with his spiritual children. To avoid wounding the Elder’s heart, each person took care not to repeat their mistakes and stayed away from the pitfalls.

Courage, sensitivity and love are not simply human states, they are theanthropic states, embodying both divine and human states. Being incarnate, they acquire meaning, and as such, Fr Amphilochios’s life – the account of his existence and interactions with others – emanates value, from a locus unencumbered with concepts and arguments that may become confined in the intellect.

When people see such holy persons, it is more accessible and easier for them to reach Christ. And beyond seeing, also

Left: The Monastery of the Cave of the Apocalypse with St John’s Garden in the forefront
Right: View from the Garden at the Holy of Holies towards the Monastery of the Annunciation (Evangelismos)



understanding, for the life force emanating value from the holy person touches real bodies, flesh and blood listeners, who may be gathered up into its narrative to extend and elaborate it with his or her own life.

I first visited Patmos in 1992. Staying at the women's monastery founded by St Amphilochios, I heard stories of his life, stories which kept me reflecting until my next visit ... and my next. And on each visit, I felt drawn to pray by his grave. In 2004, I understood: understood that I was being led to initiate a small Christian Ecological Centre ... and then events unfolded rapidly. Three days later, standing on 4,500 m² of land available for purchase, amid the monasteries, and again that evening sitting by his grave, I understood how to move forward ... in faith, knowing that I needed to *follow*.

This became our first garden – the Garden at the Holy of Holies. And then our second garden, a former farm adjacent to the Cave of the Apocalypse – St John's Garden.

And the vision for this small Christian centre grew, a learning community in theology, life and livelihood, through a series of Sacred Gardens that bear witness to the way we relate our lives, livelihoods and relationships to the earth, ... that can also have a radiating effect around the world, ... just as St Amphilochios's life continues to have.

Sacred Gardens of Patmos – a witness to the healing of our planet, each other, ourselves – leaving a legacy to inspire future generations to “live lightly on our earth.”

Our gardens are not exactly “gardens” in the botanical sense, although of course we have an eye to this, but gardens in the sense of a place where God meets man, where one can experience a dynamic connection with the earth. They are places of learning, for we ourselves need to learn, be transformed, before we can transform the world.

It would take time to tell you what we have accomplished and are doing. Perhaps you will “come and see.”

In speaking with the saint's spiritual heir, Metropolitan Amphilochios said:

With God's help, and with the Elder's blessings you will be able to complete this. The grace of our Virgin Mary first of all, of St John the Theologian, of St Christodoulos and the blessings of our Elder Amphilochios, may they always be with all of us and I hope that the dreams and plans you have, Sister Ioanna, may be blessed by these things and may they be a ray of light which will beam



View from the Garden at the Holy of Holies towards the Prophitas Elias Hermitage (at the highest point on the island)

from the island of Patmos, from the Cave of Revelation, from the monastery of Patmos and spread up all over to enlighten and bring warmth to the hearts of people.

St Amphilochios used to say to his many disciples:

Do you know that God gave us one more commandment, which is not recorded in Scripture? It is the commandment “love the trees.” When you plant a tree, you plant hope, you plant peace, you plant love, and you will receive God's blessing.



The Cave of the Apocalypse by Alejandro Cortés is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Jeanne (Ioanna) Knights is a theologian with an interest in the primacy of living holiness as a theological source. She studied theology at Lancaster and Cambridge and has worked significantly in the Orthodox tradition. She is the Director of The Sacred Gardens of Patmos Project (www.charis-patmos.org). Charis would welcome your support in realising its vision. Charis is able to offer “Discovering Patmos” pilgrimages: should your church group be interested in making such a pilgrimage, please email ioanna@charis-patmos.org.

Photographs of St Amphilochios by kind permission of Metropolitan Amphilochios (Tsoukos), the spiritual heir of St Amphilochios; photographs of Patmos by kind permission of Charis.

Zen AND THE ART OF FOREST CONSERVATION

MARK ROQUES

Tokusan (780–865) was a tough and cantankerous Chinese Zen master. He wielded a menacing bamboo stick. His Zen pedagogy was known as “Tokusan’s thirty blows.” Tokusan would harangue his disciples: “If you speak rightly, I will give you thirty blows. If you speak wrongly, I will also give you thirty blows.”

Tokusan was not noted for his wit and bonhomie.

Does Zen nurture the wise stewardship of bamboo trees? By the way, some species of bamboo can grow up to 2.9 feet per day which is incredible.

Zen teachers deploy paradoxical koans to provoke disciples to find enlightenment (satori). A Zen master was once asked about the purpose of Zen and he summoned this enigmatic koan: “The withered tree is giving a dragon’s roar.”

How do we make sense of this?

The *Diamond Sutra*, beloved of Zen mystics, proclaims that ultimate reality is the “void” or “emptiness.” This view that everything is in radical flux evokes the philosophy of the Ionian thinker Heraclitus (c. 535–475 BC) who was a contemporary of the Buddha (563–483 BC). Nothing is permanent. This worldview radically rejects biblical teaching about God’s good creation. In this silent, empty, desolate realm there are no individual creatures or bamboo trees at all. Angels, stars, planets, mountains, trees, birds, humans

do not exist as distinct entities.

Scripture reveals that while humans are related to and even share some DNA with plants, birds, animals and viruses like COVID, they are distinct creatures. This perspective urges us to examine a bamboo tree and say: “I admire this dynamic tree for growing so fast but I am not this tree.”

Through a biblically-informed worldview we recognise bamboo trees as the handiwork of God and we serve them by honouring their created goodness (Gen 2:15). We delight in these trees because they have been created by and for Jesus Christ (Col 1:16). Bamboo trees are truly remarkable and we flourish by tending the garden with wisdom, care and love.

Zen, however, instructs us that normal, everyday thinking causes pain, despair and suffering. The Buddhist doctrine of no-self proclaims that the illusion of a permanent self is devastating. The false belief that I exist as a separate self fans the flames of desire and craving which leads to suffering. Zen Buddhists believe that we must escape from this erroneous way of looking at the world.

Zen teaches that there is a solution to this misery and this is why Tokusan insisted on beating his nervous students with his bamboo stick. Tokusan wanted to shock his disciples and challenge the logical point of view. He was trying to show his followers the folly of so-called “dualistic” thinking (it’s either this or that) and the misery that this spurious thinking brings. For the enlightened ones there are no menacing bamboo sticks. There are no individual persons like you and me.

Zen takes us to a realm where logic no longer applies because everything has fused into a timeless and formless reality. According to the Zen scholar D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966), Zen obliterates God, minds and even the distinction

between good and evil. When we stop thinking in this “dualistic” way and acknowledge that everything is an illusion then we are liberated from fear and suffering.

This is the purpose of Zen meditation, also known as Zazen meditation. As we meditate, we slip into a formless, boundless realm where all distinctions melt away. Some mystics call this “oneism”; others call this pantheism (God is everything). Trees become fused with us. Eventually after much dogged, spiritual labour we vanish into a mystical unity where our thoughts and egos no longer constrain us.

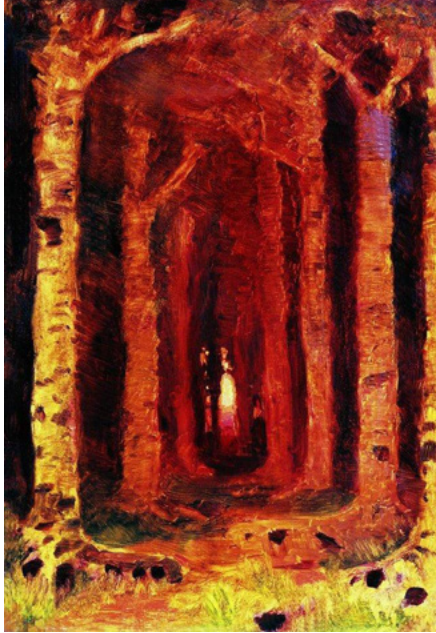
In order to deepen our grasp of Zen it is helpful to



Sakai Hōitsu, *Bamboo and Sparrow*



Li ShiXing, *Withered Tree, Bamboo and Rocks*



Arkhip Kuindzhi, *Sunset in a Forest* (study)

think about how soldiers behave in the white heat of battle. Some Buddhists are very concerned about the taking of life. On this view, killing a mosquito, a rat or a human is fundamentally misguided.

Zen presents a very different perspective. In

his book, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, D. T. Suzuki quotes this passage from the Zen master Takuan (1573–1645):

The uplifted sword has no will of its own, it is all of emptiness. It is like a flash of lightning. The man who is about to be struck down is also of emptiness, and so is the one who wields the sword. None of them are possessed of a mind which has any substantiality. As each of them is of emptiness and has no “mind” (kokoro), the striking man is not a man, the sword in his hands is not a sword, and the “I” who is about to be struck down is like the splitting of the spring breeze in a flash of lightning.¹

In this revealing passage we can discern the antinomian features of Zen. When a soldier is enlightened by Zen he crawls into a world where he no longer exists. The enemy soldier disappears into a mystical nothingness. The sword is also an illusion. This is why Zen can nurture a mindless attitude to brutal warfare.

Zen urges us to avoid careful moral reflection as we inflict bamboo torture upon the terrified enemy who is screaming in agony. Zen disciples act intuitively, impulsively, going with the silent, empty flow (remember Heraclitus). Logic and careful reflection can only enslave us to a deceiving and “dualistic” way of viewing reality.

Suzuki put it pithily: “Without the sense of an ego, there is no moral responsibility, but the divine transcends morality.”²

Why does this matter? The New Testament proclaims that death has been swallowed up by Christ’s glorious

1. Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), 114.

2. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 144.

resurrection (1 Cor 15:54–55). Zen declares that death is swallowed up in mystical “oneism.” Life and death are both illusions.

Traditional forms of Buddhism³ do not go as far as this. Many Buddhists believe in karma and reincarnation. They believe that rebirth can lead to four possible destinations: hell, earth, heaven and nirvana. This teaching can be found in the *Dhammapada*. For Zenists this view is still anchored in a form of “dualism” which denies “oneism.” When we talk about rebirth and the thousands of lives that we must live before we find nirvana (salvation) we are still making naïve, *jejune* distinctions about time and karmic bondage. The *Diamond Sutra* tells us to stop doing this.

A Zen master was once asked if he believed that Auschwitz was evil. He looked despondent as he replied sheepishly: “To be honest I can’t say that what the Nazis did was evil. To say that would be to affirm dualism. As a Buddhist I can’t do that.”



Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis, *Lightning*

Without doubt many Buddhists often show exemplary moral character and Buddhist sacred texts call for the cultivation of virtues like self-control and compassion. However, there is a deep tension between such moral obligations and the belief in the “void” where all ethical distinctions have vanished.

This brief outline of Zen Buddhism can establish this firm conclusion.

If we are committed Buddhists, why should we care about bamboo trees if they do not exist?

Mark Roques is a philosopher and storyteller who works for [Thinking Faith Network](#).

3. I am indebted to Roy Clouser, Harold Netland and Keith Yandell for their insights into Buddhism.

Experiencing REALITY

ASTON FEARON

On the surface of it, humankind knows more now than we ever have in history. Scientific knowledge and its applications have increased exponentially in recent history and perhaps show no sign of slowing down. Yet for many of us in Britain (and probably most in modernised, industrialised, capitalist societies) we live in a peculiar position.

Humankind in this kind of society as we know it is characteristically more and more alienated from reality and the knowledge of things. For example, many of us aren't acquainted with how the food we eat ends up on our plates. We might personally purchase groceries from the shop but we are separated from the experience of the realities of raising food – and all that involves. Perhaps we know something of the supply chain of our local supermarket – or perhaps not. But do we know what a squash plant looks like and how its flowers and fruit develop? G. K. Chesterton put it well:

What is wrong with the man in the modern town is that he does not know the causes of things ... He does not know where things come from; he is the type of the cultivated Cockney who said he liked milk out of a clean shop and not a dirty cow.¹

Despite the fact that eating is such a common activity, we organise our society so that most don't actively participate in experiencing the sources of these things.

However this isn't just what may be seen as an agricultural phenomenon. A variety of factors encourage us to focus a high

proportion
of time
specialising
for work
in specific

1. Gilbert K. Chesterton, *The Outline Of Sanity* (London: Parchment Books, 2011), 81.

Photo: Aston Fearon

roles in paid employment in order to provide for a division of labour. Higher education and postgraduate study is prized and often a unique privilege for those who can partake in it. However in these and other environments a certain narrowing of focus can take place. This narrowing is arguably characteristic of much of society and without other valuable input, can lead a fuller experience of all of reality to atrophy. Often the realities of industry and public life can leave us so busy and focused on meeting certain targets that we are unable to be present to realities that exist even within our own field of work. Writing in the fifties in his work *The Technological Society*, Jacques Ellul claims:

Man as worker has lost primary contact with the primary element of life and environment, the basic material out of which he makes what he makes. He no longer knows wood or iron or wool. He is acquainted only with the machine ... Men with scientific knowledge of materials are found only in research institutes. But they never use these materials or see them and have merely an abstract knowledge of their properties. The men who actually use the materials to produce a finished product no longer know them ...²



Arthur Segal, *Mining*

Ellul's hyperbole could grate on some but his point is illustrative. How many scholars or authors have witnessed the paper-making process? How many of us know the materials that are in our smartphones – what they are like and how they are drawn from the earth? Is it common for the marketing executive, remote-working in a cafe, to know anything of the leather sofa she sits in? Or if it's even leather at all?

2. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 325.

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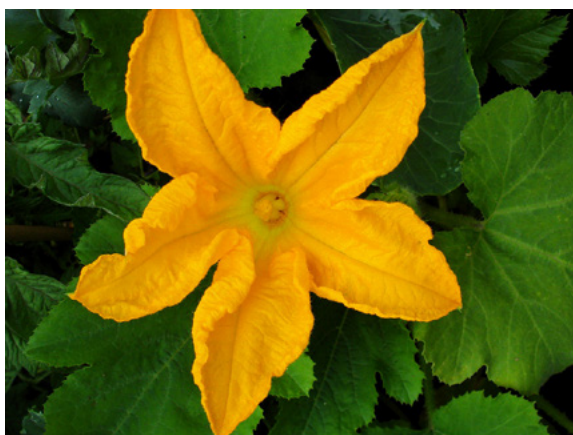


Photo: Jan Kalish (@jankalishphotography)



Scripture reveals Jesus to us, the image of the Father and the only way of salvation. It also reveals Christ as the agent of creation (along with the Father and the Spirit):

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:15–17. See also John 1:1–5 and Hebrews 1:1–3.)

If all of reality is God's creation sustained by Christ, surely Christians are invited to be acquainted with the reality of God's creation and the way things are. In its proper context resistance against our alienation from creation has value. Not only can it put the reality of God's creation in plain view in all its complexity, but it also offers a window into the variety of aspects of dominion which humanity is undertaking even amidst the curse of the fall.

Any constructive responses that we aim for should probably avoid being too narrowly prescriptive to all people – after all, creation is vast and humanity is diverse in its gifts and abilities. However we do need to translate doctrine and theory into concrete lived realities – and opportunities abound in both the commonplace and the surprising. As an example, allotments are not new yet recent years have brought a resurgence in people being more involved in raising food. Reputable courses exist to learn skills from soap making to jewellery making. We can all become more



Jan Stanislawski, *Beehives in the Ukraine*³

interested in the materials we are using every day whether in laptops or pushchairs.

It's a part of God's grace that unbelievers too can aim to appreciate God's creation and grow in skill and knowledge in developing it – even if they don't have a Christian faith. There are voices outside of Christianity decrying the dangers of various forms of this alienation and advocating for living, eating and working that is more in touch with reality as it actually is. Yet of all people Christians have a unique opportunity and responsibility to be in touch with a wide experience of reality – while growing closer to the one who made it all.

Aston Fearon lives in Nottingham with his wife and is part of a local church who meet there.

3. Editor's note: In traditional wild-hive beekeeping in the Ukraine, one of Europe's main producers of honey, naturally or artificially hollowed-out tree logs served as beehives.

Named

When, saddened by our human plight
(We trust not God or men, from fear
Of death and time's unravelling spool),
I stand, O Lord, beneath your night
And hear the grass and tired trees
Stirring in their sleep, I feel a fool
To fret that our inveterate sin,
Yielding such disloyalty, might shake
The structures of your faithfulness.
When lightning rends the dark, and din
Of thunder claps in cloud-quake
That makes the poor heart tremble,
The breadth of your great power, Lord,
Your sway and glory, strikes my soul;
Sin's citadels encroaching on our race,
Issue of our disgrace, then cease to tower
In my mind, and fear, faith's enemy,
Is toppled from its throne and trampled down.

GEORGE HOBSON <https://www.georgehobson.com/>

Yet under the turn of constellations,
The Dippers, Taurus, the precious stars
That stud the White Way's lustrous hoop,
What prompts my heart to adoration
Is not the splendour of those heavenly flames,
Not night's sweep nor the galaxy's loop
In space, but wind in the dark leaves,
Breathing on the furrowed earth, breathing
On my furrowed brow, the still voice
In the breeze whispering under the eaves
Of the universe, calling the heart harrowed
By love's impossibility, to rejoice.
Oh, not the call's content but the fact
Of it, first is wonderful – I am named!
And if named, then known, wanted, claimed.
The call itself – the Word – is the act.
Found – loved! – I stand enthralled
To hear on the night wind my name called.



Sakai Hōitsu, *Two Swallows and Wind Bell*



Living Room – Kampala, 31 x 25cm

IN THE STUDIO WITH Ydi Coetsee Carstens

Istine Rodseth Swart in conversation with Ydi Coetsee Carstens, a young oil painter from Stellenbosch, South Africa.

Istine Rodseth Swart: Briefly tell us what your studio practice entails as a painter.

Ydi Coetsee Carstens: Painting is a very old practice and I like to think of myself as momentarily escaping the modern world and all its trappings when I go to the little studio I rent on a farm. There are no computers there and no cell phone reception, making it feel almost like going to a monastery.

While I paint, I let my thoughts meander on theology, history, sociology and the strangeness of being in the world. Starting around 9am, I paint systematically, but passionately and sometimes feverishly, until two or three o'clock, when I'm spent. For the remainder of the day I work from home, separating my administrative work from the almost sacred experience of being in the studio.

My art-making process involves stitching together and editing photographic sources, drawing, stencilling, masking, scumbling, dry brushing, glazing and sometimes using gold leaf. A lot of thought goes into cropping and stitching images beforehand and comparing possible compositions before crafting a final painting. When I'm ready I emerge from hiding and show the work to a trusted friend for feedback. But until then I'm very private and critical about my work.



Church Hall Floor – Stellenbosch, 60 x 60cm

IRS: Your “empty” interiors are fascinating: mysterious and evocative. What do you think it is about empty buildings that compels you to paint them?

YCC: I think the material matters. We like to speak of the church as a collection of people and not as a building, yet the places we occupy are important theologically. The mission church I grew up in, for instance, exists within a social context in which geography

was extremely consequential. Because of the group areas act (enforced during the time my father pastored the church), the building had to be moved from the centre of town to its periphery, the psychological and spiritual impact of which is hard to fathom.

Perhaps institutional buildings also intrigue me because, like the parsonage we lived in, schools, churches and hospitals share a unique way of being administered. A committee decides on the colour of the walls, rather than an individual. And there seems to be an ethical dimension to either buying new paint or paying someone's salary.

Deserted public buildings seem paradoxical, because their core function is for people to congregate within them. Maybe empty buildings speak of loneliness, or point towards those who are left behind when everybody else has gone away. People like teachers, nurses and cleaners, who do their work unseen and often unappreciated.

In affluent communities, buildings typically fold quietly around their human inhabitants, whereas in less affluent communities, buildings can make themselves quite conspicuous. A fluorescent lightbulb may buzz overhead or a dog-eared carpet snag your foot as you walk. You move through these spaces more aware of the idiosyncrasies of your surroundings.

IRS: I find myself wanting to populate these spaces with my own thoughts, memories, connotations and stories. Do you give any consideration to how your work may be interpreted – are you comfortable with multiple personal interpretations or do you want to influence the way in which your work is read?

YCC: I hope my paintings are places within which viewers can linger. This is what makes the work accessible, I think. Some contemporary art strikes me as quite forceful, asking you to feel something right away. But once the initial impact is over, it feels like the work and its meaning evaporate. I would rather have my work unfold in collaboration with the viewer, as it does in the process of masking, drawing, erasing and glazing when I create it. Making a successful painting is a slow process because I look at it from every possible angle, scratching through layers of meaning and trying to reach a certain level of intensity, or distillation. But in the end I don't own it.

I find that meaning and memory are slippery. I sometimes wonder how much of the past is crafted to fit a narrative remembered later in life. Ambiguity in the work appeals to me for this reason.



Blue School, Ida's Valley Primary – Stellenbosch, 100 x 100cm

IRS: At 32, you are still a young artist. Do you think your generation has a different view of being an artist in SA than that of artists working the 80s and 90s?

YCC: I'm lucky that I was introduced to racial issues early because of my parents' work in the mission church, but also because I have an adopted cousin (of Zulu descent) who is in her early 20s now. Growing up alongside her has taught me a lot about the realities of race. This, and living in a coloured community for a few years while growing up, cannot be separated from how I see myself as a South African.

I think I belong to a generation that hasn't given up on reconciliation, although our choices might not seem as radical as in the 80s. South Africa is still a messy and uncomfortable place, and one needs to work hard at retaining perspective and resisting cynicism on the one hand and being in denial on the other.

IRS: Reflecting on the past seems important in your work, both in how you reference your childhood and how you're passionate about the history of the country. In what ways do you feel you live in continuity with your heritage through your art?

YCC: At [KRUX](#) we often interrogate how past events and régimes influence academia, the arts and global culture today. But there is also a very personal side to heritage. I have a peculiar name, a family name on my mother's side. The first "Eyda" was born to Dutch parents in the Cape in 1739. The name was later spelled "Ijda" and still later "Yda." My family calls me "Ydi," which is quite special and reminds



Corner, Church Centre – Stellenbosch, 50 x 50cm

me that in a small way I'm woven into an historical thread of people and events on the continent.

My art heritage comes mostly from my father's side. My father's grand-uncle was a missionary in Zambia but also a self-taught landscape painter. As a boy my father was intrigued by the enigmatic "uncle Peter painting with a knife." This inspired him to paint and draw as a youngster and to continue using art throughout his ministry years. I have many uncles and aunts who are directly or indirectly involved with missions or who have pastored churches. Like all pastor's kids I have a tacit understanding of what goes on behind the scenes of church and pastoral ministry.

IRS: Do you think this strong Christian heritage in your family helped or hindered your artistic ambitions?

YCC: I guess my relationship with the church has always been complex, although I love the church deeply. As someone who naturally grapples with things, I've questioned my faith many times. Yet, somehow, I continue to be drawn back to Christ and to Christianity. In some ways art and beauty are responsible for this "drawing back." During times of severe questioning, I feel drawn closer to God if I hear a Bach cello suite or see a Rothko painting. Philip Yancey once wrote that he has three reasons for believing in God: classical music, romantic love and nature. I think I relate to that in a very deep way.

The biggest challenge in being an artist from a "missionary family" has been in valuing art for its own sake. Protestants – and believing Christians in general – tend to speak about art as an extravagance, often unconsciously. Missionaries,

underpaid and overworked, sometimes resent the rich who spend money on high culture, and from the perspective of the suffering, the industry can seem like a slap in the face. Although I've done a lot of reading in trying to understand this, I'm still not exactly sure how making beautiful, evocative (but expensive) objects fits into our mandate of caring for the poor, the suffering and the weak. Yet art truly is my passion – I have to believe God meets me there. A book by the South African theologian, John de Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, has been a great help in this regard.

IRS: You mentioned your love for nature. Most of your works, however, depict human-made spaces and figures. Do you feel there is a tension between these two directions?

YCC: My master's research was on Romanticism, so theories about nature and landscape will always be close to my heart. My husband and I are also avid hikers, barefoot-people who love roughing it and experiencing the wilderness at its most authentic.

During periods when I have felt debilitated by human issues (as for instance during a sojourn in Kampala, a city with an extremely high human density), I needed to paint landscapes in order to reawaken myself to beauty. During other times, when I have had freer access to nature and more stability in my life, I have sought beauty in the man-made, the mundane and even the "ugly." Like the Romantics I grapple with the link between beauty and subjectivity. I often ask myself whether "kitsch," for instance, is a useful way of thinking about plastic flowers



Blue Carpet, Church Centre – Stellenbosch, 50 x 50cm

and paintings of gaudy waterfalls, i.e., the ambiguous place where “nature” and “culture” meet. I think we are all looking to connect with beauty in some way or other. And that taste has less to do with it than context, memory and human desire.



An Ordinary Day – Windhoek, Namibia, 60 x 60cm

IRS: You are currently artist-in-residence for KRUX. What does this mean for you and your art and what role has KRUX played in your spiritual and artistic development?

YCC: Before KRUX I had never heard of the term “artist-in-residence.” It is a beautiful term to me because it hints at “residing” somewhere, that is, being home and feeling safe. At this stage we don’t have a physical space where an artist-in-residence might work, but we dream of one day making this a reality.

In the academic paradigm where I studied before I knew about KRUX – postcolonial and critical race theory – I often felt very alone. I think the misalignment between my personal narrative and the narrative of the secular department was just too complex to bridge and perhaps it still is. In our lectures, white missionaries who brought Christianity to Africa were regarded as complicit in, if not responsible for, racial injustices, and words like “religion” and “oppression” were used without the nuances I felt they deserved. The theoretical labels attached to painting figuratively were also extremely constricting (realistic paintings were called “cute”).

After my studies I was introduced to KRUX through a small arts conference. The community I met there made me feel valued and listened to, and my missionary background not

resented or belittled. As I became more involved in KRUX, I met people from multiple church communities who also cherish conversations about history, Protestantism, culture and the arts, and who, most importantly, still have the ability to feel wonder. My art gradually started coming into its own and I had the confidence to pursue art for its own sake. I can’t imagine where I would have been without this input in my life.

IRS: Do media and social media have any impact on your work, in terms of your approach to your work or its contents?

YCC: Art criticism has always been practised in specialised circles, but the character of “viral” media today makes it possible for journalism to do significant harm to artists, or deter them from making work altogether. (I think for instance of the scandal surrounding Paul Emsley’s portrait of Kate Middleton.)

The general public today is flooded with images of all (questionable) shapes and formats on social media and the news. Yet as students we were made very aware of the notion of “problematic art.” Revisionist history and new fields of enquiry like gender studies and critical race theory significantly changed how artists from my generation think about their work. This self-critical posture, combined with the power of journalism and media today, can make being an artist terrifying.

In a recent series of paintings inspired by travelling in Africa, I was very aware of this. On the one hand, creating images of African people could be deemed contentious historically. On the other, omitting the human figure is equally dehumanising. I spent many weeks wrestling with this, listening to podcasts about media perceptions of Africa and trying to figure out if my artworks were unethical in some way. In the end, only by having a Christian perspective, rather than a secular one, could I find my way out of this conundrum.

At my recent solo exhibition, an elderly Sotho gentleman spent a long time looking at my figure sketches, saying they reminded him of his childhood. This revealed to me the great disparity between the critical gaze of some intellectuals, and the receptive gaze of true humanity. As long as we can resist the dehumanising forces of our time, we’ll be able to connect with each other honestly and authentically.

Istine Rodseth Swart is an administrator for the Kirby Laing Centre.

My Window of Prayer

LORITA GOLDSTONE



Kalle Løchen, *Woman by the Window*

I have been struggling to make time/ find time to pray and for hearing God.

My environment at work is very toxic and I also feel like a rat in a wheel every day – running the whole day and at the end of the day, feeling like I have achieved nothing purposeful.

So I created my window at work.

This is an actual window for me. I sit facing my window, only my computer screen is in front of me. I can see outside, but no one sees me. My window is about one metre wide and stretches right up to the roof.

On the left side of my window, I see trees with birds and nests in them. There are about three or four huge trees, and they are green, with stems that are yellowish. They remain with this colouring the whole year.

I call this the Left Side. And

here I give thanks to God for whatever I need to, in this moment – health, creation, being alive. And Psalm 118:24 comes to mind: “This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it” (NIV).

On the right side of my window, I see a hill/little mountain with different slopes of smaller trees – sharp, round trees; and I see grass on this hill. But all of this changes as the seasons change and this steep hill can look quite dull at times.

I call it the Right Side. The side for requests/asking. Let’s take a moment and pray to God and ask him to help us with whatever challenges, difficulties, “uphills” we are facing this moment, remembering 2 Corinthians 12:9–10: “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (NIV).

Then I tilt my head up to the top of the window. I see the sky – it is *wide* (everywhere), broad. It is *deep*, with a never-ending depth. It is *constant* – always there, it may be blue, grey, white, dark – but always there.

I call this Loving. Let us take a moment to just enjoy God’s love for us that is so wide, deep and constant, and



Juho Mäkelä, *Autumn Clouds*

enjoy how God’s love covers us every single minute. Enjoy being wrapped in God’s love. Ephesians 3:17–18 expresses it thus: “And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ” (NIV).

Lorita is a Specialist Case Manager, working at a hospital in Pretoria, South Africa. She loves dancing, promotes dance in worship contexts, and represented SA at the Dance Gymnaestrada in Switzerland in 2011.

Journey towards Easter

IN SONG, SILENCE
AND POETRY

TERRY BRAUER

I know in my “knower” that I ought to be able to find my centre, that is God within me, wherever I might find myself, but sadly I am someone who needs to move away from the myriad distractions which tend to overwhelm me. The advent of mobile phones and other technology has been, paradoxically, a blessing and a curse especially for one who is apt to go down a rabbit hole whilst scrolling.

Part of evangelical spirituality has included encouraging us to talk to God (almost as we would to a friend) as our primary method of communication as God is fully accessible to us. The Americans have a word that, for me, illustrates so well our tendency to talk at God, and that is “yammer.” Whilst this is certainly of merit, it has led to very little room, in my experience, for learning the habit of *listening*.

Stillness is not the mode of our Western “operating system,” though we are certainly moving that way



Photograph and collage by Terry Brauer

through the cosmic consciousness that is having a real impact on new ways of exploring our spirituality (albeit that many of these ways hark back to the ancient practices!).

About eight years ago I was introduced to the contemplative practices and what a difference these have made to quieting my mind and allowing me to listen with the heart. Although I had been familiar with retreats over many years, I have recently been attending ones which focus on creative aspects like movement, art, music and poetry as a means to exploring God more deeply.

I love writing and poetry and see myself as a “wordsmith” (though with not much self-belief in this area). One of the benefits of our long lockdown was that it allowed me space, daily, to go inwards as a refuge from my previously frenetic pace of never allowing *still* time. I began a lockdown diary over 170 days and poetry began to flow as well as sharing my mind’s meandering. I discovered the gems of Jan Richardson and began to sit lightly with Mary Oliver’s poetry.

So, when I was invited to this most recent retreat titled “Eastertide music and poetry as prayer,” my heart stirred. The setting for these retreats has been an old stone church set in tranquil South African foliage and even the flowers in the garden led me

immediately to the Lenten and Easter symbolism of purple and gold. The initial poem contained an image of a volcano gently erupting with God’s love and this has stayed with me throughout my Lenten journey.

The second session immersed us in the organ playing “O Sacred Head Surrounded” accompanying a note-perfect, sonorous alto voice. As I sat in the chapel, the stained-glass window throwing light and shadow on a very chilly day, the heaviness and sadness of this piece was palpable as I was overcome with the fact that even God at the point of crucifixion could not overcome human suffering. As verse two was sung, I began weeping as my mother’s recent death was before me as if I were in her room as I heard the words :

Thy comeliness and vigour
is withered up and gone,
and in thy wasted figure
I see death drawing on.



Crown of Thorns, Museum Leuven, Belgium

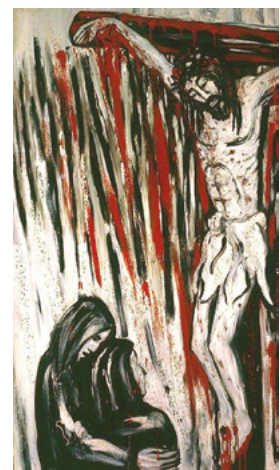
I saw Jesus’ life force ebbing away in the image of my mother’s slipping slowly from this life. The last part of my sorrow was further explored in Hopkins’s poem “I wake and feel the fell of dark not day.”

The creativity released in this kind of retreat has become a stimulating and enticing entry point for me into other levels of experiencing God using all my senses and allowing it to sink from my head deeply into my heart.

PIERCED BY PAIN

Terry Brauer

Surrounded by purple
Proudly erect salvia
The velvet drapes over the altar
Sonorous dulcet organ tones
And alto melody
Stirring the depths of soul and
sadness.
The piercing thorns
Pierce my heart
Pent up pain pours from the pierced
side
Mine and His.
Tears for losses
My family
My country
The world
Scars across our beloved land
Africa
Scarified Ukraine
Scars of humanity’s greed, hunger
for power, hatred
Like a river of blood
From the pierced side
BUT the thorns and nails do not
overcome –
Love erupts within the ashes.



Jacek Andrzej Rossakiewicz, *Crucifixion*

Terry Brauer is a dyed-in-the-wool Anglican who has worshipped at St Francis of Assisi, Pretoria (SA) for 65 years. She loves music, poetry and spirituality and is venturing into a more contemplative journey.

Personal Confessions about Poetry

LUIS CRUZ-VILLALOBOS



Ángel Zárraga, *The Poet*

Poetry¹ was born in me to fulfil a function very different from that of rational thought, whether it is theological, philosophical or psychological thought. It was born as an urgent need to say something, to whisper a song ... to sing

so softly so as not to draw attention; rather, so that only the one who should listen would actually manage to hear the words. I remember that in my adolescence, after having already written a few notebooks of poems, I defined what poetry meant to me like this: "Poetry is like undressing behind the screen of the metaphor." A poem allowed me to remain naked and yet hidden at the same time, free and anonymous, wide open, yet not completely exposed. With rational thought one cannot do this. It is like what Heidegger once said when he heard someone playing one of Schubert's works on the piano: "You can't do this with philosophy." This is precisely why the philosopher from the Black Forest valued poetry and poets as much as he did.

For me, poetry and reflection or rational thought are distinct paths; complementary, but distinct. Many years ago, I wrote an article about hermeneutics and constructivism in which I discussed this. I commented that, from my perspective, there exists a mode of integration of personal identity that goes beyond the narrative identity as presented by Ricoeur. There is also a mode that we could call poetic identity, which is much closer to the pre-reflexive

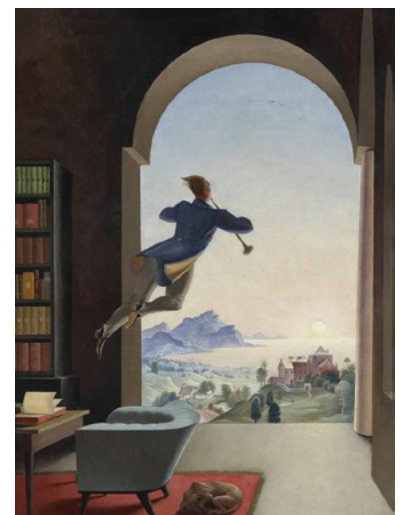
1. This article is based on a number of responses provided during an interview with the author and the Romanian journalist and writer, Veronica Balaj, published in the magazine *Floare Albastra* (Romania) and in the literary website Crear in Salamanca (Spain).

experiential processes that are not linear, causal, diachronic but rather circular, synergetic, synchronic. This poetic identity is much closer to the world of mythology,

of archetypes, of spirituality that cannot be trapped by mathematical reasoning. For me, poetry is linked to this deep dimension that is particularly human, that connects us with the reality that is more primitive and necessary, that is to say, with fundamental confidence and joy. In other words, with love.

As a result, poetry has always risen in me like a spontaneous experience of connection with reality, or with the depth of reality, with the invisible foundation of reality. And with "invisible" I mean to say, just as a wise Sufi mystic once said: In the middle of the ocean a small fish asked a large fish where the ocean was because it wanted to see it, to which the large fish responded, "For that you'll need to leave it behind." Well, we simply cannot leave the ocean. We cannot get out of Being, out of Mystery, but poetry is a kind of juggling, a mysterious act that allows us the *ex-tasis*, the joy of getting out of oneself, or the Being of our being, to look from afar and to see. See the ocean. See the Invisible and celebrate it. We could also define the Invisible as the Beautiful, the Good, the True, the One.

For me, poetry is the language of the heart from the heart. It is from this depth that I can see the Reality of the reality. Yet, poetry also connects us with the superficial reality, with pain, with loss, with what is ugly, but only so that we can be freed from its chains by naming these realities. We cannot do this through philosophy, nor psychology. Not even rational theology is able to do this, no matter what colour or particular hue it might be. Poetry is tied to mysticism. Yet, even poetry speaks of daily life, of the dark side of life, of what breaks our hearts, because if we follow the shadows, we will ultimately be led to the body that originated it and to the light that shines behind it.



Franz Sedlacek, *Evening Song*

Dr Luis Cruz-Villalobos (PhD, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) is a Chilean writer, editor and clinical psychologist. He is an Associate Fellow of the KLC. (See linktr.ee/luisacruzvillalobos.)

BRIEF POEMS *for Truth*

LUIS CRUZ-VILLALOBOS



Caspar David Friedrich,
Wanderer above the Sea of Fog

*Our mental apparatus needs truth
just as our bodies need food.*

W. R. Bion

1
Truth went out for a walk
and found no one

2
Truth kissed my mouth
And I remained in silence

3
Truth is immune
To markets

4
Truth knows how to
count
Only to one

5
Truth has no fear
Of lies

6
Truth became pregnant
With hope

7
Truth is a friend
Of the mute

8
Truth does not measure
Its words

9
Truth knows how to sing
In silence

10
Truth can slake
The most burning thirst

11
Truth always says
What it feels

12
Truth never looks
With disdain

13
Truth roars fiercely
In front of judges

14
Truth looks head on
At the darkness

15
Truth always takes care
Of its children

16
Truth loves
And rejoices in justice

17
Truth is not an entity
Rather the very abyss of being

18
One day truth
Became flesh and budding love

19
Truth wants
To take our hand as we cross the street

20
Truth is the happiness
Silently given to each heart

21
Truth draws near
As a new dawn.



From the unpublished
book *Autumn & Light*
(2019)

*Left: Alphonse Osbert,
The Solitude of Christ*

The 30-Minute Bible: God's Story for Everyone

Craig G. Bartholomew and Paige P. Vanosky (Downers Grove: IVP, 2021)

REVIEWED BY ISTINE RODSETH SWART



The Vision of Ezekiel: Christ in Majesty from The Bury Bible

ALL ARE INVITED

The 30-Minute Bible is an invitation to read and understand the Bible, that strange library of books that “is not just another story. It claims to be the true story of the whole world, and it invites us to make it *our* story” (178). If this claim is valid, then the Bible is an invitation to everybody – “us.” This is evident from the conduct of Jesus who, while on earth, engaged with and proclaimed the good news to the schooled and the unschooled, the ordinary citizen, even the outcast: the learned Nicodemus, the fisherman, the Samaritan woman at the well. In our time, the Bible and a book telling its story is likewise intended for all: the professor and the student, the pastor and the congregant, the billionaire and the homeless person, the regular you and me.

This book is suitable for those who are unfamiliar with the Bible, but it is not an invitation to the daunting task of reading the Bible verse by verse, though immersion in the whole Bible is a desirable goal. Rather it tells us why the Bible is important for every person; for all who engage with the fundamental questions: “What are human beings and why are we here?” (23); Why is the world so broken and why can we not fix it – or our broken selves?

A strength of this book is that the authors face these questions squarely and offer scholarly, yet simply and clearly formulated perspectives on the answers revealed

in the biblical narratives, while acknowledging that there is much that is only partially understood. (Additionally, the book is attractive and relatively short and asks for only thirty minutes of our time per day for a month.)

One such perspective presented is the centre-stage position of God in the biblical drama: He is the creator God who set up the earth as the ideal home for humankind; who deemed his creation to be good and did not abandon it when it became tragically and catastrophically tainted through the rebellion of his creatures.

RELATIONSHIPS

The authors navigate the creation, fall and God's great redemption plan through the Old Testament to its culmination in the New Testament; considering how God's interaction with humankind is aimed at redeeming all of creation,¹ motivated by an unwavering desire to be in relationship with the work of his hands.

Their argument for the primacy of relationships resonates with our life experience: our greatest joys derive from meaningful relationships; our deepest despair from broken ones. We are created in the image of God, created to be in relationship with God, ourselves, one another, the world and what lies beyond its confines.

Through the death and resurrection of Christ, in particular, God's love for us is readily discerned in the NT, but it is less obvious in the OT. The authors help us to look at the OT through the lens of God desiring to restore relationships with his creation by, for example, emphasising the significance of the tabernacle – as evidence of God desiring



1. See Bruce Riley Ashford and Craig G. Bartholomew, *The Doctrine of Creation: A Constructive Kuyperian Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020).



to dwell among his people, the Israelites. An Israelite could say: God is my neighbour!

Although God's love was expressed in his desire to live among his people, his love is not unconditional: he gave his prospective neighbours the Ten Commandments and rules by which to approach him. The former, a description of the ethos of a good neighbourhood, was

and remains a reminder that this is God's world, designed to work in a certain way, a way of being that eases our existential *angst*: "We find life when we submit to God and follow his ways in his world" (26).

REDEMPTION FOR ALL OF CREATION

This is also a book for those who are familiar with the Bible, but who may benefit from succinct presentations of important perspectives, notably the emphasis on the bigger purpose of our salvation beyond personal redemption. The authors question the view held by some that "the Bible is all about letting go of this world and heading for heaven as a disembodied soul, as fast as possible!" (118). A broader view of salvation is presented, one that encompasses relationships with fellow humans, society and all of God's creation so that what was once pronounced to be "good" by the creator will be restored.

In the NT we see that through the indwelling Spirit, we are more than God's neighbours, we are his address – his church is his address. When we move beyond this already-but-not-yet time, we will dwell with God in immediacy in the radically renewed heaven and earth, where "Evil is eradicated once and for all, and heaven – God's place – comes down to earth so that heaven and earth are now one" (182). Thus, the authors claim: "This is unique, epochal news on a truly cosmic scale" (138).

PRESENTATION

If the strength of the book lies in its perspective, then its charm lies in its presentation, specifically in the woodcut illustrations by Brother Martin Erspamer, OSB, a well-known liturgical artist. He is motivated by the Benedictine ethos – that God may be glorified in all things – which resonates with the intentions of the authors. That these images are an integral part of the book is well illustrated by the evocative depiction of "Out of Eden" (33). Rich in symbolism, it links the inception and culmination of the creation story through a contemporary rendition of the traditional "Christ in Majesty" icon. The tree of life supporting the figures and echoing a menorah is a

noteworthy feature.

In addition, diagrams and maps are included to aid understanding, the latter reminding us that the Bible has a context that we cannot ignore when its story is told.

The telling of the story in six acts takes us on a journey from the creation (1st act) and the subsequent fall (2nd), through the initiation of God's salvation plan (3rd) and its accomplishment in the coming of the King (4th), progressing to the spreading of the news of the King (5th) and culminating in his return (6th) at the "End that is no end" (chapter 30), with selected Bible readings

included in each chapter.²

I do have some concerns about style: A few of the examples and analogies used in the book will not be familiar to all its readers and others may become dated. This is inevitable when making a book relatable: it is notoriously difficult to choose universal examples that will be true for all time. Swopping the narration between the authors jars at times, nevertheless, the simplicity and immediacy of the language of the telling not only makes the story of the Bible accessible, it underscores that the God of the Bible (though far beyond our comprehension) is accessible.

Istine Rodseth Swart is an administrator for the KLC.

2. Note that the organisation of the material reflects the six acts of the Bible story as told in *The Drama of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004) by Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen.



Woodcuts by Br Martin Erspamer

Preaching the Gospels

FOR ALL THEIR WORTH

As the early form critics rediscovered, the Gospels themselves are the fruit of preaching. According to a justifiable translation of Eusebius's quotation of Papias (c. 60–130), bishop of Hierapolis, Mark composed his Gospel from Peter's "anecdotes" or little stories about Jesus for the church's spiritual formation (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.15). All four Gospels present Jesus as repeating and completing the



Worship before the Throne of God from The Bamberg Apocalypse Folio 010v

biblical story of Israel's redemption from Egypt and return from exile. Although his journey is finished, sitting resurrected at the right hand of God the Father (see Psalm 110:1, the most cited Old Testament verse in the New), the bride, his church, is

being led by the Spirit through a long, trying wilderness. As travel guides, the Gospels are immediately and essentially applicable for Christians. (For this reason, the majority of those who attend church hear the Gospels read every Sunday.) Preaching Jesus in little stories inside the big story invites participation from readers (hearers). Anecdotes typically remember something of the past – there are good reasons to accept the Gospels as source material for historians – but they are sufficiently sparse, the barest of settings and words, to make room for the Spirit's creative work on our imagination.

The Gospels express a pneumatic, participatory hermeneutic that we also find in the Dead Sea Scrolls, specifically the *Pesharim*; this way of reading Scripture can be simply expressed: "This is that." *This scene, this moment, this encounter is that biblical story.* The presupposition is that God, the ultimate author of the Bible,

continues to lead a people by the light of the Word through type scenes, allusions and echoes. The wilderness may look differently for every person and each community in our cultural dress and distracting idols, but it is the same journey between Paradise lost and regained. Jesus came from God, and we return to God in Christ.

And yet stories are driven by conflict and temptation. Indwelt by the Spirit, Jesus discerns that the Pharisees of his day inadvertently filled the role of Isaiah's enemies, as the Spirit may reveal to us the Pharisees of today: "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy concerning you" (Mark 7:6). *This* ideology is not the gospel, not the way, but *that* same old idol with a new face.

To repeat and summarize: the same Spirit who led Jesus through a wilderness of temptation leads us (Luke 4:1; Gal 5:18). We all have been given a God awareness and the grace to respond (Jer 31:31). We all have been given the "anointing" and are therefore Christians or "little Christs" (1 John 2:20). There is the way of the flesh and the way of the Spirit, and these very different paths may be discerned by their fruit. The Spirit takes what Jesus said and reveals our distraction from and resistance to the narrow path that leads to life. The community that produced the *Pesharim*, the *Yahad* ("union"), most likely a branch of the Essenes, believed they had received the new covenant, also calling themselves "the Way," although the Jerusalem church, our ancestors, counterclaimed the same epithet (Acts 9:2).

As Thomas Aquinas maintained, this way of reading (or entering) Scripture does not bypass the literal sense (*sensus literalis*), attuning signifiers (words) to their signifieds –



Caspar David Friedrich,
The Cross in the Forest



Alexandre Lettner,
Living Water

what Confucius called “Rectification of Names” – it comes from a deeper signified, our union with Christ.

As preachers, we are most qualified to speak after sitting humbly in the role of the Pharisee, allowing God to convict our hearts and open our eyes: “Woe is me” (Isa 6:5). But then we need the courage of Jesus to confess what is not yet entirely clear to others in the community.

RECOMMENDED READING

Richard Bauckham, ed., ***The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences***. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998. In this influential work, Bauckham and his friends make a strong case that scholars locked into the historical-critical paradigm have overly narrowed the intended audience (readership) of the Gospels to the specific communities of the evangelists. Rather, they were probably composed with some awareness of addressing the broader church.

Henri de Lubac, ***Medieval Exegesis***. 3 Volumes. Translated by Mark Sebanc and E. M. Macierowski. Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1998, 2000, 2009. In the first volume, subtitled ***The Four Senses of Scripture***, de Lubac re-introduces the Quadriga to the modern world. The cardinal was part of a movement in Roman Catholicism to retrieve the medieval worldview and exegesis of the church before the reductionism of the Enlightenment and the flatness of subsequent hermeneutical approaches to Scripture. Other significant voices of the *ressourcement* movement are Hans Urs von Balthasar and Jean Daniélou.

Martin Dibelius, ***From Tradition to Gospel***. Translated by Bertram Lee Woolf. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934. Dibelius, an early form critic, drew attention to the homiletical function of pericopes in the Gospels, claiming: “At the beginning of all Christian activity there stands the sermon” (37). Despite the overstatement, there is a grain of truth in this.

Geza Vermes, ***The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English***. New York: Penguin Books, 1998. There are newer translations of the Dead Sea Scrolls, but the translator deserves mention for popularizing the expression “rewritten Bible.” A good place to start for understanding this genre is a slow reading of the ***Yahad's commentary on Habakkuk*** (1QpHab) where the “Kittim” have become the occupying Romans but there are also enemies within Second Temple Judaism. For a more academic discussion, see Sidnie White

Crawford, ***Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times*** (Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008). She describes rewritten Scripture as “characterized by a close adherence to a recognizable and already authoritative base text ... and a recognizable degree of scribal intervention into that base text for the purpose of exegesis” (13). For Vermes's contribution to scholarship in this field, consult ***Rewritten Bible after Fifty Years: Texts, Terms, or Techniques? A Last Dialogue with Geza Vermes***, edited by József Zsengellér (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 166. Leiden: Brill, 2014).



Henry Ossawa Tanner, *Christ and His Mother Studying the Scriptures*



The New Jerusalem and the River of Life (Apocalypse XII) from the Beatus Facundus

This Jewish hermeneutic evolved and flourished in the church as the Quadriga. Rabbinic interpreters recognized this and, in turn, borrowed the Quadriga from Christians, calling it *Pardes* (“Paradise”). This fourfold way of reading Scripture is displayed in Thomas Aquinas's ***Catena Aurea*** (“golden chain”), a collection of glosses on the Gospels from Eastern and Western fathers. Aquinas insisted that the deeper senses of Scripture ought not to contradict the literal sense (*sensus literalis*). Another important work is Bonaventure's ***The Tree of Life***, which formed Franciscans in the way of the Gospels after their founder. His biography of Francis embodies the this-is-that hermeneutic. Ludolph of Saxony, a Carthusian monk, wrote ***The Life of Jesus Christ***, which invited readers to enter imaginatively into the Gospel scenes. Milton T. Walsh is currently translating the volumes into English (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press). The work inspired Ignatius of Loyola's ***Spiritual Exercises*** that formed Jesuit missionaries and was considered mandatory reading by Teresa of Ávila. The Quadriga enters English literature in the commentaries of Richard Rolle. John DelHousaye's ***The Fourfold Gospel: A Formational Commentary on Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John*** (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2020, 2021) may be the first commentary to employ the Quadriga (*Pardes*) in over 500 years.

The Master of Alkmaar:

THE SEVEN WORKS OF MERCY

MARLEEN HENGELAAR-ROOKMAAKER



LESSONS IN CHARITY

This polyptych is almost five metres wide. It deals with the seven works of mercy or charity and was commissioned in 1504 by the regents of the Holy Spirit Hospital in Alkmaar, the Netherlands. As there are various theories about its maker, the artist has entered history as the Master of Alkmaar. Most probably it concerns the painter Cornelis Buys, who was active in Alkmaar from c. 1490 to 1524. The work was badly damaged during the Iconoclasm of 1566, when Roman Catholic churches were vandalized by Protestants.

This heptatych is the oldest still existing depiction of the works of mercy from the Northern Netherlands. In the Holy Spirit Hospital in Haarlem hung a similar work by Geertgen tot Sint Jans, which unfortunately was lost. It may have functioned as a model for this work.

A Dutch town forms the backdrop to this picture narrative. It is a tidy town with only brick houses, a prosperous and exemplary place. Well-off burghers in contemporary clothing give bread to the poor. In the foreground a group of paupers crowd together at the door of one of the houses. While a woman holds up a basket with bread, her husband hands it out. He does not pay attention to those on the receiving end and in this way he does not let his left hand know what his right hand is doing (Matt 6:3). He hands a bun to the man in the red torn mantle with a child on his shoulders. The man is blind. He is lovingly held by the hand by his wife, who with her other hand gives bread to the child on the ground. They may be needy, but they are together and not without love!

In the foreground we see a man with deformed feet, who in the social order of ranking knew himself to be even lower than the poor. Yet he is given a lot of space in an important place in this panel. And who stands inconspicuously between the beggars right in the middle of the panel? It is Jesus, recognizable by his traditional Jesus face: long and narrow, with long hair, a parting in the middle. In contrast to all the others he looks the spectator in the eye and says: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matt 25:40).

A maxim was written beneath each panel. These sayings give us a good impression of the Dutch late-medieval way of thinking, complementing the panels in this sense.

PANEL 1: FEEDING THE HUNGRY

*Share generously
with the poor //
God will take care
of you*



Panel 1: Feeding the Hungry



Panel 2: Giving a Drink to the Thirsty



The Master of Alkmaar, *The Seven works of Mercy*, 1504, oil on panel, 120 x 472 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

PANEL 2: GIVING A DRINK TO THE THIRSTY

Of food and drink in this life // a thousandfold will be compensated to you

At the right in the second scene we see an especially dignified residence with steps and pillars. Even so the master and mistress of the house personally distribute water to a group of people consisting of six grown-ups – Jesus among them – a disabled person and two children. Jesus is looking kindly at the “donor” who pours out the drink. A nice detail is that the jug with the coveted liquid is located in the very middle of the composition. In the background we see a woman who provides a blind man and his companion with water. One wonders whether there were no pumps around at that time, where people could go to fetch water.

But that is not really of importance here, as this panel is about the portrayal of Jesus’ words in Matthew 25. The polyptych wants to urge the viewer to charity. It is a didactical work, just like the paintings of the Master of Alkmaar’s contemporary Hieronymus Bosch. Especially the large man who just gets poured a drink has a Bosch-like face. Nowadays art historians assume that the master from Den Bosch was influenced by the Brethren of the Common Life, which had two houses very close to his studio. This could also apply to our painter from Alkmaar, as the Devotio Moderna (Modern Devotion) practised by the Brethren of the Common Life emphasized a personal and practical faith. What we do not see here, however, are the Bosch-like devilish creatures and demons. Our artist clearly opted for a friendlier visual language.

PANEL 3: CLOTHING THE NAKED

Cover the nakedness of your neighbour // so that God will remove the stains of your sin

In the foreground of the third panel a man in an opulent

mantle clothes a beggar with a new undergarment. He has already given him a new cloak, putting Matthew 5:40 into practice in this way. Behind them a group of men approaches a couple. The one in front makes a pleading gesture. Apparently autumn is drawing near and his ragged clothes will not be able to protect him against the cold. The man of the couple looks attentively at him. He is not just doing a “good work,” but seems to be truly sorry for the poor man.

Jesus can be found among the vagabonds and vagrants again. He identifies with them. He “sym-pathizes” with them, shares in their suffering, and incites the viewer to do the same: to activate their imagination and to (literally) put themselves in the shoes of the less fortunate and imitate him in his compassion and mercy. This makes us think once more of the imitation of Christ, the *Imitatio Christi* by Thomas à Kempis, one of the foremost exponents of the Modern Devotion. This book, as the most read book in the world after the Bible, proved to be hugely influential in Western history.

A meaningful detail is the stork on her nest on the roof further back. Her partner is on the roof of the house across from her. It is a reference to Matthew 6:25–26: “Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather



Panel 3: Clothing the Naked

Panel 4: Burying the Dead



into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

**PANEL 4:
BURYING THE
DEAD**

*For his burying of
the dead so we
read // Tobit was
praised by God*

Six of the works of mercy derive from Matthew 25. In 1207 Pope Innocentius III added a seventh work: burying

the dead, which he based on the apocryphal book of Tobit, which stresses the care for the deceased. In this panel we do not see the bourgeoisie in action, but the clergy: the priests and monks took care of burying the rich and the poor in the Middle Ages. To the right of them we see the male nurses who cared for the people with pestilence, recognizable by their black suits with beak masks. In this beak herbs were stored to counteract the ill-smelling fumes which – so they thought – spread the feared disease. A frightening sight! Yet it was these men who risked their lives by caring for the plague victims and it is therefore beyond doubt that they deserved a place in the row of exemplary people.

Also Jesus is compassionate towards the sick and dying, but this time not as one of them or their nurses but as the righteous judge on the Day of Judgement. He is seated on the rainbow of the covenant as the King of the Universe. By placing this panel in the middle, Jesus towers above all of the scenes. In this way the artist links the works of mercy to the coming judgement, just like Matthew 25 and the maxims do. With one hand Jesus points at the wound in his side, with the other he shows the wound in his hand. Thereby he emphasizes his own suffering, his "sym-pathy" and mercy.

The Modern Devotion employed images (paintings, sculptures, illustrated manuscripts, pamphlets with woodcuts etc.) in support of a life of faith. People could (and can) look for a long time at these panels, ponder them and

stumble upon new details and insights – with the intention to grow from the inside out into a life committed to compassion.

**PANEL 5:
WELCOMING
STRANGERS**

*The Lord speaks
for you to see //
what you do to
the least you do
to me*

In the foreground of this panel a burgher couple welcomes seven

strangers, Christ among them. They extend their hospitality with cordiality and loving attention. In the background a woman takes a possibly blind man by the hand to show him and his companion the way to her house.

There are several pilgrims among the travellers. They are recognizable by their hats, jugs, prayer chains and pilgrim's staff. The pilgrim badges that they wear on their hats and cloaks are symbols of the places of pilgrimage they visited. Scallops were acquired in Santiago de Compostella in Spain, while Saint Peter's Keys came from Rome. They are small lead-tin pins with various depictions. With the help of metal detectors thousands were dug up in the Netherlands in the past decades. Pilgrimages were undertaken to obtain God's blessing and an indulgence for sins. In this time just before the Reformation there was a lot of criticism of these kinds of external religious forms, through which one supposedly could secure one's salvation. The Master of Alkmaar paints the benefactors in this panel in such a way that they make clear that true charity is not rooted in the compliance with regulations, but in sincere compassion.

PANEL 6: CARING FOR THE SICK

*Do visit the sick and ailing // your reward will increase in
eternity*

This sixth panel is the only one that shows us an interior. It could very well be the Holy Spirit Hospital in Alkmaar.



Panel 5: Welcoming Strangers

Panel 6: Caring for the Sick



These hospitals, in Dutch called *gasthuizen* (literally guesthouses), were first of all meant to care for the sick and the old, but they also provided the needy with bed, bath and bread. The hospital in Alkmaar was founded by the parish, but elsewhere they were also started by burghers. Usually the beds were placed along both sides of an elongated

hall, four or five of them in this case. In the first one lies a woman, who is lovingly visited by her husband. In the second (or third) bed a patient is just given a drink. The next bed is still empty, but seems intended for the man who is just being washed near a salutary warm fire.

In the front Jesus is standing among a group of men, probably the hospital masters who commissioned the polyptych. They are pleading with the stately woman, who seems to be in charge, for a place for this new patient. The message, however, seems to be that there is no place for him in the "inn." It is, of course, a reference to Luke 2:7, where it is told that Jesus had to start his life as a poor homeless infant in a measly stable. Her refusal is the only dissonance in the world of ideal charity the panels present to us.

PANEL 7: VISITING PRISONERS

Who meets the imprisoned with charities // hereafter it will benefit his soul

In this farthest right panel we look inside a prison. In the foreground a number of visitors stand before a gate. Behind the barrier we see the outside space of the prison, behind this a corridor that runs along the cells and only behind this the cells themselves: four layers in total. The artist seems to have become confused himself by all these layers: the man who is being whipped stands in the second layer,

while the man who is hitting him (and the whip) is partly located in the third layer. The whip is placed in the centre of the composition. Everyone is reacting to its painful violence, each one in their own way.

The people in front of the gate try to persuade the man with the whip to stop his flogging by offering him money. The

woman in the middle must be the wife of the victim of the beating, as she is looking pleadingly at the woman to the right. The man at the left is already groping in his pouch as well. The fellow prisoner on the ground attempts to get out of the way of the whipping. To the right behind him Jesus is standing, who knows very well what it is like to be flagellated. He is literally standing at the side of the prisoners, of the sinners, while being portrayed as "Salvator Mundi," the Saviour of the World, with the globe in his hand. He blesses the whipped man and with him he blesses all the suffering people depicted in these seven panels. This is how he brings an end to the visual story and summons the spectator also to be a blessing for all who are in need.



Panel 7: Visiting Prisoners

The Master of Alkmaar owes his name to a series of seven panels painted in 1504 that depict the Seven Works of Mercy or Charity. The paintings, bearing a similarity to the works by Geertgen tot Sint Jans, are done in bright colours and their figures are drawn in an exaggeratedly caricatured manner. It has been proposed that this artist is identical to Cornelis Buys, who is in turn thought to have been a brother of the painter Jacob Cornelisz van Oostsanen. Cornelis Buys worked in Alkmaar from 1490 to 1524.

Marleen Hengelaar-Rookmaaker is editor in chief of [ArtWay](#) and is an Associate Fellow of the KLC. Her essay on The Seven Works of Mercy polyptych first appeared as an [ArtWay Visual Meditation](#) on October 8, 2017 and is used with her kind permission.

“Hinges of History”

HOW THE WAR IN UKRAINE HAS CHANGED THE WORLD

MICHAEL SHIPSTER

When I was serving as a junior diplomat in the British Embassy in Moscow in the early 1980s, the Soviet Union was sometimes rudely described as “Upper Volta with missiles”: a country we took seriously only because of one thing – its possession of nuclear weapons and capacity to destroy its enemies anywhere in the world if it was enraged or confronted.



Ludwig Meidner, *Apocalyptic Landscape* by vidalia_11 is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Sure, it was by far the largest country on the planet, with one-sixth of the land area; it possessed the largest and most powerful armed forces; it had sent the first man into space; it had created some of the most ambitious construction projects on the planet – the new trans-Siberian railway for example; it could justifiably claim to have won, at huge cost to itself, the decisive victory over Nazi Germany after Hitler invaded in the Second World War. From its citadel in the Kremlin, just across the Moscow River from my office in the British Embassy, the USSR radiated power to all corners of the world. With the largest and most ruthless security services, the formidable KGB, it intimidated and controlled its 250 million citizens across fifteen republics, independent in name only, that constituted the “Union of Soviet Socialist Republics” (“Four Words: Four Lies,” as diplomatic wags would sometimes say). Since the end of the Second World War it had controlled vassal states on its borders

through client communist parties modelled on the Soviet Communist Party. It had brutally intervened whenever those régimes stepped out of line or lost control over their citizens.

It excelled also in “soft power” (albeit a term not invented then). Across the non-aligned world, Moscow competed with Western capitalism for hearts and minds and worked tirelessly to promote socialist transformation. As a projection of its values and proof of the superiority of its own system, its athletes frequently topped the table of Olympic medals, and its ballet dancers and musicians captivated world audiences even as KGB chaperones tried to ensure none of its stars defected to the West while on tour.

Below the surface there were serious flaws and weaknesses in this military, economic and ideological powerhouse. Its vision and version of socialism was bankrupt and increasingly seen as a sham both at home and abroad. Its octogenarian, sclerotic and isolated leadership had run out of ideas and vision. Its economy was riddled with waste, corruption and false accounting. In terms of most international measures of GDP, it weighed in somewhere between Italy and France. But what it did have, and made other nominally more powerful and successful countries and blocs – the US and Western Europe for example – sit up and listen when there was disagreement and confrontation,



Yoshio Takahara, *Firestorm*

was nukes. Lots of them, more than anyone else's, the biggest and most destructive. The avoidance of conflict which might escalate into a full-blown nuclear war, endangering the planet itself, became during the Cold War one of the principal objectives of international relations and foreign policies of Western countries, including Britain.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the transition of its fifteen constituent republics into fully independent states in effect brought the Cold War to an end. We – the West – had won. Victory without war, something to celebrate. Those Soviet republics that nominally had nuclear weapons – Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan – voluntarily repatriated them to Russia in return for security and territorial guarantees. In terms of land area, Russia itself shrank to its smallest size in over three hundred years. In the 1990s it then descended into a period of economic chaos and bandit capitalism as crooks and former KGB officers stole and squabbled over the division of the spoils. Pensions were wiped out, millions of its people were impoverished, Russia's status in the world was diminished, its claims to offer a blueprint for economic development, social justice and human happiness utterly discredited. In the West we breathed a collective sigh of relief. Russia, the old bogeyman, had been humbled. We could continue to buy their oil and gas, build the pipelines that would bring the gas to us, and in return sell them the goods they needed and could not produce themselves. We would get richer; most Russians would get poorer. The new masters of Russia – the oligarchs – would be welcome to spend their obscene new wealth in our countries on mansions, yachts and football clubs, educate their children in our élite schools and we would get along fine. As long as their nukes were stored safely and were unlikely to be needed, we could sleep easy at night.

At least that was the hope. But history has a way of confounding the best intentions and most confident expectations. Now, in 2022, thirty years after the end of the Cold War, some of those old dragons have been roused from slumber. Following the invasion of Ukraine, we seem to be in the grip of a new Cold War, one just as dangerous. What on earth happened? How did we let things get so out of hand?

It did not take long after the start of the war (or "Special Military Operation" as Putin still insists on calling it) on 24 February for it to become apparent that this was one of those "hinges of history": a watershed moment, a sea-change, an event which quite simply changes the world,



Albin Egger-Lienz, *The Nameless*

after which things will never be the same. Of course, the invasion did not by itself change the world. It was more a culmination of growing dangers and tensions, apparent but not taken sufficiently seriously over the previous two decades, bringing unresolved historical perils into sharper focus. Those perils now threaten international relations, the world's economic outlook and indeed even the security and future of the planet itself.

In the last century we have seen similar such hinges of history, events that change the world but initially seem to take people by surprise. One undoubtedly was the assassination in 1914 of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Ferdinand, in Sarajevo. Few could have immediately predicted it would be the trigger for the outbreak six weeks later of the most destructive war the world had yet seen. Lasting four years, it devastated Europe, caused over forty million casualties and ushered in revolutionary change – including the Bolshevik coup in Russia in October 1917, the overthrow of the Tsarist empire and five years later the formation of the Soviet Union.

Another was the surprise Japanese air attack on the US fleet in Pearl Harbour in 1941, which brought the Americans into the Second World War. Among other consequences, it led four years later to the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan in 1945

to bring the devastating war in East Asia to an end, but also to usher in the nuclear age. Eighty years on, we are still living fearfully in the shadow of the mushroom



Akiko Takakura, *Thirsty woman catching black rain in her mouth*

cloud, with the risk of global nuclear conflict arguably at its highest level now, in the wake of the war in Ukraine, than at any time since the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962. It is not accidental – a phrase former Soviet leaders were often fond of using – that in one of Putin's recent menacing threats to the West, he should cite the US first use of atomic weapons against Japan as an historical precedent that would justify Russia's recourse to such weapons now in its war with Ukraine.

A third hinge of history – which contributed to where we now find ourselves in our confrontation with Russia – was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. At the time it was viewed as yet another Cold War gambit, capitalising on perceived Western weakness in pursuit of Moscow's long-cherished ambition to secure a warm-water port. But it turned out to be much more than that: a strategic miscalculation which hastened the collapse of the USSR only twelve years later. While few outside Russia mourned the Soviet Union's demise, Putin, the modern Russian Tsar, has described it as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century," and the "demise of historical Russia." Right there, we can see its critical significance in the context of the current deadly impasse in Ukraine.

So far the war has not exactly gone to plan for Putin and his generals. They expected Ukrainian resistance would swiftly collapse, the inconsequential President Zelensky would surely flee abroad and Kiev would soon be occupied, opening the way for a pliant puppet leader to be installed. The West would no doubt make a fuss, but would eventually accept the *fait accompli*, new "facts on the ground," as it had over the annexation of Crimea in 2014. There would no doubt be further sanctions against Russia, but these would have little long-term impact. Business – especially trade in energy and minerals – would continue. Russia would have decisively demonstrated its strength and importance in the world and go some way towards re-establishing its rightful



George Grosz, *Explosion* by Quentin Verwaerde is licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0

hegemony over the states of the former Soviet Union.

Instead, the government and people of Ukraine have shown spirited defiance. Moscow's plans to capture Kiev failed dismally. Western support for Ukraine and sanctions against Russia have been more effective and better coordinated than Moscow anticipated. Russian forces, especially unmotivated conscripts, have performed poorly in battle against determined Ukrainian regulars and volunteers fighting in defence of their homeland. Russian casualties have been higher, territorial gains less. Until the summer, a costly stalemate on the battlefield seemed to have been reached. But recently Ukrainian forces have gone on the offensive, retaking territory in the east of the country, and attacking bases and supply depots well behind Russian lines, including in Crimea. The most spectacular attack was on the Kerch Bridge connecting Crimea to Russia – a pet project of Putin himself – which stung Russian forces into launching dozens of ill-aimed missiles against targets in Ukraine.

Putin has meanwhile been forced to acknowledge that existing Russian forces are insufficient to achieve the original military aims and has announced plans to conscript an additional 300,000 into the army. This has prompted unprecedented protests against the war on the streets of Russian cities and the flight of thousands of young men to neighbouring countries like Georgia to escape the draft. In order to shore up its shaky hold over territory already seized, Russia organised hasty – and widely condemned as sham – referenda in the eastern provinces in favour of complete incorporation into Russia.

It was when Putin announced to the Russian people the results of these votes that he made the menacing warnings that further attempts by Ukraine, with the assistance of NATO, to retake its former territory would henceforth be regarded as an attack on Russia itself, and therefore liable to a full military response in defence of Russia's now enlarged sovereign territory. This was understood internationally as a clear sign that Russia might resort to the use of nuclear weapons. To underline the threat, Putin added "I'm not bluffing."

The war in Ukraine has already had profound and world-changing consequences. Beyond the devastation of the country itself there is the global economic impact through widespread recession and inflation, exacerbated by Western sanctions against Russia and use by Moscow of the energy tap in turn to put pressure on European countries dependent on Russia's oil and gas. Many countries, especially in Africa and the Middle East, critically reliant



Georg Kolbe, *Bellona (Goddess of War)*



Andrés Alarcón, *Dios Marte (God Mars)*

wonder then in 2022 Putin was confident he could again attack Ukraine with impunity.

Russia itself has already paid a heavy price for the war, with even bigger bills to come. Moscow downplays the economic impact of sanctions, hoping

on the import of Russian and Ukrainian grain, are facing massive food shortages, and price rises. This in turn will increase migratory pressure from poor countries to rich. We can also expect to see as a result of the war a fundamental restructuring of security arrangements and military deployments in Europe, including (to Moscow's dismay) the expansion of the NATO alliance; and a heightened risk of further conflicts elsewhere in the world, especially in East Asia (Taiwan) and the Middle East. After 24 February the world order has become more unstable and unpredictable.

So, back to the question: how have we got to this dangerous pass, with no clear exit and some truly catastrophic possible consequences? For the answer we must reach back several decades to the end of the Second World War and the ideological and military divide between East and West that followed. No one side has been able to claim consistent adherence to the UN-endorsed rules-based principles of non-aggression and non-interference. Soviet invasions of East Germany (1953), Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), Afghanistan (1979) attracted widespread condemnation at the time. But in turn Moscow could cite military actions by the US and the West: US intervention in Vietnam (1960s and early 1970s) and Central America in the 1980s; NATO peace-keeping (or interference, depending on your point of view) in the Balkans (1990s); and more recently the US invasion and régime change in Iraq (2003); military intervention (and again régime change) in Libya (2011) – to name only a few.

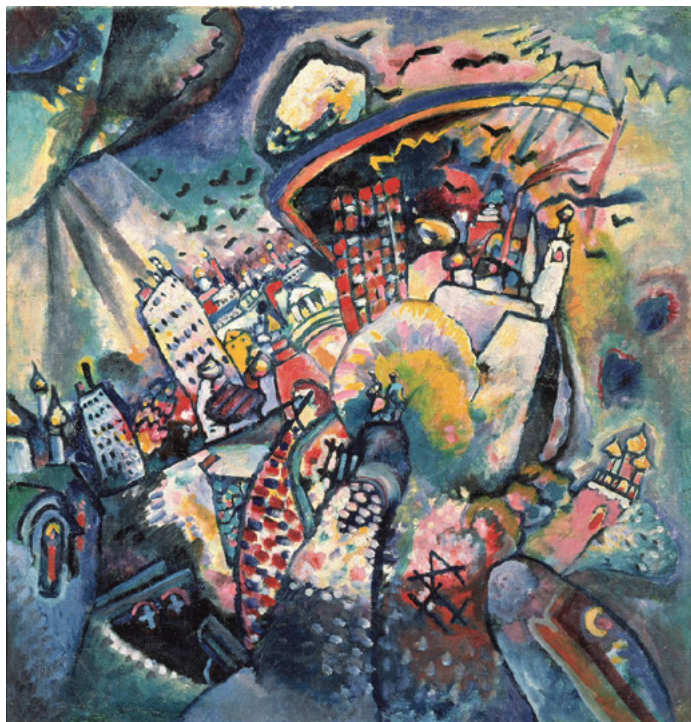
In 2008, as a riposte to Georgia's flirtation with NATO membership, Russia occupied parts of North Georgia. In 2014, after the overthrow by popular uprising of Moscow's Ukrainian ally President Yanukovich, Russia seized Crimea and invaded parts of Eastern Ukraine. When in 2015 Moscow intervened in Syria in support of the Assad régime, there was again a mixed international reaction, but no effective UN response; and despite the crossing of US and Western "red lines" (including use of chemical weapons against civilians) the West ducked punitive countermeasures. No

the West will feel even more pain, leading to willingness to break ranks and ease the penalties. So far the Western alliance seems to be holding firm and as time goes by sanctions will increasingly affect the lives and prospects of the Russian people. Meanwhile the "Russian brand" has suffered lasting damage. Whereas during the Soviet era it could at least make some claims for its brand of socialism, standing against the capitalist West, as an example for the rest of the world, now Russia can offer no such model. While some autocratic world leaders might envy Putin's brand of brutal authoritarianism, it is hardly an exemplar for other countries to follow.



Marc Chagall, *War*

Russia's reputation – already scarred by widespread institutional cheating in international sport, a reckless willingness to assassinate its political enemies abroad and lock them up at home, a refusal to abide by the central precepts of the UN Charter and a list of friends that reads like a roll call of the most repressive régimes in the world (China, Syria, Venezuela, Iran, Myanmar, North Korea) – continues to be degraded. Putin likes to tell the Russian people it is the West that is the true aggressor, having long harboured a visceral, even satanic hatred for Russia and



Wassily Kandinsky, *Moscow. Red Square*

its citizens, for its culture, identity, values and historical destiny. The war in Ukraine, he insists, with the support of the Russian Orthodox Church, is actually a holy war of liberation against Russia's fascist enemies, a wholly justified crusade to reclaim Russia's historical territorial identity, and right to security. Cowed and half believing their leader, most Russians so far seem to have supported him, or at least been reluctant openly to oppose his leadership. That may now change.

Speaking personally, I am saddened by the enmity that has been whipped up between Russia and the West. Although making friends was made deliberately difficult when I served in the Soviet Union, I have long admired the courage, creativity, resilience, and capacity for friendship of Russians I have got to know. I love the music of Rachmaninov, Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev. I love the richness of the Russian language and especially its greatest poets: Pushkin, Mandelstam, Pasternak, Akhmatova, Yevtushenko. Chekhov, Tolstoy and Grossman are among my favourite authors. Grossman's *Life and Fate*, one of the greatest novels of the twentieth century, is full of wisdom and humanity even while describing some of the worst horrors of the era in which he lived. It will be a heavy price for all of us if these voices and artistic works are eclipsed and disparaged by this savage and unnecessary war.

Predicting how it will end – for all wars do end – is not easy. Neither side is backing down or showing signs of weakening and no certain outcome is in sight. This has become a perilous conflict by proxy between Russia and the

West, determining not only the fate of Ukraine and the security of Russia's Eastern European neighbours, but also the future security architecture for the world and our prospects for tackling other long-term existential threats that we face, including climate change.

Putin is unlikely to have a change of heart, withdraw and offer the hand of friendship to his near neighbour. Equally unlikely is that Ukraine will accede to Russian occupation, still less accept annexation. In between are scenarios ranging from the manageable to the unthinkable: from Russia running out of military steam, Putin being replaced by a more pragmatic leader and a lasting deal being agreed; to Putin doubling down on his military gamble, ratcheting up the military stakes, holding the threat of nuclear conflict over Ukraine, NATO and the rest of the world for years to come. At this point the gloomier second scenario appears the more likely.

As a hinge of history, Putin's decision to invade Ukraine on 24 February therefore swings a heavy door. How far and fast it will swing and where it will come to rest remains to be seen. It may be one of history's ironies that the decision to invade Ukraine may turn out to have equally catastrophic consequences for the Russian state, Russia's position and influence in the world – and indeed for Putin himself – as the decision by his Soviet predecessors to invade Afghanistan 43 years ago.



René Magritte, *The Victory* by SL is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Whatever game Putin is playing – whether chess or poker, or indeed his beloved judo – by invading Ukraine, he and Russia have thrown down a high-stakes challenge and revived a new Cold War mindset, with acute dangers incubating in the wings. There can be no outright winners but whatever the outcome the world has been forever changed.

Winchester
October 2022

Michael Shipster, CMG, OBE, is a former British diplomat whose overseas postings included the Soviet Union, India, South Africa and the US.



5 REASONS TO READ *Ryszard* KAPUŚCIŃSKI

CRAIG G. BARTHOLOMEW TODAY

The theme of this edition of *The Big Picture* is journalism. Journalists are our storytellers, investigating what is going on in our cultures and reporting back to us. There is a good reason why the Victorian writer Thomas Carlyle called the press “The Fourth Estate,” the other three being the executive, the legislative, and the judicial branches of government. For a democratic society to flourish, a healthy press is essential. In a democracy government is by the representatives of the people, and the people need to know what is going on if they are to elect good leaders. One of the main ways in which we learn about all that is going on in our and other countries is the press, through the work of journalists.

In the West it is widely acknowledged that the Fourth Estate is in a crisis. Doubtless there are many reasons for this. The communications revolution has brought many benefits, but it has also facilitated the telling of stories by every and anyone, far too often without any investigation. As I note in my editorial, part of the unravelling of modernity has been the calling into question of the very possibility of “truth,” so that we are reduced to “your truth” and “my truth.” The internet and the media revolution have facilitated echo chambers in which we only hear what we want to hear and already believe. In such a context of *the surface* (see Jean Baudrillard on postmodernism) and *the instant* there is less and less room for the costly, slow, hard work of investigation.

The instant and the uninvestigated are the enemies of the truth. The release of the redacted affidavit justifying the search of Mar-a-Lago is surely newsworthy but there is something disturbing about major news outlets reporting on it even as they try to read it. The instant also plays to the trivial and the titillating. Do we really need endless reports either slagging off the Sussexes or celebrating them? The right wing responds to the search of Mar-a-

Lago also revealed the danger of the uninvestigated. Seeing politicians and others spreading all sorts of conspiracies without any evidence or investigation is downright dangerous.

We desperately need healthy, investigative journalism but clearly it is not a priority in



Marta Shmatava, *Untitled*

our cultural moment. If we are to retrieve investigative journalism, we need exemplars that we can hold up to future generations, encouraging them to do likewise. In this piece I commend to you Ryszard Kapuściński (1932–2007) as one such exemplar. Here are five reasons for reading Kapuściński’s readily available books.

1. BECAUSE HE IMMERSSED HIMSELF IN WHAT HE WROTE ABOUT

Kapuściński learnt from the Polish born social anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski that “to judge something, you have to be there,” what we might call journalism through immersion. Read any of Kapuściński’s books and you will soon realize the extent to which he went to understand situations on the ground. His most well-known book, *The Emperor: Downfall of an Autocrat* (Penguin, 1983), for example, emerged from his settling into Addis Ababa to locate and interview the courtiers of the recently deposed Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie. After the revolution, when most Westerners were getting out, Kapuściński went back in, located an old acquaintance who had been an official in the court, and through him

found survivors who had served in the royal court. The result is that, as Neal Ascherson says in his "Introduction," *The Emperor* is "not simply the history of the fall of the



MODERN CLASSICS
Ryszard Kapuściński
The Emperor

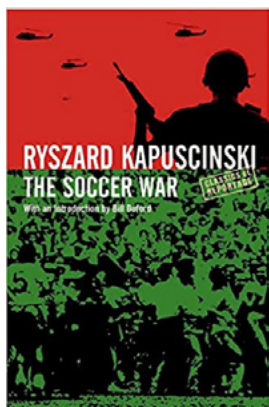
Ethiopian crown. It is something much rarer in our own epoch: the anatomy of an imperial court, the dying years of a monarchy as they were seen by courtiers" (viii). If you want to taste absolute rule, here is the book that will serve up the meal.

Amidst the renaissance of authoritarianism in our day

there are lessons to be learned. Haile Selassie presided over all promotions at every level in his kingdom. Describing the rituals of such promotions, Kapuściński writes: "A special human bond, constrained by the rules of hierarchy, but a bond nevertheless, was born from this moment spent with the Emperor, when he announced the assignment and gave his blessing, from which bond came the single principle by which His Majesty guided himself when raising people or casting them down: the principle of loyalty" (31). If this sounds oddly familiar, it should.

2. BECAUSE HE CELEBRATED AND TRANSCENDED THE LIMITATIONS OF HIS CONTEXT

I can imagine a conversation between a teenager and her parents about her desire to become an investigative journalist. "But there is no demand for them anymore!" "How will you earn a decent salary?" "It's far too dangerous!" Kapuściński is instructive in this regard. He was Polish and he attended university in Warsaw when Stalinism was at its height. When you think of the propaganda and utter brutality of the Stalin era and the travel limits for a Polish journalist it is surprising that he ever achieved a fraction of what he did.



In an astonishing way Kapuściński celebrated and transcended his limits. He reported on both the local (Poland) – he wrote extensively about Pinsk, the town where he was born – and the global. He says of Pinsk that "this very provincial town, this town of dirt roads, cut off from everything, was in fact an

extraordinary cosmopolitan gathering" (*The Soccer War*, Granta, 1990, 235). He could not travel and report from the West, but he could travel in the majority world and this he did with a vengeance, personally witnessing some 27 revolutions. As he delightfully notes, "I was full of stories" (*The Soccer War*, 239).

3. BECAUSE HE IMMERSSED HIMSELF IN "THE ORDINARY"

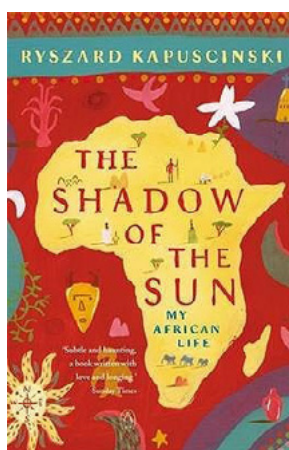
Nowadays travel can be – and is designed to be – simply more of the same Western style tourist hotels and consumer culture. Not so for Kapuściński. In the epigraph to his *The Shadow of the Sun: My African Life* (Penguin, 2001), he writes: "I lived in Africa for several years. I first went there in 1957. I returned whenever the opportunity arose. I travelled extensively, avoiding official routes, palaces, important personages, and high-level politics. Instead, I opted to hitch rides on passing trucks, wander with nomads through the desert, be the guest of peasants of the tropical savannah."



Eddie Kang, *In the middle of* by See-ming Lee (SML) is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0

The result is that through his writings we get a real sense of what the life of "the other" is like. His writings are full of real people with all the challenges and joys of their lives. What he uncovers is noteworthy. Kapuściński helped me, for example, get a sense of what real poverty is like. In his neighbourhood in

Lagos was a solitary woman whose only possession was a pot. She survived by purchasing beans on credit, cooking, and selling them. One night, Kapuściński was woken by a piercing cry. The woman's pot had been stolen. Reflecting on such theft he writes, "To be robbed is, first and foremost, to be humiliated, to be made a fool of. But with time I came to



understand that seeing a robbery as a humiliation and an affront is an emotional luxury. Living amid the poverty of my neighbourhood, I realized that theft, even a petty theft, can be a death sentence" (*The Shadow of the Sun*, 111).

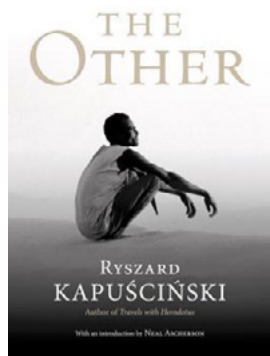
4. BECAUSE HE SHOWS US OURSELVES AND THE GIFT OF THE OTHER

You could never accuse Kapuściński of being a romantic. His immersion shows us human life in all its brokenness and glory. There are harrowing accounts in his writings, but there are also moments of wonderful humanity. As he writes, "There is so much crap in this world, and then, suddenly, there is honesty and humanity" (*The Soccer War*, 82).

Anthropologically, we might say that his accounts are thick rather than the sort of thin accounts of people and events that we have grown accustomed to. An important element in Kapuściński's reflections in *The Other* is that it is through encounters with the other that we get to know ourselves: "Others ... are the mirror in which I look at myself, and which tells me who I am" (*The Other*, Verso, 2008, 44–45).

A penetrating insight of Kapuściński's is that encounter with the other need not involve collision but can open out into *exchange*. He tells the remarkable story of the juxtaposition of conflict and exchange during the civil war in Liberia in the early 1990s. The war front was a river joined by a bridge with a market on the government side. The shooting would continue unabated until midday and then, in the afternoon, peace would come, with the rebels crossing the bridge to shop at the market! They would hand their weapons to government representatives while they shopped and upon returning would receive back their weapons (*The Other*, 20–21).

One can, for example,



juxtapose the loneliness that is pervasive in the West with African traditions of hospitality. In Dar es Salaam, Kapuściński writes of the hospitality he experienced. Neighbours started to invite him to their homes. He writes, "The saying 'Guest in the house, God in the house' has a nearly literal meaning here. The hosts prepare a long time for the occasion. They clean, they cook the best possible meal" (*The Shadow of the Sun*, 68). Here is a gift that we need in the West.

5. BECAUSE HE UNDERSTOOD JOURNALISM AS MISSION

Ascherson observes that "not many of his readers have absorbed Kapuściński as a thinker, as an intellectual who enjoyed philosophical theorising and ethical reflection on the margins of Catholic theology" (*The Other*, 3). Kapuściński was deeply influenced by Father Józef Tischner, a Kraków theologian close to John Paul II. Tischner, like John Paul II, drew on the Jewish philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, who positioned ethics and the face of the other at the heart of his philosophy. Kapuściński, too, is deeply influenced by Levinas, stressing the importance of the face of the other, of our responsibility for the other and that we encounter God in such encounters.

At the end of an interview in *The Soccer War*, Kapuściński reflects on why he does what he does. He answers: "Mine is not a vocation, it's a mission. I wouldn't subject myself to these dangers if I didn't feel there was something

overwhelmingly important – about history, about ourselves – that I felt compelled to get across. This is more than journalism" (*The Soccer War*, 244). Indeed it is. Here Kapuściński fingers that about journalism which is holy. It is a vocation, a sacred calling, vitally important for the well-being of our societies. It would be wonderful if KLC could contribute to the emergence of a new generation of investigative journalists like Kapuściński, and healthy, investigative news outlets. Our lives and those of our neighbours may depend on it.

Craig Bartholomew is the Director of the KLC.



Natalia Sergeevna Goncharova, *The Bridge*

SHOULD CHRISTIANS WATCH HORROR FILMS?

It's a question I'm continually asked, especially every year around Halloween. I somewhat agree with the affirmative answers others have given: that by focusing on the darkness, there is opportunity to shine a light; that many horror films are built upon an undergirding of morality. But I wonder if there's a way to push this defence a bit further. Might there be a crucial connection between how the best horror films function and a Christian understanding of fear?

Let's start with that Christian definition, as taken from a 1933 Dietrich Bonhoeffer sermon on Matthew 8:23–27, titled “Overcoming Fear.”

Fear is, somehow or other, the archenemy itself. It crouches in people's hearts. It hollows out their insides, until their resistance and strength are spent and they suddenly break down. Fear secretly gnaws and eats away at all the ties that bind a person to God and to others, and when in a time of need that person reaches for those ties and clings to them, they break and the individual sinks back into himself or herself, helpless and despairing, while hell rejoices.

This grim homily sounds about right, whether we're talking about the world-shaking fears Bonhoeffer faced

in relation to Nazi Germany, the universal fear of illness which he later references, or simply the primal fears we're seemingly born with. (Say, of the dark.) Strikingly, Bonhoeffer doesn't deny those fears, but acknowledges them, just as Matthew 8 acknowledges the storm. And this is not an isolated incident in Scripture.

The Bible doesn't balk at fear. Scripture is wide awake to horror, from the bloodlust of Cain to the zombies of Ezekiel to the more existential despair of the psalms of lament. And so it seems to me that the expression of fear is a more Christian response than the repression of it. Horror in the Bible exists partly to evoke a darkness that will provide context for God's shining light, but also to acknowledge the deep-seated terror (of violence, of mortality, of despair) we experience in this broken world. To sweep away this fear runs against the grain of the Bible. (Bonhoeffer again: “Those who would try to keep up their pride, as if all this had

nothing to do with them, as if they didn't understand what it's all about, would hardly be human.”) If we deny fear, we can't defeat it. So horror helps us take that crucial first step of confrontation.

Consider that the best horror movies aren't, at heart, simply about menacing figures with sharp instruments. Rather, horror helps us process the things we're fearful about in cinematically heightened ways: sexuality (*It Follows*); parenthood (*The Babadook*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *Eraserhead*); race (*Night of the Living Dead*); mortality (*The Fly*); mental instability (*The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*); and religion (*Night of the Hunter*). And, of course, horror movies help us process the debilitating fear of fear itself (*The Blair Witch Project*).

Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* – one of my favourite fright flicks and very likely the only horror masterpiece to be directed by a Wheaton College alumnus – is essentially about the fear of falling asleep. When heroine Nancy Thompson (Heather Langenkamp) finally succumbs to sleep – exposing herself to Freddy Krueger (Robert

Englund), the clawed killer who haunts teens' dreams – she represents the vulnerability and sense of abandonment that is part of the human condition. Often we feel this most acutely when we lie unconscious in our beds, exposed and alone.

WES CRAVEN,
DIETRICH BONHOEFFER AND A
**Christian Defence
of Horror**
JOSH LARSEN

All fearfulness is rooted

in one fact: a deep uneasiness over our separation from God, and the broken world that is the result. To that, the gospel has an answer, described quite eloquently by Bonhoeffer: “We name the One who overcame fear and led it captive in the victory procession, who nailed it to the cross and committed it to oblivion; we name the One who is the shout of victory of humankind redeemed from the fear of death – Jesus Christ, the Crucified and Living One.”

Admittedly, the horror genre is too focused on fear to always make room for this ecstatic Good News. But maybe that's what Hollywood musicals are for.

Josh Larsen is editor of *Think Christian* and host/producer of the TC podcast. He is also the co-host of *Filmspotting* and author of *Movies Are Prayers*. You can connect with him on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Letterboxd](#). The article above first appeared on [thinkchristian.net](#) and is republished here with permission.

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FILM REVIEWS

The Mauritanian



The Mauritanian (2021) is based on Mohamedou Ould Slahi's bestseller *Guantánamo Diary*, a record of his fourteen

years in the US prison at Guantánamo.

Terrorism is evil and that is unequivocally true of 9/11. However, one of the awful side effects of evil is that it too often generates an ongoing cycle of injustice. Under pressure from the US, Slahi was picked up by the Mauritanian police and handed over eventually to the US authorities, who extradited him to Guantánamo. Alas, his time there coincided with Donald Rumsfeld's approval of "enhanced interrogation techniques." This searing narrative exposes the profound moral ambiguities of Guantánamo and the harrowing experience there of Slahi.

Jodie Foster, as we have come to expect, provides an excellent performance as his lawyer, outflanked only by Tahar Rahim's deeply human portrayal of Slahi. As is common knowledge, prisoners at Guantanamo were held in inhuman circumstances without being charged or brought to trial, and torture was pervasive.

Stuart Couch was the military lawyer appointed to prosecute Slahi. A Christian, there is a riveting moment in the film where a church baptism confronts Couch with his responsibility to renounce evil and injustice. A reminder, and we do need it, of the power of ritual and the sacraments.

footage of Slahi and are also told that the USA has never apologised for the abuses of Guantánamo. Indeed, some forty prisoners are still held there. The eruption of evil in terrorism is truly terrible, but so too is it when the abused become abusers. A must-see movie.

The Bees are Coming

I sometimes reflect on the courage of investigative journalists who are committed to unearthing the truth. In Russia good investigative journalism can be a death sentence, and we have seen the lengths that President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus is willing to go to in order to silence opposition, with his forced diversion of a Ryanair plane in order to arrest dissident journalist Roman Protasevich. Sadly, it is not only in such authoritarian states that good journalists are in danger.

In countries where good journalists are most needed, their lifespan can be short. The murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi was one of the most brazen and ruthless of such murders. The searing and harrowing story of his carefully planned assassination is well told in Jonathan Rugman's *The Killing in the Consulate: Investigating the Life and Death of Jamal Khashoggi* (Simon and Schuster, 2019), and now in the documentary film *The Dissident*. Rugman concludes: Khashoggi "was a complicated man with a tangled private life, from the

In the conclusion we see actual

radical Islamism of his youth, to Saudi government insider, to outspoken critic of the kingdom's young crown

prince in the pages of a leading American newspaper; and it was surely this final incarnation as a brave journalist that the killers could not forgive" (315). Every adult should watch *The Dissident*.

The Trump administration refused to declassify the US National Intelligence report on the murder and former President Trump vetoed Congress's attempt to curtail arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Under the Biden administration the report has been declassified and is now readily available on the internet. The report is short and clear, and I encourage you to read it. Its conclusion is as follows: "We assess that Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman [MBS] approved an operation in Istanbul, Turkey to capture or kill Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi." To date no major action has been taken by the West against MBS.

Saudi Arabia has become a leader in cyber attacks, apparently using Pegasus spyware purchased from Israel. Khashoggi's friend Omar

Abdulaziz refers to the cyber attacks as flies and responded by launching a counterattack of "the bees," e-messages endeavouring to counter the disinformation.

One longs for the day when justice will roll down like torrents of water.

Craig Bartholomew is the Director of the KLC.



Jamal Khashoggi,
March 2018

On Being Finite

DAVID McILROY

When I was younger, I wanted to be the lead singer in a band, I wanted to play sport for England, I wanted to act in plays, I wanted to get top marks in my studies, and I wanted to date and eventually marry a beautiful woman. One of the shocks of growing up was discovering that I couldn't fulfil all those dreams – that lack of time and limitations on my talents meant only two of them came true.

What I needed to learn was that there is more than one big “F” in the Christian life. The big “F” I knew about was **Fallenness**. I knew that I was full of sin, I knew that my best efforts were tainted by mixed motives, and I knew that I needed to depend on the grace of God in order to do any good.

But it has taken me a long time to understand the big “F” of **Finitude**. To accept and embrace the truth that to be a creature is to be finite, and that's a good thing. Being finite means that I do not have enough time to invest in all the things I am interested in, I do not have enough energy to give to all the people I want to support, I do not have

enough capacity to meet all the needs that I see.

What is more, the fact that I am finite is a good thing. The Genesis narrative repeatedly affirms that the things-in-representation that the triune, relational God made, were good. There is a goodness to the difference between land and water, which we enjoy when we listen to a stream, swim in a river or dive into an ocean. There is a goodness to what I experience when I stroke my dog, ride a horse, or watch the birds flying in my garden. Being finite and embodied gives us unique, particular experiences as well as creating space for our relationships with one another.

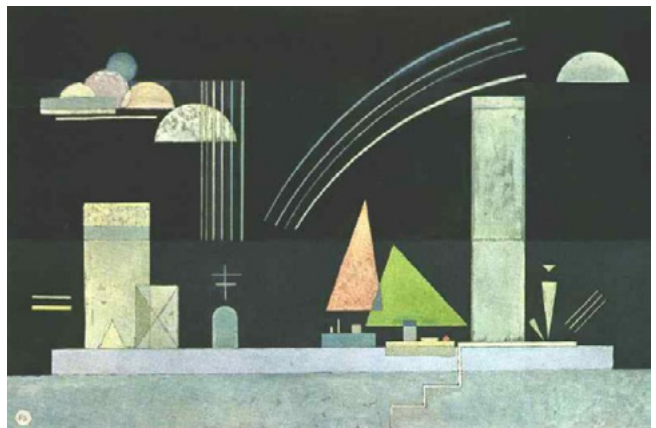
Being finite is a good thing because our limitations are an important reason why we need one another. To be a finite human being is part of what it means for us to be made for community. Because I am finite, because I have only a limited amount of energy and a fixed number of hours in the day, I need others to do not only the things I cannot do as well as them but also to do some things I can do well in order to free me to do other things I can do even better.

Being finite is a good thing because it places limits on the ability of any one human being to do evil. Our embodiment is part of the reason why human beings are neither wholly good like the angels nor wholly bad like the demons. Our embodiment both gives us appetites which can be overindulged and also means that we can exhaust our capacity to indulge our appetites.

Being finite is a good thing because it is a reminder



Waldemar Flaig, *Cemetery with Chapel*



Wassily Kandinsky, *At Rest*

that I am not a saviour. God has already saved the world through Jesus. God does not need to do so all over again. Because I am finite, I cannot do everything, I cannot control everything, I cannot fix everything. I am not called to do so.

Being finite is therefore a divinely ordained aspect of our createdness. It is infralapsarian, that is to say, it is part of the original design of creation before the fall. Human beings were always meant to inhabit individual bodies, to form communities, to occupy particular places, and to relate to one another, to creatures, and to particular spaces in unique and individual ways.

Where our finitude and our fallenness intersect is this: if we forget that we are finite, we fail to recognise that we are **Fragile**. The brilliant Scottish preacher Robert Murray McChesney who graduated from Edinburgh University in 1827 aged just 14, and who was leading a mega-church of over 1,000 people by age 23, worked himself to death by age 29. As he was dying, he said: "God gave me a message to deliver and a horse to ride. Alas, I have killed the horse and now I cannot deliver the message."

One of the things I find hardest to accept is that I cannot always be at my best. If I am tired, I get grumpy. If I am exhausted, I make more mistakes. If I work too hard, I sleep badly. If I take on too much I run out of time and let people down. If I try to control everything, I will end up either stressed out or manipulating others. If I neglect my need for rest, my health will collapse.

Denying that we are fragile is an aspect of Fallenness. It is a refusal to accept that only God needs to have a God's eye view. It is a rejection of the good gift of sabbath, of our need to rest and to enjoy, rather than to solve and to control.

Those of us who are activists by nature are particularly prone to denying that we need to rest in order to serve well. Apart from very specific and extreme contexts, we are not



Johannes Resen Steenstrup, *Landscape with a Boy and Two Horses at a Lake*

called to sacrifice our health in the service of the mission of God. We are not called to do so because we are not the saviour; only Jesus is. The saviour complex carries a high price tag in the medium term. Those who are manipulated and controlled are denied their freedom in Christ. Others are exploited to meet the saviour's needs. And the pressure on the saviours themselves becomes unsustainable. Either their health breaks or they engage in some reckless or deliberate act that torpedoes their ministry (and sometimes both).

Even if we don't suffer from the saviour complex, or have managed to overcome it before it is too late, if we forget that we are finite, we will fail to be **Fulfilled**. Fulfilment comes not from trying to solve all the world's problems, but knowing what we have been called to do and what we have been equipped to do. Fulfilment comes from focusing our finite energies on the limited good which we as fragile, fallen creatures can do through the empowering of the Holy Spirit who equips us to follow Christ to the glory of God the Father.

David McLroy is Chair of Trustees at the KLC. He is a practising barrister and author of Ransomed, Redeemed, and Forgiven: Money and the Atonement. First appearing at [Theology of Law](#).



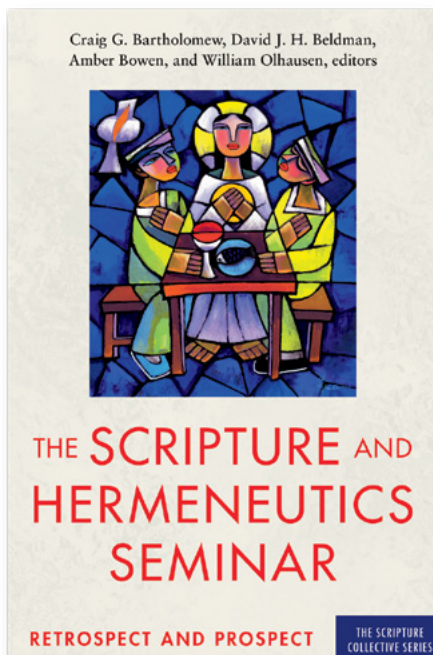
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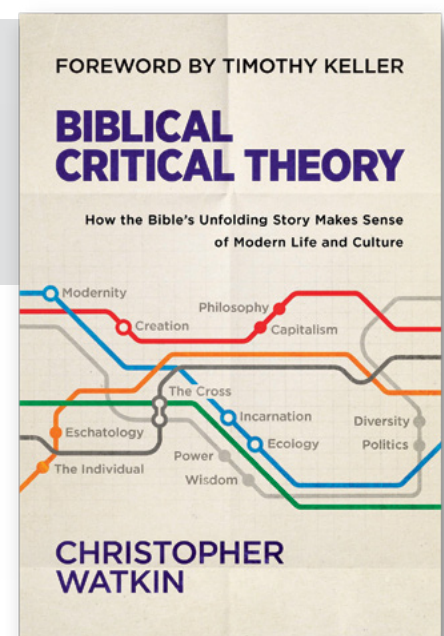
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