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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 see our website, kirbylaingcentre.co.uk.

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

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COVER ARTWORK

If Shannon Hoffman's photograph of a bearded vulture's egg is dismissed as a cliché, albeit a beautiful one, it would be a shame: In recording her story (see page 16), Shannon has provided us with a striking visual rendition of the theme for this edition of *The Big Picture*. The fragile egg nestled in strong, yet sensitive, hands speaks of our capacity as custodians of nature, and nature's reciprocal nurturing of us is conveyed by the symbolism of the egg: sustenance, fertility, new life and, beyond this life, resurrection – thus also hope. What is unexpected and delightful is the origin of the gold colour of the egg, proclaiming its preciousness: oxide in mud stains the parents' breast feathers and is transferred to the egg during brooding – that most potent act of nurturing.

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KLC, Margaret Beaufort Institute, 12-14 Grange Road, Cambridge, CB3 9DU.

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The Nurture of Nature

EDITORIAL BY CRAIG G. BARTHOLOMEW

We all know the story of Jonah, but, do you know how it ends? With two profound words in the Hebrew, namely “and many beasts/animals/cattle.” God’s reason for compassion – there is a play on the word חַיִּים (to have compassion) in Jonah 4:9–12 – is the many ignorant Ninevites and the many animals. Unlike Jonah, we are called to be compassionate like God, and it is instructive that his compassion extends to all of his creation, including our fellow creatures.

During the pandemic many of us found nature a source of solace and nurture. I watched many episodes of *The Dodo* on YouTube, which tells the fascinating stories of human-animal interaction. I also found my small garden a blessing and not least the pair of blackbirds who each year bring their newborn to spend many days in the protection of the borders of my garden, often rushing out to receive a worm from one of their parents. Nature bears the imprint of its maker, and thus, not surprisingly, it can be nurturing.

However, there is a deliberate double entendre in our theme for this edition of *The Big Picture*. Just as nature nurtures us, so we too are called to nurture nature. Being granted rule or dominion over the creatures (Genesis 1:28) is not a pretext for exploitation and plunder, but a call to relate to our fellow creatures as does God, namely with compassion.

Intriguingly, animals may have been among the first witnesses to the birth of Jesus, bearing in mind that he was placed by Mary in a manger, a trough for animals (Luke 2:7). It is the doctrine of creation which alerts us to the place of humans, all other creatures, and the environment, in God’s economy. Karl Barth was ahead of his time in recognising this:

man is certainly not His [God’s] only creation. Man is only *a* creature and not *the* creature. The creature of God is the totality, the whole cosmos of the reality posited by Him and distinct from Him, in the plenitude of which man is only a component part, very inconsiderable in some important ways and deeply dependent on creaturely elements and factors which are greatly superior to him.... Besides man there are other creatures posited by God and distinct from God, with their own dignity and right,

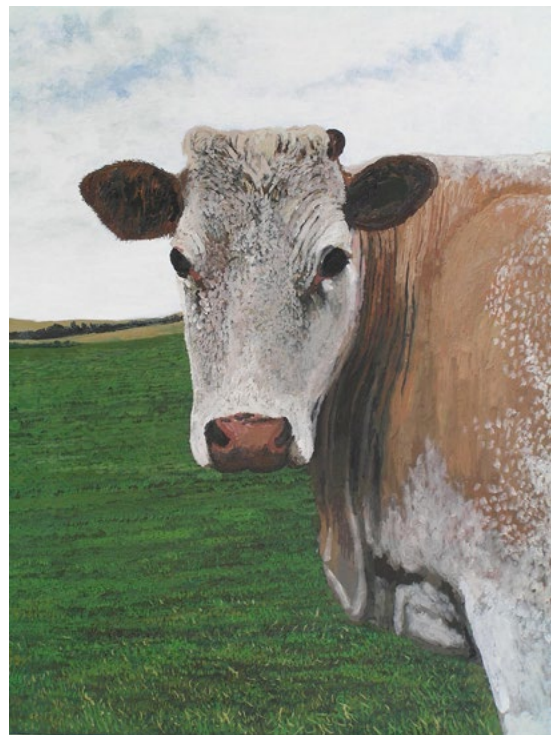
and enveloped in the secret of their own relation to their Creator. Man is a creature in the midst of others which were directly created by

God and exist independently of man. (CD 3.2, 3–4)

Barth anticipates recent concerns with animal rights in his assertion that slaughterhouses should have written over their entrances, in fiery letters, Paul’s reference to the whole creation groaning in anticipation of its redemption (Rom 8:22). Groaning is an appropriate metaphor for the way in which so many animals are exploited in the food chains of our cultures. In the West our major concern is that food should be plentiful, cheap and pristine, with little thought about how it got to us. If we are to be like God, then such an approach is unacceptable. As possible, we need to know where our food comes from and that animals are well treated and humanely slaughtered. The next edition of *TBP* will focus on food and this topic will be addressed there.

Humans are unique amidst God’s creatures. This brings power but also responsibility, and responsibility, not least, for the well-being of our fellow creatures. They are not human, but they are sentient, and as we nurture them we will be surprised, and ourselves nurtured, by their response.

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



Alan Storkey, *Emley Moor Cow*

Christianity is certainly all about conversion and church, but it is far more than that. It opens out onto all of life and is integrally and gloriously related to spheres of life such as agriculture, politics, immigration, family, education, entertainment, business and economics, art, sexuality, etc. Few things would help us make these vital connections more than a rediscovery of the doctrine of creation. Why?

1. BECAUSE CREATION IS THE FOUNDATIONAL ACT OF THE DIVINE ECONOMY.

The most foundational Christian doctrine is that of God: from him, through him and to him are all things. However, we would never know about this trinitarian God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, were it not for creation. John 1 captures the comprehensiveness of creation when John writes of the Word that apart from him nothing came into existence that has come into existence. Only God is uncreated; everything else is part of

Genesis 1:1–2:3 is a truly remarkable text. We do not know exactly when it was written or by whom, but in all likelihood it was crafted during the history of OT Israel. We know that Israel's history was tumultuous and in such a context it is remarkable that this text should emerge with its sixfold repetition of God seeing that what he had made is good and then his reflection on the sixth day that all that he had made was very good! Why this repetition? It is not so much to alert us to God seeing as *to encourage us to see the world the way God does*. The creation in all its myriad dimensions is declared very good by God and we ought to think of it in the same way.

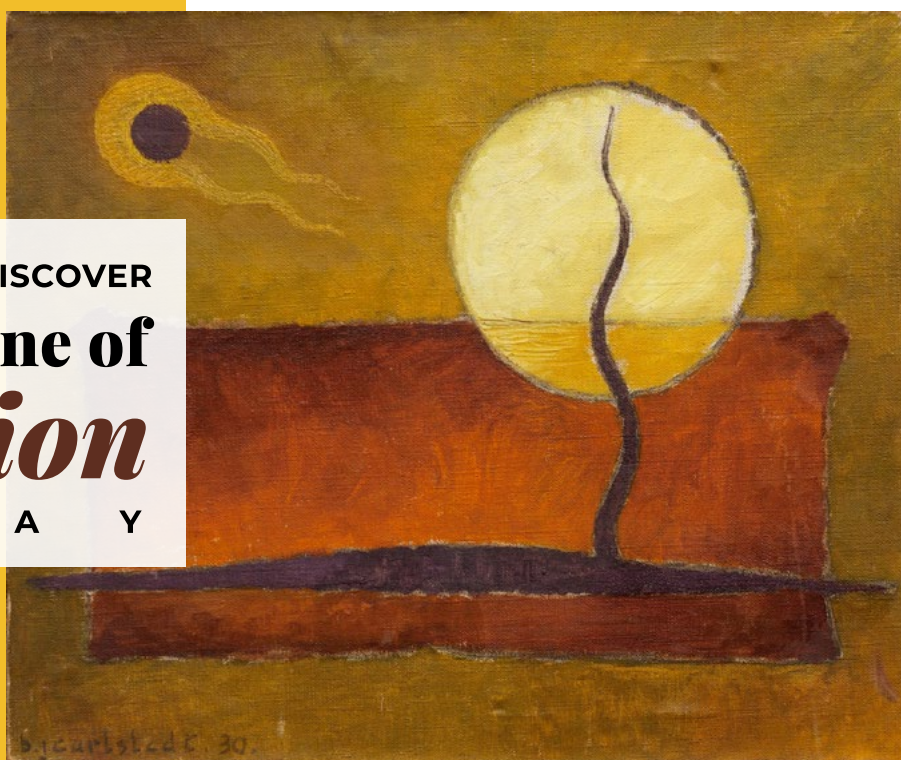
This has all sorts of practical implications. The “goods” of creation are what they are because God has made them so

5 REASONS TO REDISCOVER the Doctrine of *Creation* T O D A Y

CRAIG G. BARTHOLOMEW

the creation. We only know about God because we too are part of that creation.

One way to see the extent of this doctrine is to work through Genesis 1:1–2:3, making a list of everything that God creates. The result is astonishing. It includes the heavens and the earth, day and night, light and darkness, time and history, the three great places of earth, sky and sea, the inhabitants of the three great places, and humankind in God's image. God brings his creation into existence *ex nihilo*, leads it through a differentiation process of the six “days,” furnishing it, as it were, so that it is the perfect home for human beings and the many other creatures. This is what we mean when we speak of “creation,” summed up in many NT passages as “all things.”



Birger Carlstedt, *The Creation of the World*

and thus they do not need utilitarian justification. Take the gifts of imagination and art for example. Hans Rookmaaker (see *TBP* 03) understood the implications of creation when he titled one of his books *Art Needs No Justification*. There is certainly value in asking what art is for, but we do not need to justify imaginative art and literature in terms of evangelism, for example.

In some theatre productions the stage changes in new acts. This is never the case in the great drama of the Bible. Creation remains the great stage for the divine economy throughout all acts of the drama. Remove the creation and there would, for example, be no humans to participate in

that drama. Furthermore, God's declaration of it as very good signals his commitment to his handiwork and calls us to explore what he will do with it after rebellion and sin pollute so much of it as a result of the fall.

2. BECAUSE "NATURE" IS PART OF THE CREATION.

The theme of this edition of *The Big Picture* is the nurture of nature. "Nature" is used here to refer to the environment and the animals that are part of it. God's creation bears all the marks of his handiwork and so it is not surprising that humans should experience it as nurturing. Psalm 19:1–6, for example, reflects on the skies and the sun and exclaims that they speak continually, proclaiming the work of God's hands! James Mays captures this well in his commentary:

The heavens, says the psalm, do what the congregation does in its praise. The congregation enumerates the mighty works of God and proclaims them as the glory of God (see Psalm 29). The heavens by being the work of God's hand do the same. In their marvellous beauty and expanse, they are the praise of God. Day and night are the creation of God (Genesis 1). Day speaks to day; night gives knowledge to night, all in ringing choral antiphony. There is no speech, no words, no voice that is heard. Yet their voice goes out into the whole world. It is all very mysterious and marvellous. The visible becomes vocal. Seeing is experienced as hearing. The imagination is in the midst of an unending concert sung by the universe to the glory of God. (James L. Mays, *Psalms*. Interpretation [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011])

Little wonder that as the pandemic forced us to stop, many of us found nature coming into fresh focus as wonderfully nurturing. Some of the stories in this edition of *TBP* bear ample witness to this.

We can and should differentiate nature from humans in this way, but it is vital to remember that both nature and humans are part of the creation. We do well, therefore,

to explore the connection between nature and humans. The connections are multiple. For example, in order to survive, we eat the world! (See Leon Kass, *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfection of Our Human Nature* [London: Macmillan, 1994].) What is important to note is that just as nature nurtures us, so we are called to nurture nature. There is a deliberate double entendre in our theme for this edition of *TBP*.

"Dominion," or what I call royal stewardship, in Genesis 1:28 is not a pretext for exploitation of the creation but a call to humans to use their real but limited power to care for the creation and to develop its potentials to God's glory. Being human brings with it responsibility and we are not free to do with the creation as we like. Imagine if a great artist left us an amazing piece of his work. Would we feel it appropriate to draw graffiti on it and let our children use it



Unknown Korean artist, Eight-Fold Screen Painting of the Sun, Moon and Peach Trees

for their art endeavours? Of course not. How much more then should we be deeply committed to the well-being and flourishing of all aspects of the world as God's creation. Environmental concern and animal welfare flow straight out of the doctrine of creation (cf. Jonah 4:11).

I confess that I find the science of climate change a challenge. What does make perfect sense to me is that if we spew pollution endlessly into the biosphere, spill toxic chemicals and an endless amount of plastic into our oceans and rivers, we fail to honour the world as God's creation and should not be surprised if there is a kickback effect from the creation, resisting such degrading treatment (on climate change see Bob Goudzwaard and Craig G. Bartholomew,

Beyond the Modern Age: An Archaeology of Contemporary Culture [Downers Grove, ILL: IVP Academic, 2017], chapter 11).

The South African sculptor, Gert Swart, spent nearly a decade of his career carving trees. He would, for example, take thick railway sleepers and carve them back into trees, a marvellous reminder, amongst other things, of where our wood comes from and our responsibility to care for the creation.



Photographs of *Tree Form* (details) by Gert Swart: Marit Greenwood

3. BECAUSE WE WILL MISUNDERSTAND CHRIST, REDEMPTION AND SALVATION IF WE DO NOT GRASP CREATION.

Redemption and salvation are part of the rich and great vocabulary of the Christian faith. They are, if you like, our gracious inheritance. They absolutely include personal salvation, but we trivialise them and fail to see the enormity of our inheritance when we reduce them to this. Ola Tjørhom resists such reductionism. He writes, "The Father is the creator, the Son is the ultimate liberator of creation, and the Holy Spirit conveys life to all created beings. Surely a misplaced confusion of creation and redemption must be avoided." Indeed, but what is the relationship between redemption or salvation and creation? Tjørhom perceptively answers: "Actually, without creation there is nothing to save – creation is the 'stuff' of salvation." (Ola Tjørhom, *Embodied Faith: Reflections on a Materialist Spirituality* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 33, 36).

Above we have focused on Genesis 1 in particular. However, the doctrine of creation is assumed and present throughout the Bible and certainly is pervasive in the NT. One way to

access this is to do an online search of the Bible for the expression "all things," and then to explore the contexts in which it occurs. My search of the NIV online reveals ten occurrences in the OT and thirty-six in the New. Nearly all of these relate to creation in one way or another.

"All things" occurs, for example, three times in Colossians 1:15–20, one of the great Christological and ecclesial passages of the NT, a reminder that a reduced doctrine of creation will result in a reduced and impoverished view

of Christ. Too often our Christ is too small!

Passages like this one in Colossians will, by means of creation (see vv. 15–17), massively expand our view of the Son, *and* invite us to rethink the church because the Son in whom all things were created and hold together is also the head of the church, his body (v. 18). (On the relationship between Christ and creation see the marvellous book by Colin Gunton, *Christ and Creation* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005].)

How might we rethink church in the light of such a passage? Abraham Kuyper makes an insightful distinction between the institutional church and the organic church. The institutional church is what we generally think of as church: buildings, offices, staff, gatherings for worship and Bible studies, etc. The organic church is the life of the people of God as a whole, lived out

in all spheres of created life. A rich doctrine of the church needs both elements, and the doctrine of creation compels us in this direction. Of course, we then need to think hard about how institutional church relates to our lives outside church and how our lives outside church relate to what we do when we gather.

4. BECAUSE WE WILL MISUNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN WITHOUT A ROBUST DOCTRINE OF CREATION.

Calvin begins his *Institutes* with the remarkable statement that "*Without knowledge of self there is no knowledge of God.*" The relationship between self-knowledge and knowledge of God is intriguing and fascinating. Suffice it here to note that this statement occurs at the outset of Book 1 of the *Institutes*, "The Knowledge of God the Creator." Who we are can only be answered in relation to how and as what God has made us. In other words our identity as humans is inextricably related to the doctrine of creation.

Ironically, modern society, which is built to a significant extent on human autonomy, has now unravelled to the



Józef Rapacki, *Reverie*

point where human identity has become one of the most contested ideas. There are many politicians in the West who doubtless most dread the question “What is a woman?” Whatever we think of this question, and I am not arguing that a full answer is a simple one, it is instructive that an emphasis on human autonomy would bring us to such a point.

This crisis in identity, for that is what it is, should not be underestimated. Every day we live out some view of what it means to be human, but with no clue as to what this is we are in serious trouble. Indeed, if Christians wish to contribute to the flourishing of our cultures then it is in the area of anthropology – our view of the human person – that we do well to make rich and deep contributions. Where will the resources for such work be found? In many places including human experience, but we will not make much progress without a rich doctrine of creation. With its teaching about us being made in the image of God and much other material besides, the Bible has a huge amount to contribute towards a normative view of the human for today.

It should be noted that it is often not only our secular culture that struggles with this issue but also our dualistic churches. Churches without a strong doctrine of creation easily develop unhelpful distinctions such as that between full-time service of God – the pastor and the missionary – and, by implication, the rest of us in the part-time service of God. Real commitment to God will therefore take us into his full-time service! This leaves most of our working lives in spheres other than that of the institutional church marginal and of little consequence. An effect is that our humanity gets closed

down rather than opened up. By contrast, the doctrine of creation alerts us to the world as the theatre of God’s glory – to allude to Calvin – and alerts us to all of life as the field of full-time service of God, the only question being in which area/s of life we are called to serve.

5. BECAUSE THE GLORY OF GOD AND HUMAN AND NATURE’S WELL-BEING IS AT STAKE.

Irenaeus, the church father who did so much to defend the church against Gnosticism with its anti-materialist ideology, notes evocatively that, “The glory of God is the human person fully alive.” Hans Rookmaaker poses the question, why – to what end – does God save us? His glorious answer: to make us fully human! It is

only as we become fully human that our lives together will create the requisite plausibility structure against which backdrop our words about Christ will resonate and make sense. To get on such a journey, which the Bible calls sanctification, we will need the lens of a robust doctrine of creation shaping our view of what it means to be human, thereby, intriguingly, enabling us to become more fully ourselves even as we decrease so that he might increase. God’s glory in his creation, our well-being, and that of the whole creation insofar as it is shaped by humans, are at stake. We do well therefore to rediscover the exhilarating doctrine of creation.

Craig Bartholomew is the Director of the Kirby Laing Centre. With Bruce R. Ashford, Craig is the author of The Doctrine of Creation: A Constructive Kuyperian Approach (Downers Grove, ILL: IVP Academic, 2020).



Vito Timmel, *Countryside*

Cultivating Meaningful Gospel Conversations in a Secular Age: The Doctrine of Creation

CAS MONACO

our current secular age.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE SECULARIZED?

Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor characterizes the twenty-first century context as being

Lesslie Newbigin posed this question in his 1984 Warfield Lectures:

What would be involved in a genuinely missionary encounter between the gospel and this whole way of perceiving, thinking, and living that we call “modern Western culture?” (Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 1)

This critically important question surfaced for Newbigin after he returned home to England from the foreign mission field, only to discover an entirely new mission field in his own backyard. He observes that missionaries and missiologists had made significant contributions pertaining to contextualization and cross-cultural missions overseas. But they had neglected the need for contextualization within their own powerful, persuasive, and resistant, modern Western culture. He then issued a clarion call to missiologists that resounds still today.

There is no higher priority for the research work of missiologists than to ask the question of what would be involved in a genuinely missionary encounter between the gospel and this modern Western culture. (*Foolishness*, 3)

I feel compelled to help answer this call. My discovery through research, interactions with Scripture, and conversations with people today is that the doctrine of creation cannot be underestimated when it comes to meaningful gospel conversations. This is especially the case in

secularized. It is exclusively humanist and is devoid of sacred authority. Taylor describes this era as one in which people find belief in God not only implausible but even unimaginable. He insists that being secularized is not the absence but rather the presence of belief. He posits that secularization exists within an entirely natural and humanistic frame and displaces theistic belief from the default position. This creates a new set of faith assumptions or beliefs about history, identity, morality, society and rationality. In his *My Life among the Deathworks: Illustrations of the Aesthetics of Authority* ([Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2006], 13), Philip Rieff warns, “The notion of a culture that persists independent of all sacred orders is unprecedented in human history.” He alerts his readers to an inevitable set of problems that arises due to an empty and meaningless sacred centre.

GLIMPSES OF TODAY'S SECULARIZED CULTURE

Today most people view the world based entirely on what they can explain or experience without any reference to God – a truly secular understanding. This denial of the supernatural has led to what Charles Taylor describes as *exclusive humanism*, a radical new option in the marketplace of beliefs that accepts no final goal beyond our present existence. He describes this marketplace of beliefs

as a “super-nova – a kind of galloping pluralism on a spiritual plane.” (In *A Secular Age* [Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2007], 300). This view treats Christianity as being just one option among an explosion of other choices.

Taylor’s assertions continue to be validated by current research studies in Western societies. For example, Cru’s 2016 US Research Study, *Understanding Faith and Purpose in the City*, reveals that more than half of the four hundred people



Andrew Stevovich, *Popcorn*

surveyed claimed no religious affiliation, and describe Christianity as offensive, inauthentic, irrelevant or unsafe.¹ Stephen Bullivant, in his study, “European Young Adults and Religion,”² discovered that in the Czech Republic, ninety-one percent of young adults categorized themselves as religiously unaffiliated, and seventy percent have never gone to church. In the UK, France, Belgium, Spain and the Netherlands over fifty percent of those surveyed said they never go to church and never pray. In this study, Bullivant notes: “Cultural religious identities just aren’t being passed on from parents to children. It just washes straight off them.” Christianity is just one option of belief among a myriad of others and is increasingly among the least appealing.

If we are committed to fostering a genuine missionary encounter in our day between the gospel and Western culture, then we must cultivate an increasing awareness of this pervasive secularization. We must counter and engage the effects of today’s galloping pluralism that is rife with options void of substance and meaning. In his lecture, “Seven Lies of the Global Youth Culture” (Steiger Online Intensive Training, Worldwide Online, November 18, 2022), Luke Greenwood identifies these cultural fables that betray the emptiness in a post-Christian Western culture. I contend that at least five connect back to the doctrine of creation.

The first lie is embedded in our secularized culture that holds, “We can only be sure of what we see.” This fable is predicated on the notion that truth is relative to each person leaving our deepest questions forever unanswered: *Why am I here? Who Am I? Is there a God?* Second, since there are no answers for our deepest questions, then, this lie suggests that logically speaking, “We must be here by accident.” In other words, since there’s no grand purpose for this life, then it doesn’t really matter who I am or what I do. The third

lie conveys the personal freedom that, “We can be whoever we want to be,” but in truth, this quest seldom proves to be true.

Fourth, there is the lie that, “Everything is going to be OK.” This ignores our shared global reality regarding the staggering rise in mental health issues and suicide. To believe this lie leads to an endless search for something, anything, to assuage our fears and anxiety. Finally, there is the lie that, “Love is just a passing feeling.” This suggests that relationships are fluid and change all the time, leaving no possibility of true companionship. All of these cultural lies provide us with significant opportunities to engage in meaningful gospel conversations by drawing from the doctrine of creation.



Lucas Cranach, *The Creation* from Martin Luther’s 1534 translation of the Bible.

THE DOCTRINE OF CREATION

A recent and helpful publication by Bruce Riley Ashford and Craig G. Bartholomew, *The Doctrine of Creation: A Constructive Kuyperian Approach*, (Downers Grove, ILL: IVP Academic, 2020), presents a substantive look at the doctrine of creation from a trinitarian, Christocentric point of view. It is comprehensive, leaves no area of life or reason untouched, and opens a door for meaningful gospel conversations in a secularized era. Here I note five important aspects of this doctrine.

First, the doctrine of creation establishes a worldview that includes all that is seen and unseen, and, when rightly understood, orients and reorients

every aspect of life. The Scriptures that begin with God creating the world *ex nihilo* continue across the canon to portray God’s power over and action within creation. By faith we affirm that God transcends the frame of a merely human existence within the natural world.

Second, the doctrine of creation is an article of faith, historically embedded, and marked by the Apostle’s Creed and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. It is important to note that in relation to God that our rational logic is limited, and that faith can and must swim deeply into the mystery of God as revealed in Scripture (23).

1. Brooke Wright et al., *Understanding Faith and Purpose in the City* (Atlanta: Cyrano Marketing Collective, 2016).

2. Stephen Bullivant, “Europe’s Young Adults and Religion: Findings from the European Social Survey (2014–16) to inform the 2018 Synod of Bishops,” *Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society* 2018, accessed November 22, 2022, <https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/research/centres/benedict-xvi/docs/2018-mar-europe-young-people-report-eng.pdf>.

Third, the doctrine of creation is the opening act in the divine drama of Scripture. Here God furnishes the earth, creates multiple and diverse inhabitants and places in both the earthly and heavenly realms. God's creativity is displayed in the beauty and diversity of creation in God's relationship and partnership with Adam and Eve.

Fourth, the doctrine of creation, contrary to the claims of unsupervised evolution theory, affirms that humankind is uniquely created, specifically gendered, and called to cultivate and fill the earth. Humans are created for relationships with God, with self, with others and embody the capacity to love and to be loved. Yet, what God declared as good both structurally and directionally, is corrupted by Adam and Eve's rebellion against God and marks the expulsion of humankind from the garden. Sin, autonomy from God's authority, corrupts and misdirects God's good purposes.

Fifth, the doctrine of creation affirms the good news that this divine drama climaxes in God's greatest demonstration of love, the incarnation of Jesus. This inbreaking of God culminated in his suffering and death showing us in human and tangible ways that he loves us by sacrificing himself for our sake. Jesus Christ, through his resurrection, is the firstborn of the new creation and embodies a living hope presently and for the life to come.

ECHOES IN THE VOID: MISSIONARY ENCOUNTERS IN A SECULAR AGE

There is no doubt that the effects of the galloping pluralism in secular Western culture are everywhere and are deeply troubling. It is only by being willing to stop, to listen, and to understand that we will be invited to talk with others about the God we love. In today's secularized context, the doctrine of creation serves as a critical launching pad for meaningful conversations.

When we read the Bible, we encounter the creator across the storyline time and again. Creation is not only a phenomenon that took place in the past tense at the beginning of time. In astounding ways, it continues to unfold across the entire canon of Scripture and is

magnificently realized in the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ (Col 1:15–22). Notably, Ashford and Bartholomew call attention to the continuity between creation and providence to demonstrate what is called the *creatio continua*. "God is lovingly sovereign over his creation and remains deeply involved in it" (277). This realization affects our view of contextualization and enables us to see the opportunities for meaningful gospel conversations that issue from the doctrine of creation. In fact, introducing secularized people to their creator who loves them is a step toward addressing life's most poignant questions. A friend of mine who interacts with high school students around the gospel often

starts with Genesis 1–3. He notes that the creation story is often the first alternative to Darwinism and evolutionary theory these students have ever heard. They discover that their lives actually matter.

I often find myself in conversations with friends about marriage and family. Sometimes we discuss the desire to have children, the struggle and fear of infertility or, conversely, the option of abortion. These are deeply emotional topics to discuss, especially with people who have been conditioned to live within the immanent frame. Here, I share the gospel

beginning with Psalm 139 and introduce them, often for the first time, to God their creator who creates humankind and gives life and breath to every living thing. This means that their lives matter!

THE DOCTRINE OF CREATION: THE JOURNEY OF FAITHFUL RECONTEXTUALIZATION

To understand the implications of the doctrine of creation in a secularized context, we must accept the fact that most of the people we converse with today know little or nothing about Jesus let alone God the creator. Most don't believe in God and some never even think about God at all. So, the doctrine of creation proves to be a good place for us to begin to build a foundation for understanding the living God as we seek to faithfully recontextualize the gospel for a secular age.

Cas Monaco, PhD, serves as VP of Missiology and Gospel Engagement for FamilyLife and lives with her husband Bob in Durham, North Carolina. She is an Associate Fellow of the KLC.



Marie Bermond, *Portrait of a Couple*

Let me begin with three questions. First, in this very confusing and dangerous world, is it still possible to believe the old truths of the gospel as we've always affirmed them? Secondly, is it possible not only to believe them but to proclaim them, when we are surrounded by the gods and the idols of the culture that surrounds us? And thirdly, is it possible to believe in any hope of a better world, of a new world to come? Psalm 96 gives us a resounding yes to all three questions. The composer gives us a new song that refreshes the old words, a new song that displaces the old gods, and a new song that transforms the old world. Let's think about the first of those here, in relation to the first three verses of the psalm, and save the other two for subsequent columns.

Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Sing to the LORD, praise his name;
proclaim his salvation day after day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among all peoples (Ps 96:1–3 NIV)

The psalmist begins in a very lively way, "Sing ... sing ... sing ... praise ... proclaim ... declare!" he calls out. Six urgent imperative verbs telling us to wake up and "sing to the Lord a new song." So we ask, "OK, please give us the words. What are the lyrics of this new song you want us to sing?" Well, he says, Let's sing about the Lord's *name* (meaning Yahweh the personal name of Israel's God). Let's sing about his *salvation*, (most likely the exodus, when God had redeemed his people out of Egypt). Let's sing about his *glory* (possibly meaning the whole creation or specifically his presence in the temple). Oh, and let's not forget all the other *mighty deeds* that God has done in the history of Israel so far (fill in the blanks).

But hold on, that's not a new song! Those are the old words. That's the song that Israel has been singing ever since Moses crossed the Red Sea! This is the old, old story of Yahweh and his love. How can this be called a new song? Is this a cover, or a remix? What makes it "new," I think, is

CHRIS'S COLUMN

The Music of Mission' – Psalm 96: A New Song that Refreshes the Old Words

CHRIS WRIGHT

where it's going to be sung, which is in *all the earth*, and who is going to be doing the singing, which is *the nations* and *all the peoples*. An old familiar song for some people

can be a very new song when it's being sung by people who have never heard it before. Maybe you've had that experience as a visitor in an unfamiliar church and you say to your neighbour at the end of the service, "That was a lovely new song we sang today," and she replies, "Oh that's an old song, we've been singing it here for ages!" An old song for her has become a new song for you.

The psalmist is picturing the nations of the world singing as a new song *for them* what was an old song *for Israel*. All that the Lord meant to Israel (his name, salvation, glory and mighty deeds) was to become the content of a new song for new peoples in new places to the very ends of the earth. And is that mission, or what?



George Frederic Watts, *Mammon*

Here is a musical metaphor for what we call world mission. It's nicely different from some others, such as the more dominant military and management models of mission (warfare, targets, strategies and so on). Here, the mission of God's people is winsomely inviting the nations to join in the joyful music of celebrating the name, the salvation, the glory, the mighty acts of God (which presupposes, of course, that they've been told about them). For us, reading this psalm as Christians and standing on our side of the cross and resurrection, this must mean celebrating the name of *Christ* and *his* salvation and *his* glory and the mighty works that *he* accomplished when

1. The heading is borrowed from a fine article by W. Creighton Marlowe, "Music of Missions: Themes of Cross-Cultural Outreach in the Psalms," *Missiology* 26 (1998), 445–456.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. For as Paul says (almost certainly citing an early Christian song), God has given to Jesus his own name, the Lord, and all that goes with it, including the anticipation of universal worship (Phil 2:9–11). We invite the nations to sing this new song, through the preaching of the gospel, the teaching of the Scriptures, and everything else that constitutes Christian mission. Mission turns the old song into new songs that bring the old words to life for new singers.

Now of course it's still the old song. For the Israelites, the name, salvation, glory and mighty deeds of Yahweh, called to mind the whole story on which their covenant relationship with God was grounded – the story in which they had come to know God as creator, redeemer, covenant Lord and lawgiver, to experience his faithfulness, compassion, holiness and justice, and to be uniquely entrusted with such knowledge for the sake of the nations (a point emphasized in Deut 4:32–40). Nothing could ever change that original story because it was history – the record is there in the narrative. There was a having-happened-ness about the gospel of the Old Testament.

The same is true for us. Nothing can change the core truth of the gospel as the good news of what God has done in historical fact – the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. But we are summoned to celebrate this “old story” with newness, with freshness, in such a

way that every new culture hears it in a way that brings them understanding and joy, and that's the task of Christian mission. “Singing a new song with the old words among the nations” could be a metaphor for the translating, enculturating and contextualizing thrust of Christian mission ever since the first Jewish followers and apostles of Jesus Christ found ways of articulating the great truths of their Scriptures, now fulfilled in Israel's Messiah, among the varied cultures of the first century Mediterranean world.



Gerard van Honthorst, *King David Playing the Harp*

Both Israel and the church have been commissioned or called to reflect and to report the light of revelation, the good news about the true nature of God as Savior, Judge, King and Lord of the earth and all its inhabitants....

visualizing and verbalizing the revelation of the one, true God before the reachable world of nations ... Old



Paul de Vos, *Concert of Birds including Eagle, Peacock and Bird of Paradise*

Testament psalms are sacred songs (Hebrew poetry set to music) that in part explicitly reinforce this divine purpose for Israel and thus implicitly for the church. They celebrate the character of cross-cultural outreach. They are the music of missions.²

Mission as music is a metaphor worth

thinking about, however, not only in relation to intentional and organized programmes of evangelism and social engagement and international “missions,” but also as to

2. W. Creighton Marlowe, “Music of Missions,” 452.



Emmett Ardie Williams, *Hands of a Jazz Piano Player*

whether and how it can describe our ordinary daily lives in the world around us. What music emanates from your life? What is the new song that people hear as they meet and interact with you every day? And I don't mean the latest Hillsong item that you hum at your desk ... Like the fruit of the Spirit (another wonderful metaphor!), the music of our lives is mostly unconscious, but it is there and it is being heard by others. There may be times when it shares the lament tones of the blues, in empathy with suffering friends or advocacy for unjustly treated colleagues. Or the joy of jazz that brings improvising beauty out of pain-filled roots. Or the steady symphonic harmonies of the peace of God overcoming personal distress. What really matters is whether the music of our life is fundamentally the "old song" of gospel truth and biblical hope that permeates every fresh rendition, intriguing and inviting those who hear it to join in as a new song for them.

But it need not only be a metaphor. We are summoned, literally, to *sing* that new song. There is missional power in Christian worship and song. Indeed, the conversion of Europe began at midnight in a prison in Philippi when two Jews, who had been "severely flogged" and chained up in bleeding agony, "were praying and singing hymns to God [*imagine!*], and the other prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25). Doubtless it would have been some of the old songs (psalms) that Paul and Silas were singing, but for the prisoners and especially the jailer, they were new songs that led to the planting of the first Christian church on the European mainland.

Luke doesn't tell us, of course, what motivated Paul and Silas to *sing* in such circumstances, but it may have seemed like the only way (and a pretty effective way) that they could bear witness to the living God in the surrounding darkness and degradation – very different from their regular synagogue psalm singing.

It may surprise you to know that many Jews in the

period between the Old and New Testaments took seriously the idea of public worship as an act of mission. They knew full well that the collective praise of God in the synagogue or the temple was one of God's ways of convincing Gentiles to bow their knee to the Lord. In some cases the Jews had great success. We know that numerous synagogues in the first century attracted great crowds of pagans wanting to know more about the

God of the Jews ... From the Psalm singing of ancient Israel to the synagogue services of Jesus' day, public praise of the true God was believed to serve a missionary function.³

And it still does, or can. Paul assumed that when believers met together, singing would be part of the event (Col 3:16). Combined with the spoken word in prophesying, such collective worship would have the power to bring unbelievers to conviction, repentance and worship of the living God (1 Cor 14:24–25).

Let's be singing a new song to the Lord, in songs that proclaim his name, salvation, glory and mighty deeds, for the sake of the peoples and nations God has placed us among.

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.



Sitting Christ sculpture, Passion Facade of the Sagrada Família, Barcelona, Spain

3. John Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission: Proclaiming the Gospel with More than our Lips* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 158–159.

An Unorthodox Path Toward Nurturing Faith and the Arts

JOSH RODRIGUEZ

Although the world of contemporary arts appears to be a secular place, there are many creatives working today who have found imaginative ways of engaging their faith in and through their art. Over the past three years, Deus Ex Musica has endeavoured intentionally to cultivate spaces for ecumenical and interfaith dialogue by inviting composers from different cultural, religious and denominational backgrounds to engage the biblical psalms and to write new works shaped by this experience. This approach has already yielded forty new musical compositions, multiple video and audio recordings, live performances around the world and collaborations with educational institutions (including the Wheaton College Conservatory, Gordon College and Eden Theological Seminary), religious organizations (such as the National Conference of the United Church of Christ), and churches including Old South Church (Boston), the parish of St Martin in the Fields (UK), St Andrew's Church (Moscow) and Immanuel Lutheran Church (Riverside, USA).

To cultivate the creation of spiritually

resonant music in any genre is worthwhile enough, but in this case, it was not the only goal. Deus Ex Musica exists to “promote sacred music as a resource for learning, discipleship, and spiritual growth” – in other words, to invite audiences to engage holistically with *both* music and text regardless of musical or theological training.

This unique project was created in 2019 by [Delvyn Case](#), a composer and professor in Massachusetts, who refers to this approach as akin to a “musical Bible study.” As various people became involved, including me, a website was launched and a concert was planned. For our initial event, nine composers from different theological traditions were divided into three subgroups and each group was assigned a psalm which would be written for vocalist and piano. The result was three contrasting artistic and theological perspectives on each psalm (Pss [13](#), [57](#) and [148](#)). The works were premiered at a unique event that combined live performance with small-group discussions, led by an ecumenical slate of Christian clergy, which allowed the audience to discuss immediately the impact and insight revealed through each composition. This event – and others modelled on it – has now been replicated dozens of times in person and online. Over the past three years, thousands of participants have had the opportunity to explore the psalms in this unique way.

In addition to its projects featuring newly-composed sacred works, Deus Ex Musica has created online resources in the form of [blog articles](#),

[podcast episodes](#), and [YouTube videos](#) that explore the intersection of faith and classical music. At its core, it is a gathering of musicians who share a passion: to explore musically what it means to be human, created in God's image.



Emma-Marie Kabanova

In August 2022, Deus Ex Musica recorded its first [album](#) featuring musical meditations for solo violin written by ten composers and performed by four violinists from various Christian and Jewish traditions. Each new work is shaped by a biblical psalm and bears the unique cultural, aesthetic and religious imprint of its creators. Attendees at the KLC's launch event in September 2022 participated in a live discussion session featuring several of these works, performed by Danish-British violinist Emma-Marie Kabanova. Below are four highlights from this uplifting interfaith collection centred on the psalms – that enduring collection of prayer and praise.

[Sungji Hong](#), who is the music director at her home congregation, Denton Korean Baptist Church, has been honoured by a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Charles Ives Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts



Delvyn Case



Sungji Hong

and Letters, commissions from many prestigious organizations, and a position as Assistant Professor of Music Composition at the University of North Texas. Her music has been described as “a work of iridescent freshness” (*BBC Music Magazine*), in which “the harmonies and fluid dynamics were modern” (*The New York Times*). The inspiration for her piece, “Proba me Deus,” is Psalm 139:23–24 (translated from Latin as “Search Me, O God”). In this passage, the psalmist asks God to search his heart to see if there is any sin in him, and he asks God to lead him in the way everlasting.



Michel Klein

A graduate from the University of California, Los Angeles, Michel Klein

– an Orthodox Jewish composer and educator – contributed “Ura,” a work based on Psalm 57. In this entrancing music, Klein explores the narrative found in the rabbinic writings or Midrash regarding King David, explaining, “King David used to hang his harp above his bed and when an Eastern wind would pass through his chamber at midnight, the strings would vibrate and wake him up. Upon waking, he would proceed to pray, sing, and compose music (very likely the Psalms) until dawn. In this piece, one can hear allusions to the midnight wind, the slowly building prayer melodies, and whispered prayers of the ‘Sweet Singer of Israel.’”

Born in the Bronx and raised in Morocco, Jewish composer Joelle Wallach has been writing music for over three decades. She was the American Composers Alliance nominee for the Pulitzer Prize in Music for her “String Quartet #2.” Of her contribution, Joelle writes, “‘Beside the Still Waters’ is a musical meditation on the 23rd Psalm ... Its use of double-stop drones throughout represent the constant presence of God, even when the

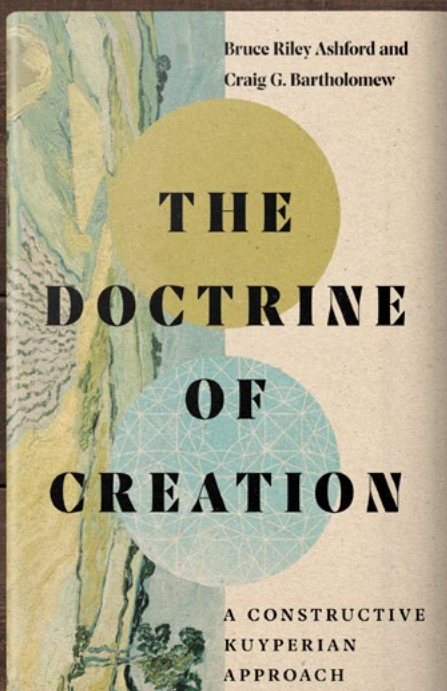
melody of His song is neither audible nor clear.”



Joelle Wallach

For thousands of years, the psalms have been a primary source of consolation and inspiration for Jews and Christians alike. They have found musical expression in the work of composers as diverse as J. S. Bach, Florence Price, Ernest Bloch and Igor Stravinsky. And the impact of the psalms on contemporary classical music continues today in Deus Ex Musica’s album “Search Me O God.”

Josh Rodriguez is composer-in-residence of the Corona Symphony Orchestra, Associate Professor of Music Theory and Composition at the Collinsworth School of Performing Arts, California Baptist University and an Associate Fellow of the KLC. Listen to his music [here](#).



“Dazzling in its sources and range ... rigorous and provocative in its judgements”

Approaching the world as God’s creation changes everything, and regaining a robust, biblical doctrine of creation is vital for the church today.

In *The Doctrine of Creation*, Ashford and Bartholomew deftly trace historical treatments of the doctrine, exploring various intertwined theological themes, drawing from diverse streams of Christian thought while remaining rooted in the Kuyperian tradition and maintaining a sustained focus of doing theology in deep engagement with Scripture.

Concluding with implications for current issues, including those related to philosophy, science, the self, and human dignity, this exegetically grounded constructive theology contributes to renewed appreciation for and application of the doctrine of creation – which is ultimately a doctrine of profound hope.

God's Plan for the Nurture of Nature

SUSAN BUBBERS

The theme of this edition of *The Big Picture* is "The Nurture of Nature." One quickly smiles at the fitting literary ambiguity of the phrase.

Shall I write about the way we humans are called by God to nurture nature, to care for God's creation? Or, shall I write about the many ways God's creation provides nurture to us? Actually, by writing about animals, I will



Maria Uhden, *Woman with Bird*

be able to write about both perspectives at the same time. For, when we dedicate ourselves to nurturing animals, God will use that expression of care as a conduit to convey graces of many kinds to us.

Let us consider the idea of "nurturing." The connotations are many, such as teaching, protecting, encouraging, nourishing, guiding, comforting and loving. Nurturing is providing the context for health and growth, safety and thriving. Read all of these again, and realize that just as we can nurture animals in all these ways, so too can they nurture us in all of these ways.

Allow me to go a step further and posit that not only "can" we humans offer such nurture to animals, but also we are "called" by God to do so. And, as with any form of calling, as we fulfil God's desires and purposes, we experience his grace and blessings. While much has been written to explicate the biblical theology of creation care and stewardship, here I will emphasize just two points.

First, the biblical theology of stewardship recognizes the role God intends humans to have in regard to his creation. God's first commission to humans was to care for both the environment and the animals. This sense of purpose was set into humans before the fall, and remains inherent to the *imago Dei*. As humans fulfil this calling, we are more fully human. The love and compassion and wisdom of Jesus make this all the more possible for Christians. Christianity should be showing the way to the rest of the world about how to care for the earth and all of its creatures.

Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over [*radah*] the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground." (Gen 1:26 NLT)

The New Living Translation of the Hebrew "*radah*" as "reign over" is a more helpful translation than the ESV "dominion over" or NAU "rule over," for these have been taken as grounds for opportunistic, even short-sighted and selfish, uses of resources and animals. But, to be an expression of God's image, selfless nurture and care is certainly the mandate. The kingdom of God is a place of thriving, not a place of exploitation.



Kanō Tsunenobu, *Rabbit, Wave and Full Moon*

The second point I will emphasize in the biblical theology of stewardship is the recognition of the role God intends creation to have in our lives. Creation is often referred to as "general revelation" and is a companion to the "special revelation" of the Incarnation and Scripture. Creation is meant by God to be a conduit through which he communicates his nature, character and purposes, albeit with not as much specificity as through the Word. Through the majesty of creation, God's glory and goodness are made evident (Rom 1:16–20; cf. Pss 50:6; 97:6). Through the marvels of creatures, God's graces are also conveyed. God can do

anything, and he has shown that he can choose to use animals to convey his will and correction (Num 22), teach sluggards how to be wise (Prov 6:6), be a metaphor for his own divine being and doing (Ex 19:4; Ps 91:4), and serve in teachable moments to further discipleship (Matt 6:26). God chose to use a colt as the way to dignify Jesus' triumphal entry (Zech 9:9; Luke 19:30), and even divinely tamed the non-saddle-trained young equine for the honour. These and other biblical references serve to heighten our expectation of encountering God's graces as we endeavour to rightly care for his creatures, in Jesus' name.

Edward Sellner's lovely little book *Celtic Saints and Animal Stories: A Spiritual Kinship* (New York: Paulist Press, 2020), is a collection of reports of early Christian saints' nurture of animals and how their lives were blessed in return. The genre of hagiography can at times read more like legend than history, but I tend to believe many of even the more supernatural accounts, for I have experienced some unexpected, marvellous connections with animals myself. A feral cat allowing me to rescue her. An injured dog who did not know me at all willingly accepting my invitation to climb into the passenger side of my car. A frightened frog in a hurricane seeking refuge in the palm of my hand. Pets who convey unconditional love, comforting companionship, and even deep-level heart-healing. I could go on. Each time, the presence of God as the source of life and hope and help was palpable and soul-nourishing.

Sellner dedicates his book to two people and a dog. The people are the Linzeys of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, of which I am also a Fellow. The dog is his beloved cocker spaniel "Red," whom Sellner calls his "teacher and muse." Recall how "nurturing" includes teaching and encouraging. As Sellner nurtured Red, so Red nurtured Sellner, and was therefore part of the process which ultimately led to me reading this book, and being nurtured by it as well. Some of my favourite quotes from his book

are his affirmation that "both saints and animals are to be seen as soul friends and mediators of wisdom, capable of inspiring a deeper spirituality, a new ethic of holiness for our own time" (24), and from St Columban, "If you wish to know the Creator, come to know his creatures" (25). The stories he recounts result in the reader being moved to greater compassion for animals and to greater admiration for the saints whose godliness included a lifestyle of learning from and caring for animals. Sellner includes the famous story of

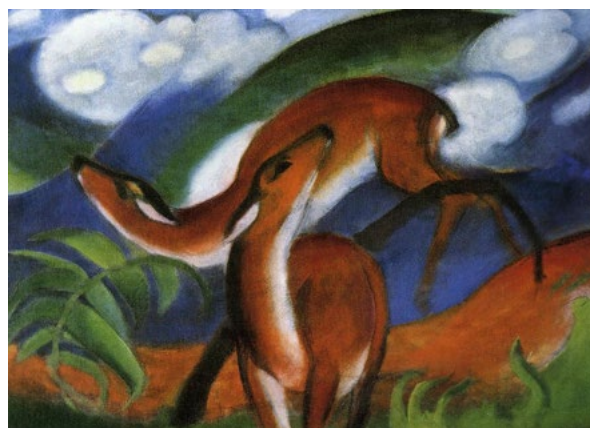
how St Patrick "was moved to kindness like a godly father" (31) when his charioteer's horses were missing, causing the charioteer who considered them close friends to be in a tearful state. God used Patrick to illuminate the way in the midst of the dark night to where the horses were, and the reunion was a great relief and noted as a miracle. An overall theme in this hagiography is how a maturing love for Christ will

manifest in greater care for creatures, and how a greater love for creatures will nourish a more mature love for Christ. These stories are truly examples of how the godly rightly care for creatures (Prov 12:10).

Here are some organisations through which God can nurture you as you nurture his creation:



Wilhelm Morgner, *Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem*



Franz Marc, *The Red Deer*

- Defenders of Wildlife: defenders.org
- Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine: pcrm.org
- The Humane Farming Association: hfa.org
- Amberdell Equine Sanctuary: amberdell.org
- Castaways Pet Rescue: castawayspetrescue.org
- Gentle Giants Draft Horse Rescue: gentlegiantsdrafthorserescue.org
- SARX Christian Animal Welfare: sarx.org
- Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics: oxfordanimaethics.com

The Rev Dr Susan I. Bubbers (DMin, PhD, OCAEF) is the Dean of The Center for Anglican Theology, the Rector of Celebration Anglican Church, Florida, and an Associate Fellow of the KLC. She is the author of Pet Prayers (available at Amazon.com). See also www.CenterATLAS.org and <https://courses.biblemesh.com/atlas-theological-center>.



When You Hear His Call

SHANNON HOFFMAN

Project landscape: The Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Park. Photo: Shannon Hoffman

God doesn't call the equipped, he equips the called. This statement bolsters my shaky heart when I contemplate the scale of the task at hand, so beyond my abilities and resources that if it isn't of God, there is no way to succeed. *Our calling* can be described as what we are meant to do in life, or perhaps, who we are meant to become. What if we shift the focus: would it not be more apt to say that it's hearing *God's call* as he draws us to himself; becoming more like him. And, as we "do life" and listen for his voice, it becomes more about him and less about us. Jeremiah 29:13 so beautifully promises, "I will be found by you, declares the Lord."

This story I share is about a bird. It's also become my own; woven together into God's story, part of his greater plan. So, in relating the goodness of God as I have experienced him, know it's biased, of the heart and personal, but how

wonderful to know that even in his all-encompassing sovereignty our God is still deeply relational. He's in the now, as I write and as you read.

The bearded vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus meridionalis*) is a large and highly specialized bird of prey, which looks more like an eagle than a scavenger,

unique in both behaviour and adaptation. It is the only bird in the world to live on the unlikely diet of bones, which are swallowed whole, or if too large, dropped from the air onto flat rock surfaces called *ossuaries* to smash open and access the nutritious marrow. Its name is from the distinctive black "highwayman" mask made up of stiff, hair-like feathers that extend into a beard under its chin.

The last remnant group of this magnificent bird lives high up in the Maloti-Drakensberg mountains that serrate the border between South Africa and Lesotho. Over the past few decades this wild population

has declined by at least thirty percent, until it is estimated that fewer than three hundred and fifty birds remain. I manage the "Bred 4 the Wild" Bearded Vulture Breeding Programme, now part of a collaborative conservation effort between governments, the formal conservation sector, corporates and private specialists, aimed at saving this critically endangered species from extinction.



Shannon, nest monitoring in the field. Photo: Ian Cockbain

Bearded vultures breed just once a year in the dead of winter, nesting high in cliff-face potholes weathered by wind, rain and time. Breeding pairs lay two eggs, but only ever raise a single chick. In a behaviour called *cainism*, (named from the Old Testament story of Cain and Abel), the older sibling out-competes the younger one on the nest platform within a couple of days of hatching. The challenging aim of our breeding programme is to carefully harvest thirty-two of these second eggs to hatch and raise in breeding stations. This captive group forms a genetic reserve to guard against species extinction and, more importantly, their progeny will be released to supplement



Shannon Hoffman. Photo: Ian Cockbain



Adult bearded vulture in flight. Photo: Ian Cockbain

the dwindling population in the wild.



Leseli. Photo: Shannon Hoffman

That's the biology and programme structure, but let's get back to *the bird* and how it all began. *Leseli* (pronounced Lesedi), when I met her, was a near-adult bearded vulture female, confiscated from a *sangoma* (traditional healer) and brought into our rehabilitation centre for care. A rarity indeed, she was only the second of

her kind to be seen in captivity in twenty years in southern Africa. When placed in a long flight tunnel to prepare her for release, however, she didn't fly. Just as a child, raised in a cardboard box can't be expected to know how to run, so Leseli was yet to realize the potential of her wings. Sitting with this beautiful, bearded lady, the idea of her living out her life alone, while her wild counterparts continued to decline, seemed too awful to contemplate. During my career in raptor captive management, I have worked with many non-releasable rehabilitation birds; end-of-the-line raptors that can no longer be released due to physical or behavioural defects. In each one of them I learnt to see the potential that maybe God sees in each of us broken vessels. Loving us even before we love ourselves. These birds have been my greatest teachers.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature advises that when a threatened species drops below one thousand in number, captive breeding should be initiated. How would we achieve this with no birds with which to breed? Could the redundant eggs be harvested and how would they be raised? So often well-meaning humans do animals an irreversible disservice by hand-raising them. This renders the creature an *imprint*, animals that "think they are people" and are unable to interact with their own kind. In the last twenty years I have developed an odd set of skills, of little value in this modern world, but in this case, strangely applicable. My understanding of compromised birds, coupled with a deep appreciation of wild things in wild places, allows me to interface the in-situ and ex-situ requirements of this long-term programme which will likely be the culmination of my career.

God, in his infinite kindness, so often prepares us with life experiences for what is to come. Thus was birthed a dream, so big that it scares me; for which I am called upon to perform at the full extent of my ability and solidly into his. And as the programme began, instead of being redundant,



Puppet-feeding in the rearing enclosure. Photo: Ian Cockbain

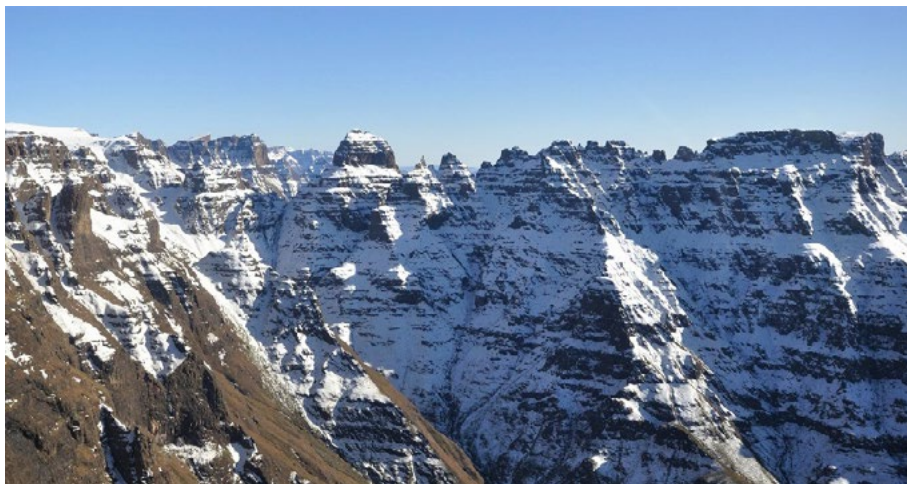
Leseli became the surrogate parent, pivotal for the captive flock and perhaps even the very hope of her species. Hatched chicks are puppet-raised from behind a screen in glass incubators and brooders for

the first twenty days of life. Thereafter they are transferred to an outside rearing enclosure where they have visual exposure to Leseli so that they grow up knowing what they are.

What started as a conservation project, has proved to be so much more. I believe the programme's value is in the hope it represents, a commodity which is like fresh water to a thirsty world. It is my sincere prayer that, in response to the freedom of wild places, hearts will be opened to the call of our creator God, who already knows us by name, loves us completely and offers to uphold and lead us through life with his righteous right hand.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those that love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Rom 8:28). Time and time again, in this journey with our loving Father, have I experienced his mercy and grace. On one occasion, driving down the steep and treacherous Sani Pass and carrying the precious cargo of a harvested egg, the brakes of our 4x4 vehicle failed. I remember feeling the most amazing peace, even as the driver's neck muscles spasmed in anxiety. How often does the pride of self-sufficiency fool us into thinking that we are in control of our lives! In what seemed like an accelerated eternity we made it safely through the South African border post below. Remarkably, the chick could be heard calling from inside the egg, a gentle tribute to his maker.

Months later, at the top of this same pass, I sat on the cliff edge looking out over the distant world below. That day, (fickle human that I am), my "inner peace" was gone and I prayed desperately to a seemingly silent God for clarity and life direction. Eventually, after hours, I realized that I must end my vigil in order to make the evening border closing times, exiting Lesotho and returning home to South Africa. As I scrambled to my feet and turned, and in his "perfect"



Snowy escarpment. Photo: Shannon Hoffman

timing, an almost audible "Trust me" filled my head and heart. I'm embarrassed to admit that the best response I could muster was a retaliating yell at heaven, "I'm trying!" By his gentlemanly grace, I still

made the border crossing with minutes to spare.

In 2016, extreme snowfalls covered the extent of the breeding range over the three-week harvest period. Right at the end of the season (in desperation to not waste the year), the harvest team attempted to access a high mountain nest via helicopter. As we approached the escarpment, and the craft was buffeted by the wind, I knew with gut-wrenching certainty that we were in life-threatening danger. "Please Jesus, save us" was the simple, stricken prayer of my heart. Well, he did. Later, as our full team regrouped in the snow and watched the smashed helicopter burn, I thanked God for his great mercy of second chances. Of the four passengers I was the only one to know who holds our salvation in his hands.

On another occasion I sat in Lesotho with a local headman, watching the climber prepare to go over the cliff edge to harvest an egg. Although briefed and in agreement to the access, the headman suddenly panicked at the process, having no experience of the skilled ropework and safety



Hallam Payne going over the edge of the escarpment. Photo: Shannon Hoffman

protocols that the high-altitude expert would employ. Grasping for a way to help him understand and to allay his fears, I asked him if he knew God. "The Lord?" his eyes flicked at me. "I do!" he exclaimed. And that was how two people, man and woman, from completely different backgrounds and cultures had the privilege of praying for another.

Sharing the high-altitude home of the bearded vultures are communities of pastoral people. Many of the shepherds caring for the herds of sheep and goats are young boys who live exposed to weather extremes. Their understanding of bearded vultures ranges from disinterest in the mundane to gentle acceptance, taking for granted what they see daily. During our field work we try to share our appreciation of the rare and beautiful birds and in return glean much from local knowledge.

Before we can ask the hill children to care about the birds, however, they need to know that we care about them. Hearing of this requirement, groups of ladies in South Africa stepped up to knit beanies for these youngsters, whom they will never even meet. Their kindness is received with such excitement as the children choose from a wonderful assortment of colour and design. The beanies might just be a simple handshake of introduction, but they initiate conversation about the bearded vultures, their threatened status and what our project is all about.



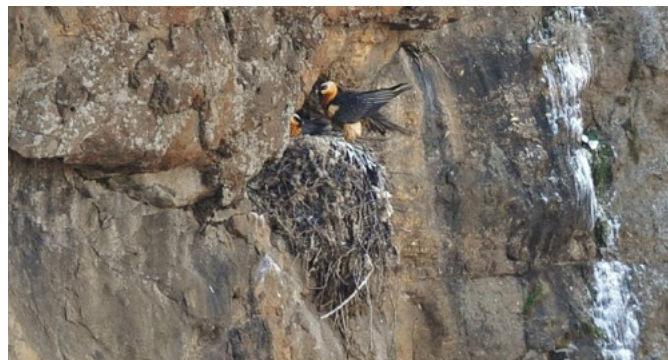
Graeme Bruschi approaching a nest site to harvest. Photo: Shannon Hoffman

Sometimes we need not do great things, but only small things with great love.

In 2022, we lost a programme bird, a three-year-old female, called Red. Big and beautiful, she showed no signs of illness before we found her dead on the enclosure floor. Three of us sat around her lifeless form, looking for answers, trying to understand. What a terrible loss of time and genetics to the programme and *of herself* to us who knew her. Life sometimes gets hard. It just does. God's word never said any different, but he does promise to never leave us, and he can turn what is meant for evil into good.

That season, the only escarpment nest available for harvest was Red's original natal home. We were able to collect and

bring down a brother. We called him Rooster. At the beginning of the season the captive group of birds was sexually skewed, with more females than males. With Red's passing at the end of the season we have a perfect pairing balance of nine males and nine females. To God be the glory!



A breeding pair at incubation shift change. Photo: Shannon Hoffman

Although only halfway through our story, it is coloured by a tapestry of people, woven together from every walk of life

by a shared hope and a future. May our story encourage your own and, to those who dare to dream and hear God's call: don't doubt it.



Shannon coordinating a nest harvest between SA and Lesotho. Photo: Stefan van Zyl

Shannon Hoffman (onair@africanraptor.co.za) is the programme manager for the "Bred 4 the Wild" Bearded Vulture Breeding Programme. For more information see Facebook: African Raptor Centre; Instagram: @Bred 4 the Wild.

Cats: A Blessing of Comfort

KAREN HARDING

I have always loved cats and have been blessed with so many in my life thus far. Bush Baby was my first. She was a stray, infested with fleas, who was given to me by a friend from school when I had my first apartment. One Sunday, I had to take her with me to church. I hid her in my purse, but her head kept poking out. I took her directly to the Sunday school class where I was teaching. I was only eighteen and would have done anything to protect her. The Sunday school kids loved her and swore to keep my secret. I thought I would go crazy from all the care she needed, but she grew into an absolutely beautiful cat with long whiskers coming out of her ears. As I had to move away, I gave her to a new widow who was completely alone.

Then there was Mugsy, a beautiful calico whom I adored and gave to my new niece after my husband became acquainted with his birth mother for the first time in forty-eight years. So many incredible memories involving cats as pets.

More recently, in 2006, I purchased a small brick home in downtown Hamilton and brought another cat, Boo-boos, with me from Peterborough,

Ontario. Boo-boos was a very different cat in that he would ride the vacuum cleaner whenever it was being used, would fetch toys like a dog and would stretch himself over the top of my office chair every morning for a full-body hot-air massage from my hairdryer. He loved the neighbours and would try to make friends, but they were not so eager. They were satisfied at least that he was not a stray. I named him Boo-boos because he was always getting into trouble. Unfortunately, he was hit by a car and died instantly.

I was devastated and alone. I had just arrived in Hamilton and had no friends there yet. The house was quiet without Boo-boos and I was left alone with my thoughts. My husband had died, my sons were in Ottawa, and I was working on my degree in theology.

Within a matter of days, a stray cat began to try to access my home. There was an old doggie door built on the back

wall of my porch and I had barricaded it with bricks. Nevertheless, this beautiful cat would butt the bricks with his head and make his way into my back porch. It didn't seem to matter how many bricks were piled against the doggie door, he always made his way in. He seemed very hungry and devoured a can of tuna in seconds so I decided that he should stay. He had obviously already made up his own mind in that regard. I named him Fred because he seemed like an "old soul." My grandfather's name was Fred and he seemed very wise to me when I was a young girl.

I took Fred to the vet and he received a few injections. The doctor told me that he was very ill with pneumonia and would need a lot of

care. His lungs were weak and he was not very active. It must have taken all of his strength to have moved so many bricks with his head. He stayed under my coffee table for over six weeks before regaining his strength. His first sign of feeling better was noticed when he started playing with a piece of yarn that was hanging over the top of the table. I knew he would be okay and my prayers had been answered.



Yumeji Takehisa, *Ten Themes of Woman, Black Cat*

Fred was extremely friendly with everyone but received ill treatment from neighbours. He came home one day with deep cigarette burns on his hindquarters. I decided he would now be an indoor cat.

He stayed inside without too much opposition and began to respond very favourably to music. He especially liked the opening music to the movie, *The Godfather*. Every time it would play, Fred would come to the living room and curl up on the couch. He slept on my bed every night and was very devoted. After eight years he succumbed to a blocked ureter and I had to have him put down. The tears flowed and I felt so very empty and alone. Fred had been such an incredible cat and is sorely missed by everyone who knew him.

The nights were getting colder and I often attended a lecture at the university in the early evening. The wind chill was predicted to reach minus forty-two degrees and so I placed a cardboard box with an old fur coat in it on my veranda, just in case a cat needed a warm place.

I had to be careful because I had been threatened with a fine for leaving food out for stray cats. City life was proving to be so contrary to my family home life back east in New Brunswick. Anyway, I was off to the university and the inconspicuous box was left on the veranda.

Upon my arrival home that evening, I looked in the box and, much to my surprise, found a mother cat with four kittens. It was freezing outside so I quickly placed all the kittens in the house. The mother cat looked up at me and took off. She seemed both relieved and confident that her babies would be okay. Three of them were black and were quite feral. The remaining kitten was mostly white and preferred to stay huddled under my Christmas tree. After a few days, I found her sleeping on a branch directly above the nativity

scene. She was a keeper and the other three would be put up for adoption.

"Gorgeous" is her name at home, but "Charlotte" is her vet name. She resembled a little doughnut as a kitten and has grown into a beautiful cat. She is now about eleven years old and has only ever preferred her original kitten

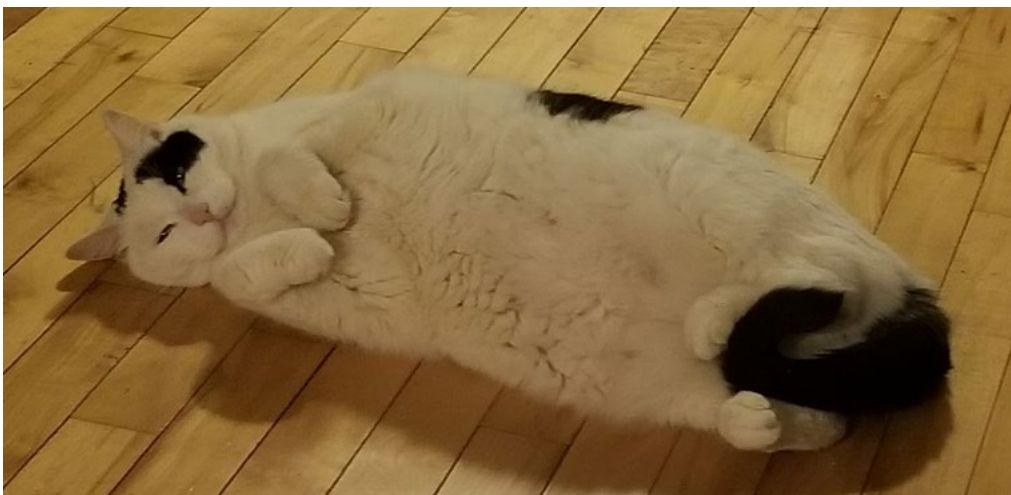
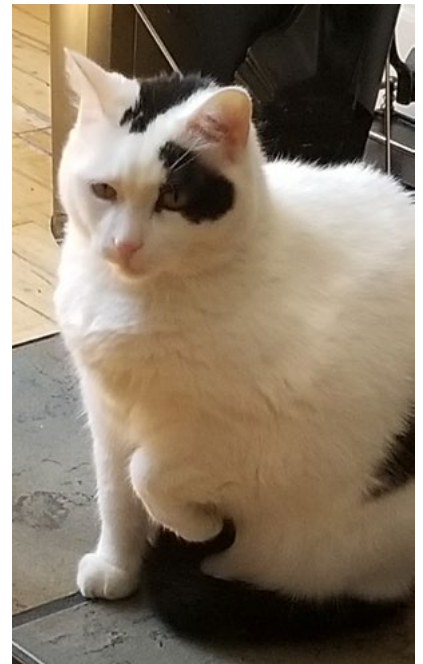
food. She has never shown any interest in human food ... not even fish. I brought her back to New Brunswick with me in 2015 after I purchased a five-bedroomed Victorian style home and she loves the space. I should say "her space" as this home is hers. Lying on top of the heating register is where she spends most of her days and she loves watching the birds and squirrels from the window.

She snores quite loudly now and sleeps most of the day and night but still enjoys her catnip-stuffed toys and her Whiskas Temptations cat treats. She is a true addict and lets me know when she needs her fix.

She loves being close to me. Whether I am watching a movie, typing on my laptop or cleaning the house, she just makes herself "present." She waits at the door for me to return if I go out and loves soothing music. She still sleeps

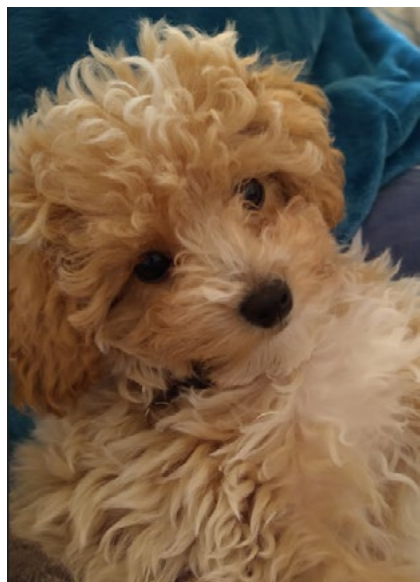
under the Christmas tree and I am sure she is grateful for a peaceful place to dwell. She has certainly been a comfort and a blessing to me. She is truly a gift and always will be.

Rev Karen J. Harding is living in New Brunswick, Canada, and is a missionary to Haiti. She has done extensive research in exclusion and authenticity. Photographs of Gorgeous by the author.



The Yellow Dog: Luteina's Attitude

DIANA SALGADO



Luteina. Photo: Diana Salgado

If you were a food scientist that loved dogs you would understand why all my dogs have "scientific" names. My first dog – officially – was a Bichon frisé mix called Zymomona. Zymomonas are a group of bacteria that produce alcohol from sugars

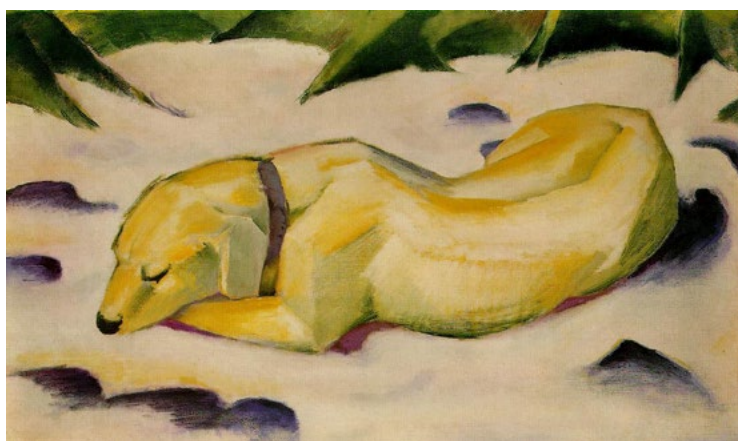
in mezcal, a Mexican alcoholic beverage. At the time of acquiring the dog, I was researching those bacteria and I thought Zymomona made a perfect dog name. She is a great, fun dog addicted to chasing/fetching the ball. She's thirteen years old at the moment (and counting), not fully healthy but happy. She eats bolognese some days after my mum hurries to finish our calls to go to prepare the Italian dish for Zymomona.

More recently, I bought a Poochon which is a mix of a white Bichon frisé and a brown French poodle. No doubt if you had taken canine genetics classes, you would know that a white dog + a brown dog = a yellow-with-white-patches dog, right? This time I was doing research on tomatoes and thus Luteina made a great name for my dog, lutein being the molecule that gives the yellow colour to yellow tomatoes. I love to think that Luteina has a big personality under that mini body full of energy. She has all sorts of characters: superhero, archenemy, automatic floor cleaner, codependant, histrionic creature and more. She has her own voice and responds accordingly. She's part of my own fantasies and we enjoy being together, each in our own way. Nobody loves Luteina like I do and nobody loves me like Luteina does. It is a

relationship that can be understood as how the creation was originally meant to be: we are a team in symbiosis. It is great to know that her own "personality" (I call it dogsonality) is what actually makes her fun. That tremendous need for hugs and strokes makes her dig herself into my hands and twist her whole body. She would stroke herself all day with my hands moved by strings if she could.

But having a dog is not all fun. Luteina has had health problems – twice in her short life. On the first occasion a groomer cut more than necessary off her ears. She got such severe infection and pain that she refused to move. She looked at me as if saying, "Goodbye, this is the end of our fun-loving relationship, it's time for me to depart, you keep living your life in happiness with the next dog." This was her histrionic character of course ... I took her to the vet, gave her antibiotics for a week and she got better. In no time she was jumping and chasing balloons again. The second time was when she broke her claw when going to chase the noise of the neighbour putting his rubbish bin outside. She came back full of blood on one paw, crying and blinking fast. I never fully understood what happened but she was clearly in lots of pain. I felt so bad about her, I rushed to the vet's rooms that were about to close. They received her immediately and put something like a cast on her fragile little arm. She was looking at me with the same expression I saw in her eyes the previous time. She felt miserable for the following twenty minutes, not moving. I removed the cast and suddenly she was "healed." She started walking as if nothing had ever happened. I'd love to have this attitude sometimes in life, Luteina's attitude: I make a drama when things look bad but thinking wisely, they're not that bad ... should we play?

Diana Salgado is a Christian food engineer working on projects to reduce food waste in the UK.



Franz Marc, *Dog Lying in the Snow*

Nature, Naming and Noticing:

LESSONS FROM ROBERT MACFARLANE ON COMMON GRACE IN THE NATURAL WORLD

SARA OSBORNE



Naming of the natural world occurs from the very first pages of Christian Scripture: in Genesis 2, God creates *adam*, a generic name for mankind that would also serve as the proper name for the first male human. Just a few verses later, Adam himself is given the task of naming “all livestock

and ... the birds of the heavens and ... every beast of the field” (Gen 2:20 ESV). Scripture is full of various instances of naming, whether it be naming a person or place or animal. While sometimes mysterious in its power, naming appears to bridge a gap between the human and divine, giving language to the relationship between co-creator and Creator, the natural and the supernatural.

In his book *Landmarks*, Robert Macfarlane writes that human beings “are and always have been name-callers, christeners.”¹ His book explores the powerful connection between naming and nature, and calls our attention to what may be lost when such language begins to die. Just as naming in Genesis 2 conveys meaning and signifies relationship, so does our terminology for engaging the natural world. Macfarlane suggests that this common language of nature possesses “a kind of word magic, the power that certain terms possess to enchant our relations with nature and place” (4).

Macfarlane’s justification for such an assertion is that *naming leads to noticing*. No litany of terms is required for encountering nature, but something different is gained when we approach the natural world with a language particular to its treasures. Macfarlane illustrates his point: “*Smeuse* is a Sussex dialect noun for ‘the gap in the base

of a hedge made by the regular passage of a small animal’; now I know the word *smeuse*, I will notice these signs of creaturely movement more often” (5). Such noticing shapes our awareness of creatures, plants and place. In brief, nature words show us something we might otherwise fail to see.

Christian Scripture supports the connection between naming and knowledge: 1 Kings 4 tells us that “God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon’s wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the peoples of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt” (1 Kgs 4:29–30 ESV). The text illustrates this wisdom by noting that “[Solomon] spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish” (1 Kgs 4:33 ESV). Solomon appears to have been a skilled taxonomist, and the Bible associates his naming and noticing with wisdom.

Macfarlane argues that “[celebrating] the lexis of landscape is not nostalgic, but urgent” (10). American author and place-keeper Wendell



Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka, *The Lonely Cedar*

Berry echoes

this sentiment: “People *exploit* what they have merely concluded to be of value, but they *defend* what they love ... and to defend what we love we need a particularizing language, for we love what we particularly know” (Cited in *Landmarks*, 10). Macfarlane notes this function of precise vocabulary as a criteria for the writers who help inform the pages of *Landmarks*: “... for all of them, to use language well is to use it particularly: precision of utterance as both a form of lyricism and a species of attention” (11).

It is this attention that appears most endangered. Macfarlane notes the concerning trend of children’s

1. Robert Macfarlane, *Landmarks* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 10.

decreasing knowledge of nature terminology. One particular study revealed that “children aged eight and over were ‘substantially better’ at identifying Pokémon ‘species’ than ‘organisms such as oak trees or badgers.’”² The researchers “pointed to evidence linking ‘loss of knowledge about the natural world to growing isolation from it.’”³ The resulting concern, of course, was that the children would fail to love or protect what they did not know – reminiscent of C. S. Lewis’s observation decades earlier that “men do not long continue to think what they have forgotten how to say.”⁴



Indeed, this trend in the young is concerning – but perhaps it is not only the young we should consider. I can vividly recall hikes full of eager questions from my own children – inquiring about the names of wildflowers, trees, birds and animals – to which I responded by pulling out my phone to conduct a quick internet search for the correct term. We are a bit better off when a grandparent is in tow, providing a compendium of nature terms far deeper than my own. This disparity is not owing to affinity: I am a self-avowed nature lover, much preferring a romp in the Rockies to a trip to Disney World, yet the deficit still exists. With each subsequent generation, safety concerns, pace of life, and concrete jungles of urban dwelling move us a little further away from wild places and the names that identify their bounty. While modern living has its benefits, we might be losing more than we know.

Macfarlane offers a frank assessment: “Language deficit leads to attention deficit. As we further deplete our ability to name, describe and figure particular aspects of our places, our competence for understanding and imagining relationship with non-human nature is correspondingly depleted” (*Landmarks*, 24). We can surely encounter nature

without a sack full of names with which to label it, but the loss of names to promote *noticing* may indeed correspond with a loss of awareness and wonder.

This connection between naming, noticing and wonder is of paramount importance for the Christian. Without the language and experience of wild places, we lose some understanding of the potent proclamation of Psalm 19: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” What part of this message is lost when one loses a vision of such skies? What wonder ceases when we no longer remember the starry hosts over which our Creator-God stands sovereign (Isa 40:26 ESV)? Our failure to *notice* the natural world cannot help but result in a failing awareness of both creation and creator. This inattentiveness not only impedes human flourishing, but also inhibits worship.



Just a few months ago, my husband and I took our boys on a week-long expedition into the Colorado Rockies. One particularly long and arduous hike took us through wooded forest, boulder fields, and high alpine lakes before it opened up onto an alpine meadow ablaze with

summer colour. Eager to reach the trail’s end before an approaching thunderstorm, I forged across the meadow with zeal, aiming for a snack spot along the shoreline of a small stillwater. My youngest child dawdled – partly due to tired little-boy legs, partly due to the wildflower handbook he had insisted on toting along. He seemed to stop nearly every few strides, pausing to examine blossoms of colour and match them to his guidebook, proudly shouting out the corresponding term to anyone within earshot. I struggled to quell the temptation to hurry him along that welled up within me – until I turned around and took in the magnificent view that had been at our backs as we climbed. My heart could do nothing but shout “glory!” to the creator of such beauty. The landscape was awe-inspiring. And in a flashing moment, I realized that my small child was helping us learn and remember the words to ascribe worship to the God of it all. Well done, little one. May we all strive to *learn* and *remember* – so that we have the language to *notice* and *wonder*.

Sara Osborne is an Adjunct Instructor of Composition and Classical Education at the College of the Ozarks, a lifelong learner, and the mother of four curious children. She enjoys good books, travel, rich conversation and adventuring outdoors. Photographs by the author.

2. Robert Macfarlane, “Badger or Bulbasaur – Have Children Lost Touch with Nature?,” *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/sep/30/robert-macfarlane-lost-words-children-nature>.

3. Macfarlane, “Badger or Bulbasaur.”

4. C. S. Lewis, “The Death of Words,” *The Spectator*, <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/22nd-september-1944/9/the-death-of-words>.

PREFACE

I'd be lying to say I wasn't a *bit* nervous, driving through hours of sprawling landscapes and no cell phone service – without another vehicle in sight. When my mother and I pulled through the gate of our fishing lodge, I breathed a little easier, looking forward to human contact and settling into a comfortable room. I've always loved the wilderness, but after eighteen years of marriage and birthing four children, I am seldom without husband or child in wild

places. In fact, when I pulled into the lodge's dirt parking lot, eyeing the tumbleweed blowing across the road, the solitude was eerily unnerving.

A day or two into our westward fishing expedition found me venturing out into the High Uinta Mountains, fly fishing freestone creeks and small, clear streams in solitude. Our guide often left me alone in order to help my mother, and the sheer silence began to chip away at the modern distractions normally vying for my attention. Senses alive to the sights, sounds and smells of nature, I was

enraptured – by something I hadn't felt in a long time.

The poem which follows explores the impact of wild landscapes on our human experience, something I became keenly aware of after this fly-fishing trip to a remote area. It had been quite some time since I had inhabited a place so unlike the urban (or even rural town) habitats in which most people live and move about. I encountered God in a profound way through those wild places and became more convinced that we must nurture such treasures.

Into the Wilds

SARA OSBORNE

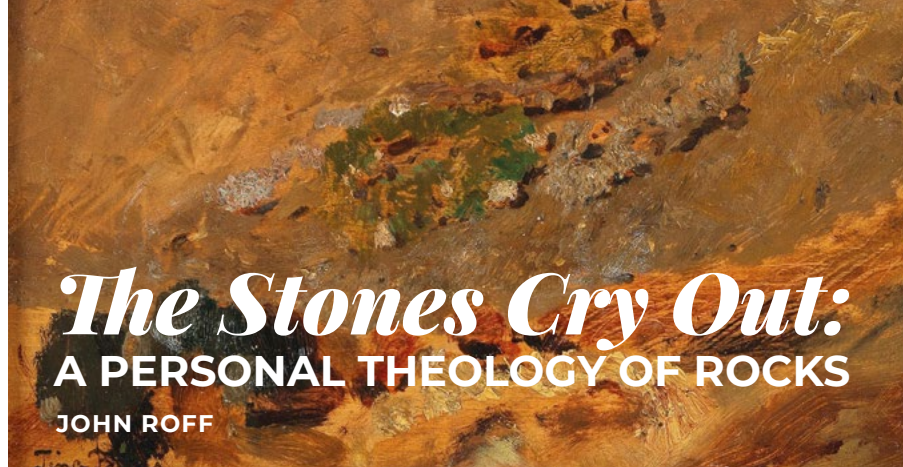
From walled-in fluorescence
And pavement shrouded in high-pitched whine –
From people swarming,
Doing, going, moving in time –
Take me out of the noise,
The steady rhythm of busy business.
Pull me away from constant motion
Into other-worldly wilder-ness.

Let the long roads take me
Past glowing paths of tinted street-light.
Let the night wash o'er me
Until I reach unfettered starlight.
Lead me into the wilds
Of rocky cliffs and stream-side wonder.
Leave me to touch the sky,
To trace the flashing fish-forms under.

Find me standing silent,
Gaze fixed on sparkling, sun-soaked ripples.
Find me casting – calling –
To swimming shapes of slivered silver.
Hear the wind's strong whisper;
Listen to aspen dancing in the breeze.
Take me to the wild lands –
Among these I am free.



Ila Mae McAfee, *Mountain Lions*



As a confirmed Anglican and practising Christian in my teens, who deliberately departed from that road at university, through eight years of a kind of homegrown zen atheism, I was drawn and keep being drawn back to faith by the question: "What is the purpose of beauty?"

Concepts create idols, only wonder grasps anything.

– Gregory of Nyssa

There are days when all I need is to stand on a huge outcrop of granite, to be dwarfed by the size of it, and to be there long enough to simply become aware of the presence of stone. I feel a kind of grounded healing in such places.

There are other days when I am comforted by carrying a small smooth stone in my pocket all day, and taking it out from time to time to feel its texture and temperature on my skin. There is some kind of primal kinship at work, the clay of my body and the firmness of stone in a subtle dance that mirrors the ongoing transformation of matter from one form into another.

Regularly I guide people to places where the story of the earth can be read in the rock formations and stones found there.

All this is really an ongoing study of the nature of God, mediated through personal experience, understanding and interpreting rocks and landscapes, biblical and other texts, and conversations with other people.

What is God like? In a way, I can no more answer this than a fish can discover the nature of water, yet life experience and an indefinable longing keep drawing me to a place of faith. I find the divine presence to be beyond understanding, yet knowable – endlessly understandable, in the words of Richard Rohr. Walking through the world and picking up stones, I find the big question being endlessly answered.

ON BEAUTY

I find great beauty in rocks, stones and landscapes, not only in their immediate physical appearance, but also in their formation processes – the beautiful stories that they carry.

My work as a nature and geology guide is to help people discover the wonder of the earth. Nearly all of it is rock – molten, solid, and all states in between – there's an inexhaustible supply of stone to discover, study and wonder at. This interest may have started for me as a young boy marvelling at the play of light in my mother's opal ring, reinforced by growing up in a place where there were stones lying about wherever I walked. Granite and banded ironstone hills in the landscape of my youth in Zimbabwe are made of different kinds of rock, in very different shapes; these are imprinted on my inner landscape, and are the places where my body fell in love with the earth.

A NOTE ON ORIGIN STORIES

Working with people of diverse backgrounds in beautiful natural places, discussions about origins inevitably emerge. I am as comfortable speaking about evolution as I am about creation; not as opposing ideologies but rather as deep stories and complementary lenses through which we attempt to make sense of the world.

I see the earth, and all that's in, around and on it, as part of creation in process. Here, every place, thing and moment has a sacredness about it, and carries a subtle invitation. Jacob, at a place he later calls Beth El, has an encounter, and says "Surely the Lord was in this place and I did not know it." In many other Hebrew texts, mountains and hills are places where YHWH is to be found and met with – holy places. Through this lens, and other lenses from various spiritual traditions, God may be encountered in every place, and every rock.



Seen with eyes of reverence, rocks can be a revelation – “places where the Holy touches us through experience,” in the words of Christine Valters Paintner.

Here are some of the ways this happens for me through geology, defined informally here as the study of the earth, what it's made of, and what's happening in and on it over time.

Let's take a rock, any rock. Pick one nearby. It's made of one or many minerals, it has texture, shape, colour, density, perhaps a smell. It came from somewhere, it was buried at one point, it was formed in some way. In short, it has a story.

What shape is the earth around you now? Please take the time to look and notice the contours of the earth where you live. They are like that for many reasons, and the underlying rock type is usually the main one.

The earth is fluid and changing. Over marvellously long periods of time, and through shorter cataclysmic events, the rocks move, shift, pour out, bend, break, melt, flow, ooze, collapse, weather, erode, and so on. These processes form tiny crystals of dazzling attractiveness, breathtaking landscapes, a bewildering array of thousands of minerals ... Earth's processes are a beauty-generating factory; a storehouse of stories.



Mykola Yaroshenko, *Eruption of a Volcano*

Some rocks form patiently, layer upon slow layer, at the bottom of vast seas. Some are the deposits from a single storm event in mountains that have now vanished – records in stone of the immediacy of the event; others hold the shape of animals extinct for aeons.

Rocks become completely melted, stirred, boiled, cooked, partially solidified, poured out into the sea, cooled rapidly, and they ooze quietly between layers of other rock, cooling

a bit more slowly. Some take so long to cool that they form huge crystals, kilometres below the surface.

All these rocks can be remelted, pushed upwards as mountains, plunged below continents, reformed, remelted, crushed, reformatted, buried, hidden and reworked. Says the writer in Psalm 104: “You renew the face of the earth.”

A BOX OF ROCKS

Purple Amethyst calls
coy within its angled crystal showcase,

Green Malachite murmurs,
bubble-stone deep-grown under-earth,

Pale Agate draws
me into concentric circling whorls of stone,

Hole-black Jet swallows
any colour daring to be lighter than its hunger,

Clear Diamond cleaves
the human heart as chisels cleave its own,

and Carborundum's name
rolls in my mouth like a small hard sweet.

I tilt their cardboard cavern
and six turning pebbles tickle the air.

William Blake saw heaven in a grain of sand,
in a box of rocks, you might glimpse God.

In summary, I find rocks beautiful, their stories beguiling and their mysteries intriguing. They are to me an endless source of wonder, and portals to an ever-deepening revelation of Christ in creation.

John Roff (johnroff1@gmail.com) is a nature and geology guide, sharing the stories of South Africa's remarkable biodiversity, rocks and landscapes. A lifelong student of nature, he describes himself as an open Christian nature mystic, and finds his heart's home in Jesus Christ. (See Johnroff.co.za). Photographs by the author.



What Drives our Nurture of Nature?

GENEVIEVE WEDGBURY



William Turner, *Tintern Abbey*

My mum and I went away for a few days towards the end of summer, to the Forest of Dean, where my mum was born. I was excited to explore the beautiful countryside and visit some of the historic sites such as Tintern Abbey, inspired by studying the Romantics at A-Level. They would sit well in discussions and representations of the nurture of nature, though they went so far as to deify the natural world. But the Romantics did illuminate the ability of nature to touch the deepest parts of ourselves in a way that we recognise as being transcendent: Wordsworth describes “the meadows and the woods/And mountains; and of all that we behold/ From this green earth” as being “The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,/The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul/Of all my moral being.”

One way I had always wanted to immerse myself in nature was through wild swimming, partly due to the health benefits it promises. As your body is plunged into the cold

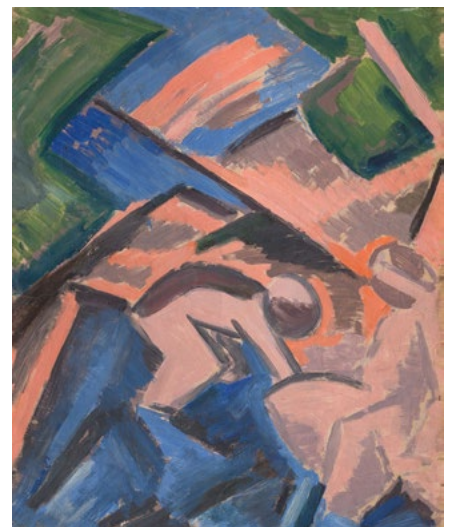
water, the flight or fight response is set off, but when you then emerge back into the relatively warm air, a flood of endorphins is released. Current thinking posits the experiencing of these two extremes as priming us to better handle stress. The cottage we were staying in recommended a local outfit,

“Angela Jones Swim Wild” – “The *Guardian*’s recommended Top Adventure Days.” This sounded like the one for me! However, there had been little time to plan. I rushed off an email to Angela, feeling rather foolish, as I hadn’t even brought a swimming costume! I wasn’t expecting to be successful, but to my surprise, Angela offered me a one-to-one swim early the next morning.

I didn’t know anything about Angela Jones, but as I read more on her website, it was clear she is a very special lady. Her wild swimming school is run from a passion to educate people on how to look after our rivers, and in particular, the river closest to her heart, the Wye. She has become an activist in the process, not by design, but by necessity. She spends hours in the river every day, in all seasons, and she sees first-hand the effects of pollution to aquatic life. She is quietly unapologetic about the point of no return the River Wye teeters on. She has made headlines through her media appearances, including on primetime TV, and her creative ways of driving her point home: she swam down the River Wye trailing a coffin. But she is also passionate about people, and clearly loves the inclusivity of wild swimming and the opportunity it affords her to introduce others to the healing serenity of being outdoors and immersed in nature.

As I read about this incredible lady who cites the river as being her home, office and playground, I began to feel rather star-

struck at the prospect of meeting her! Angela Jones is a professional. She exudes a motherly warmth, but from the moment of our meeting it was very clear: safety first. In Isaiah 11:6–9, we hear of a



Václav Špála, *Bathers*

promised utopia where “The wolf shall live with the lamb,” and tellingly, “They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord.” It seems that true knowledge of God yields peace and harmony in the created world. For Angela, it seems that we need to approach creation almost as the ancient Israelites might have approached the temple; with reverence, awe, and above all, respect. So much of what she says is common sense, you wonder why you didn’t think of it yourself. For example, she asks that before planning a wild swim, you refrain from using cosmetics, even deodorant, on your body, because anything on your skin will be transferred to the ecology of the water. She also talks of entering the water gently, remembering that you have entered someone’s else’s habitat, and being careful not to disrupt it.

We were lucky enough to swim in a completely unpolluted lake that Angela has access to, and which is carefully kept by the ecologist who owns it. But in other more public wild swimming spots, swimmers will need to be mindful of fishhooks in the riverbed, for example. Being in nature also runs the risk of encountering the full breadth of river life that you would not in a swimming pool; water rats and snakes may cross your path, and the river weeds tangle around your limbs! Wild swimming is a serious pursuit, and Angela is quick to identify those who are truly invested and those who aren’t. Do we care that there are now miles and miles of polluted stretches that preclude the enjoyment of wild swimming? Taking responsibility is something Angela engenders in all her wild swimming students. As is her innate ability to really see the beauty of the natural world.

As we sat on the water’s edge, Angela took me through some deep breathing to prepare me for the cold plunge. My mum was back at the car, so it was just the two of us, sharing sacred space. We slipped into the water, and I let Angela be my guide across the lake (with my trusty life float strapped securely to my side). There is something very intimate about sharing an experience like this, and I felt very blessed to have Angela’s wisdom and expertise all to myself. Through the velvet gloom of the water, we shared a little about our life journeys. I spoke of my Christian faith, and Angela shared her early experience of Christianity. In the midst of a very difficult and unstable background, she recalled how she had willingly taken herself off to Sunday school and treasured the recounting of the biblical tales. Something of their message resonated with her. When she suffered later trials and difficulties, she shared how this child-like faith sustained her with the knowledge that she had what it took to face them; she believes in her own strength and ability to take on what life throws at her.

I intuited when the time had come to return to the riverbank, watched by Angela’s careful eye whereby she can tell by the dilation of her swimmers’ pupils when they need to exit the water. “It is a beautiful world, isn’t it?” We both agreed. Angela would align herself with being spiritual rather than with a particular faith tradition. But to my mind, it is clear she inhabits a “church without walls,” and those early biblical stories she heard at Sunday school, coupled by the gift that faith itself is, imparted a sound doctrine of creation; that creation itself is *good*, and worthy to be protected as well as enjoyed. If we believe that our good works now have an eschatological dimension, then we should be moved to invest in the health of our rivers. For, in the words of the psalmist:

There is a river whose streams delight the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.

May we be inspired with Angela Jones to see God in his and our rivers and streams and be moved to protect them.



Paul Gauguin, *Fisherman and Bathers on the Aven*

Genevieve Wedgbury is an Associate Fellow of the KLC. She is currently in her first year of a DProf with the Cambridge Theological Federation, is a guest presenter for Radio Maria England and manages her father’s small marine business.

To learn more about Angela Jones, wild swimming and protecting our rivers, you can visit her website, www.angelajonesswimwild.co.uk.

Panentheism and Christ

DAVID McILROY

been established
by his resurrection
from the dead
(Acts 17:30–31).
There is no room
for doubt about

The biblical claim that everything is in God is sometimes stretched to the panentheistic assertion that “all things are *in* God, and God is *in* all things.” The key verse relied on by those attracted to the panentheistic worldview is Acts 17:28: “For in him we live and move and have our being.” Read in the context of Paul’s argument as a whole, this is not a warrant for the worship of God in creation: what Paul is saying is that “Christ plays in ten thousand places.”

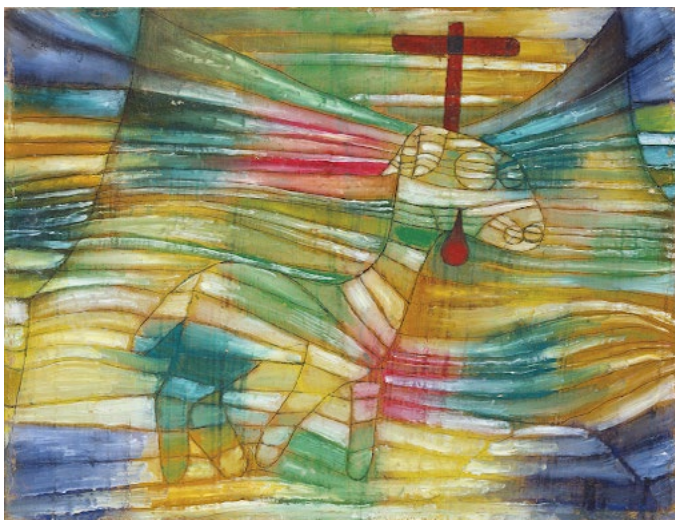
The heart of Paul’s message in Athens was Jesus and the resurrection (Acts 17:18). He was speaking in a context in which, at the popular level, the gods were beings within the universe. Paul decisively asserted that the God he proclaimed was the creator of the world and all things in it (Acts 17:24). He went on to claim that this God was “Lord of heaven and earth,” in need of nothing (Acts 17:25). Paul understood God as not part of, dependent upon, or co-dependent with creation. Instead, life in all its manifold forms and humanity with all its glory and cultural richness were the manifestation of God’s superabundance (Acts 17:25–26).

Having established God’s transcendence, Paul then turns in his argument to assert both God’s immanence and God’s desire to reveal his God-self to human beings. This is the context in which he states: “in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). But for Paul, God’s supreme act of self-revelation was not through the sublime aspects of creation but in the person of Jesus Christ. Paul presented the Athenians with a call to face up to a coming judgement, to be delivered by Jesus, whose credentials for this task had

the direction of Paul’s argument: the signposts in creation pointing to God are a preparation for the fuller revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

Another snippet of Scripture used to support panentheism is 1 Corinthians 15:28, which looks forward to a moment when “God will be all in all.” The focus of the chapter in which this phrase appears is the reality of resurrection. Paul stakes everything on the claims that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day” (1 Cor 15:3–4). If these historical events, the truth of which Paul had verified for himself, including by talking to the other witnesses to them (1 Cor 15:4–8), had not happened, then Paul and the other witnesses were false witnesses (1 Cor 15:15), the message they were preaching was a lie, those who had believed their message were deceived, and death and sin remained the unconquered realities of human existence (1 Cor 15:15–18).

Having summarised the evidence which caused him to change his mind about Jesus, Paul reminds his readers that he has been prepared to risk death many times (1 Cor 15:30–32), in the hope of resurrection and for the truth which he has witnessed. It is between those passages, the first of which sets out the evidence for the resurrection of the Son of God and the second of which expresses the depth of Paul’s conviction that this decisive event had occurred, that Paul gives an account of how the Son of God will overcome all of humanity’s enemies, including death (1 Cor 15:26) before returning all things to God (1 Cor 15:28).



Paul Klee, *The Lamb*



Robert Delaunay, *The Rainbow*

Paul's extraordinary claim is that the sublimation of evil and the resolution of all things is not some inscrutable mystery but takes a shape defined by events which took place around 30 AD, when one homeless Jewish rabbi was executed as a blasphemer and traitor, before being brought back to life by God in confirmation that he did, in fact, have authority over creation, evil, and death.

A third passage in which some have detected panentheistic themes is Colossians chapters 1 and 2. Colossians 1:18 declares that "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." The subject of this declaration is not an undifferentiated Godhead or God the Father: it is Jesus Christ. Colossians chapter 1 contains the strong affirmation that the creation of the universe was mediated by the Son



Matthias Grünewald, *Christ in Majesty*

of God (Col 1:15–16), but that this Son of God is none other than Jesus of Nazareth who died on the cross (Col 1:20) and rose again from the dead (Col 1:18).

The claim of the apostle Paul and of the early Church was not that Jesus of Nazareth was a messenger who opened people's eyes to the God entwined with nature. On the contrary, the claim was that the true referent of the signposts to God in nature was Jesus Christ, who in his bodily death and resurrection decisively affirmed the goodness of matter and its connection to the heart of the maker of the universe. Jesus does not point to God in creation; creation points to God in Christ.

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.

Craft

GEORGE HOBSON

Time is a pen in our Creator's hands,
Space his paper. He traces bold designs
On the vast blank, limns features – lands,
Suns, seas, forests, fish – all creatures – lines
On the emptiness of white, curling and coiling
Under love's press, as the pen on the sheet
Drafts populations out of dim, roiling
Forms forged in unimaginable heat.
Us too he sketches patiently, from womb
To birth, through youth and the ripe years to death,
Modelling us for life beyond the tomb,
By sure craft shaping us till our last breath.
So with time we're drawn, and finest art,
To live outside time's range, inside God's heart.

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Eugenio Cruz Vargas,
Bubbles of Life



ON THE FARM WITH *Brad Anderson*

Jarrod H-B: Brad, thank you so much for taking the time to tell us about yourself, your farm, your vocation as a farmer, how farming intersects with your faith, and much more besides.

Let's take a step back for a second and get the lay of the land, as it were. Can you tell us a bit about yourself, your family and your farm?

Brad Anderson: Thanks for the opportunity to share our story! Let me start by saying that we are still very new to the regenerative agriculture adventure, and there are many other people way ahead of us! You see, not too long ago, my wife Anne and I were city folk, living with our four children (Josh, Ben, Timia and Hannah) in Cape Town, where I was serving as one of the pastors of a large multi-site church community. Now we live on a farm thirty kilometers from our nearest town, Robertson, in the Western Cape, South Africa. Our lives have changed a little! The farm belongs to new friends, Ant and Lynn Robinson. It's three hundred and sixty hectares in size, and there are still big portions that we are not actively working with yet.

JH-B: So, you don't come from a farming background then. For many, quitting your job and relocating your family from a bustling city out into rural South Africa to take up farming may seem like a radical move. What were some of the major turning points in your journey that led you to where you are now?

BA: A radical move is one way to describe it! I am sure many people thought, or still think, that we were just plain crazy.

For us, however, it was a long process and slow shift in our sense of passion and calling in life. The starting point was actually chronic illness. Anne was diagnosed with Crohn's disease while at university, and although she had a few years of remission, it flared up dramatically around 2016. The mainstream medical thinking was very much focused on managing symptoms, but Anne started exploring how diet might impact the disease, leading us to realise that not all food is equal. I'm not just talking about types of food, I'm talking about how the food is actually produced. Modern industrial farming focuses on maximum production at the lowest cost possible, and the result is nutrient-deficient food at best, and at worst, food that is compromising our health. That was certainly the case for Anne. So that really got us interested in how our food was being produced – who was farming, where and how. Regenerative agriculture grew from an interest to a passion as we discovered trailblazers like Joel Salatin, Richard Perkins and Justin Rhodes.

Then in 2018 we had the incredible opportunity to work and live on a regenerative farm in Florida for three months, partly to test if this growing passion was something we wanted to pursue as a family. That was a key turning point, because although we saw some of the more challenging elements and the hard work of farming, our desire and passion grew stronger. When we came back to Cape Town, we spent some time processing this with our fellow leaders and friends, and asked God to make clear what our next steps should be. And, wow, God really led us very clearly. Over the course of twenty-four months, we resigned from our ministry position, endured the Covid lockdown, met Ant



and Lynn, felt God leading us into a farm partnership with them, and in February of 2021 we moved onto Wellspring Farm. At times it was a testing season of waiting for God to lead, and at times it was a whirlwind of responding to his open doors.

JH-B: Your passion for the farm and for farming in general is so evident to all who know you. What is your vision for Wellspring Farm and the work you do there in particular?

BA: Well, in short, our passion and vision is to produce nutrient-dense food that heals people's bodies while restoring the environment. We want to see our farm growing in ecological health and wealth each year. More biodiversity. More ecological resilience. Healthier soil. Healthier plants. Healthier animals. Healthier food. Healthier customers.

But there is another element to our vision. We want to share this space with others, so we are passionate about the farm being a place where people and relationships can be restored and renewed. Where people can come and experience our heavenly Father in a new and refreshing way.

JH-B: I don't think it is an overstatement to say that without farmers, farms, and farming, human society would not exist. And yet farmers and their work have been increasingly relegated to the margins of society, with your average person knowing very little about where their food comes from or how it is produced. Can you help us to

understand better the role farming plays in the modern world and why it is so vital?

BA: I think you are absolutely right, farmers play an essential role in any society. I love the quote from Wendell Berry around this when he said, "We are all farmers by proxy." We all need to eat, and that food must be produced somewhere and by someone, so essentially, we all outsource our food production to a farmer. The sad reality is that in today's world, most people are completely disconnected from their farmers. Ask many children where eggs come from, and they will simply point to a supermarket. But the role of a farmer goes beyond just food

production. Farmers are also stewarding the land they are working, and their farming practices are either harming or healing the environment. There really is no neutral ground in this – farmers are either contributing to the demise of our global ecosystem or nurturing it towards regeneration and restoration. Now, if you take that to its natural conclusion, as consumers, our choices around what food we buy and from which farmers becomes a direct endorsement and support of that farmer's practices. If I buy a chicken from a Concentrated Animal Feed Operation (CAFO) I am supporting a broken, cruel and environmentally detrimental farming system. But when we buy from a regenerative farmer who is focused on the holistic regeneration of their land, we are not only getting a much higher quality product but are also playing a role in healing our planet.

JH-B: Foundational to your farming philosophy and practice are the tenets of regenerative agriculture. Why have you embraced it as your method of farming – as opposed to the methods of modern industrial agriculture – and what does regenerative agriculture look like for you in practice?



BA: At the core of regenerative agriculture is the nurturing of healthy soil, so we farm using a number of principles to lead us towards that end:

- Minimal disturbance of the soil. When we plough and till the earth, we degrade the soil and lose most of the carbon in the ground, and carbon is the driving force behind the soil food web and thus healthy living soil.
- No chemical fertilizers or poisons. This has become the backbone of modern industrial farming, and necessarily so because the mainstream “extractive” farming approach treats soil as an inert mechanical substrate that requires vast inputs to produce maximum outputs. The problem is that those chemicals destroy the life in the soil – literally billions of microbes that exist in a handful of living, healthy soil. Those microbes drive regenerative agriculture.
- Incorporation of animals. Animals are key tools in any regenerative farm as they both disturb the ground surface and drive the nutrient cycle. Animals are not just an end in regenerative farming, but also the means towards a thriving ecosystem.
- Biodiversity. We are not managing a monoculture but trying to nurture an intensely diverse ecosystem. Diversity promotes health and resilience.

In practice, on our farm, that means that we are managing lots of different agricultural enterprises – cows for dairy and beef, sheep, chickens for eggs, trees for fruit – and we are trying to choreograph all those elements carefully as we try to mimic nature and ultimately grow healthy, living soil. We move our animals often (at least every two days) and then



allow the grasses a long time to recover, creating a pattern of pulsing growth that promotes deep roots and a soil rich in carbon. It is all about holistic management towards the

goal of a healthy ecosystem.

JH-B: How does your Christian faith inform your farming? And how does farming inform your Christian faith?

BA: Oh, it is huge! It takes me all the way back to Genesis where we were asked to steward God's creation. The picture we get in Genesis is not an extractive mentality – get as much out of the planet as fast as we can, no matter the cost to creation itself. That is what I see around the world now, not just in mainstream agriculture. Rather, we are given this mandate to care for creation, to massage it into its fullest and most productive potential. My sense is that, around the world, God is calling more and more of his followers back to that vocation. So, my farming is rooted in Genesis' calling to steward creation but is also rooted in the Revelation image of a new heaven and new earth. I have no idea what that is ultimately going to look like, but my sense is that God has called us to begin creating a space that is foreshadowing the restorative work that God is doing and will perfect in creation itself. I feel like this regeneration of a piece of land is a tangible demonstration of God's heart for redemption and restoration – of people's hearts primarily, but also of creation that is “groaning” for his appearing. I ask the question, “Does God care about how we farm?” For me it is a resounding yes. And then that filters down to, “Does God care about what food I buy and how it was produced?,” and again, I think the answer must be yes.

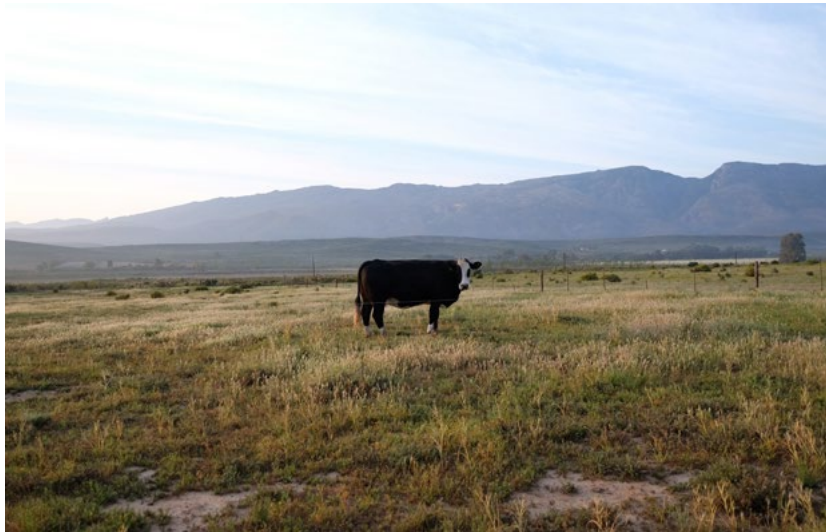
JH-B: Most of us are not and will not be farmers, and yet, as you reminded us via Wendell Berry, “We are all farmers by proxy.” What are some of the things that we as everyday

citizens can do to participate in farming practices and a food chain that heed God's call to be good stewards of creation and seek its flourishing?

BA: Again, I would encourage people to dig deeper into the food system and where their food comes from. Read *The Omnivore's Dilemma* by Michael Pollan. Watch the documentary *Kiss the Ground*. Then I would encourage people to try to make regular small shifts in their buying and eating habits and choices. Try to grow a consciousness of where your food comes from and how it was produced. The context will be different for everyone, but increasingly regenerative farmers

are looking to make their produce available to conscious consumers through food clubs, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) networks and online shops. If you spend

some time looking, you will likely find there is an emerging food system that runs independent of the mass food and supermarket machine. It is normally not as convenient, but convenience should not be the primary driver for our food purchases. We need to focus on the farming practices and the subsequent nutrient quality. And let me just say, often people would complain that these food options are more expensive. That may be true from a purely monetary perspective – but what of the hidden costs? Cheaper food results in poorer health leading to higher medical bills. Cheaper food is



less nutritious resulting in the need for greater volumes to be consumed. Cheaper food is ultimately costing the global ecology. We need to start thinking more holistically in our food system.

But small steps – that is key. A dramatic overnight shift is a daunting prospect. So, change one thing at a time. Find better eggs or eat less processed food – allow that to become your new normal and then make another shift.

Jarrold Howard-Browne is part of the KLC's operations team. Photos taken at Wellspring Farm by the author.

Kiss the Ground

FILM REVIEW BY JARROLD HOWARD-BROWNE

In 2006 former US vice president, Al Gore, presented the documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, to the world, placing the plight of our planet's climate front and centre in the global cultural zeitgeist. It has been seventeen years and the climate debate rages on with a growing accompaniment of scientific study, protest action, Hollywood films and documentaries, books, news articles, songs and heated Twitter debates.

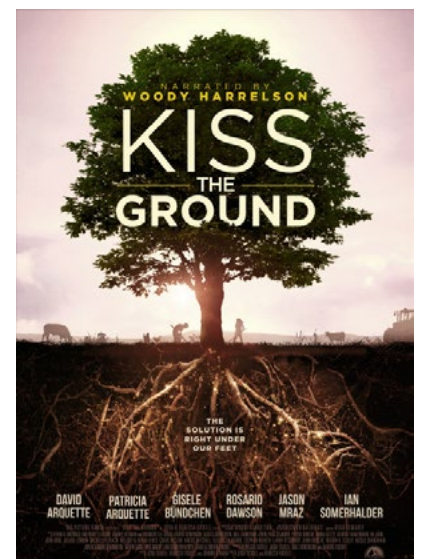
It is impossible, in this brief review, to run the full gamut of the global climate debate. Instead, I am going to focus solely on one of the more recent entries in this conversation, the award-winning documentary, *Kiss the Ground*.

Kiss the Ground is narrated by Woody Harrelson and produced by Sundance Audience Award-winning documentarians Josh and Rebecca Tickell. Featuring a who's who of noteworthy soil, climate and agricultural scientists, farmers, policy makers, business leaders, authors and activists, it insists that both the problem and solution for our climate challenges lie right beneath our feet: the earth's soil.

As the film states simply: "If we take care of the soil, it will take care of us."

At this point we are aware of many of the main culprits contributing to climate degradation, for example, the burning of fossil fuels, emission of greenhouse gases by feedlot livestock, and wide-scale pollution. *Kiss the Ground* acknowledges these, however, it makes a convincing case for what it sees as a main driver of the climate crisis: the destruction of the earth's soils and exponential increase in desertification on a global scale due to modern, industrial agricultural practices.

According to the documentary these practices include: mass tilling, monocropping, the use of artificial fertiliser and toxic pesticides, and the decoupling of livestock from the land and natural life cycle of the soil. Tilling uncovers the soil, causing



©Big Picture Ranch

evaporation and exposing the delicate soil microbiome to the elements. This, combined with the stressing of the soil via repeated artificial fertiliser use and the killing of microbial life by pesticides and other toxic sprays, destroys nearly all life in the soil. Dead soil becomes sand. Desertified areas of land – once living topsoil, now blowing away in the wind – cannot absorb and employ water effectively or, via plant photosynthesis and microbial activity, absorb the sun's heat and draw down carbon from our atmosphere. This raises average temperatures and allows build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. It also makes food production more difficult as topsoil disappears year on year.

As one soil scientist states in the documentary: "The way we are feeding ourselves is undermining the very ecology that we're dependent upon. So, the long-term prognosis for our survival on this planet, given business as usual, is very, very poor."

Thankfully the documentary does not end there, instead it presents a compelling and seemingly achievable solution to our climate problems: build healthy soil and the soil will take care of the rest. This is because soil has the unique ability to "sequester carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere." Through photosynthesis plants absorb sunlight and draw carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, which travels to the roots of the plant and is used as fuel and building materials, ultimately being sequestered there by the billions of micro-organisms in the soil. There is no greater tool available to humanity that can draw down carbon from the atmosphere than healthy, living soil. Living soil also absorbs exponentially more water as the water does not run off or evaporate due to erosion, but through the transpiration of plants, restores a healthy water cycle. Sunlight is also absorbed rather than deflected back into the atmosphere and average temperatures drop.

But how to build healthy soil? *Kiss the Ground* calls for the shedding of chemical agricultural methods and instead for the adoption of regenerative agriculture, an umbrella term for a collection of principles and farming methods that all aim to manage for soil health. Some of these include: not tilling the soil and ensuring the constant presence of living roots, thereby preventing erosion and desertification; forgoing the use of artificial fertilisers and pesticides, thereby preventing the destruction of soil life; ensuring biodiversity instead of monocropping at scale, so preventing



Vincent van Gogh, *Tree Roots*

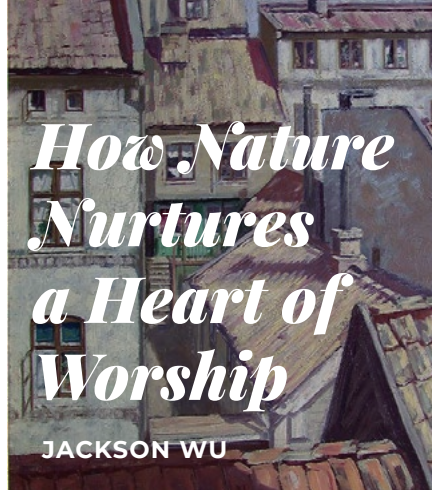
rampant disease and risk of whole crop loss; and mimicking the patterns of nature, including the recoupling of livestock and land via planned rotational grazing where the animals stimulate the plant life through appropriate grazing and trampling and fertilise the ground organically.

An added benefit to employing these methods of agriculture, the film argues, is that they not only heal our soils and significantly contribute to the stabilization of our climate, but also produce healthier, more nutrient-dense products, free from harmful chemicals, better for the humans who eat them, and scalable globally as a business and as a way to feed the world.

One of the strengths of *Kiss the Ground* is the way it highlights the many successful initiatives already at play both on a local and global scale. From the educational work of soil scientists, to regenerative agriculture successfully employed by farmers and ranchers, both small scale and large, and to the enterprises and charities of local business owners and citizens. It is also honest in highlighting the mixed-bag attempts of political action and global policy proposals in this arena. And, finally, refusing to ignore everyday consumers and citizens, it also shows many ways in which we can contribute through understanding where our food comes from and choosing to buy regeneratively produced products.

In the end, *Kiss the Ground* is an important documentary tackling some of the climate challenges we face today. It aptly diagnoses what it sees to be a significant problem and offers a persuasive solution. Whether or not all its claims bear out in the long term remains to be seen, however, it is a worthy and hope-filled contribution to this ongoing conversation.

Amongst other platforms, *Kiss the Ground* is available to stream worldwide on Netflix and available to rent for \$1 on Vimeo.



How Nature Nurtures a Heart of Worship

JACKSON WU

I'm not an "outdoorsy" guy. I like books, air conditioners and electricity too much. My boys and I once "camped" on our balcony because, as it turns out,

Chinese cities lack forests. We didn't make it for two hours before coming inside. But during Covid, I logged hundreds of hours hiking the mountains around Arizona. I often spent more time with my AllTrails app than my Bible. And that's okay. God uses nature to nurture a heart of worship.

Few people enjoy deserts. Neither Moses nor Israel sought a home in the wilderness. I'm no exception. But sometimes we go anyway because that's where God calls us. Often, we'll find God creating sanctuaries in solitary places.

Initially, I cared little for nature. I just wanted exercise while my gym was shut down. If I learned anything spiritually, I assumed it would be from a podcast or audiobook.

This is ironic because it's precisely my phone that stunts my spiritual growth more than other things. The dopamine cravings keep me from being present and attentive to people. The noise insulates my mind from the Spirit's whisper.

However, on long trails and despite my inclinations, God arrested my attention. Some paths are monotonous, others dangerous. There were times when I wondered whether I'd return healthy. Snakes, cliffs and suffocating heat threaten one's autonomy and self-sufficiency. Take the wrong path or fail to drink water? You'll soon realize how much you need community. While hikes can push us physically, desert trails can challenge our hearts too. Prolonged silence induces withdrawal symptoms, exposing addictions to technology.

In some ways, extended times in nature remind us that we're human. We're dust, created, not self-made. On early morning hikes, constellations were my only companions. I felt small beneath those stars. Even on the highest peaks, God showed me how vast is his creation. I echoed the psalmist: "what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them" (Ps 8:4).

Ancient people thought gods dwelled on mountains. Even the Bible depicts the garden of Eden as a mountain (Ezek 28:13, 16). While rejecting any suggestion that God is limited geographically, we see why Scripture invites us to seek God's face in nature. The heavens declare the grandeur of God (Ps 19:1). It's only when one savours God's creation that one understands how Isaiah beckons: "Break forth into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree in it!" (Isa 44:23). Nature speaks with one voice praising God, but few of us learn to join the chorus.

What can we do? In "So Will I (100 Billion X)," Hillsong United declares powerfully that since the stars, mountains, oceans – everything – lift God high, so will we.¹

Want to worship God? Struggling to stand in awe of him? Find a river, a mountain, or a forest trail. Nature nurtures a heart of worship. Why? John Piper says it well:

The really wonderful moments of joy in this world are not the moments of self-satisfaction, but self-forgetfulness. Standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon and contemplating your own greatness is pathological. At such moments we are made for a magnificent joy that comes from outside ourselves.²

In nature, we see more plainly than elsewhere what it means to be created for worship. We discern what it means to reflect the nature of God.

Jackson Wu (PhD, SEBTS) is the author of The Cross in Context and Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes. He provides articles and resources at jacksonwu.org.



Konstantin Miroshnik and Natalia Kurguzova-Miroshnik, *Yes, Glorious God*

1. "So Will I (100 Billion X)" by Hillsong United (2017).

2. John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life* (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway, 2003), 33.



HEIDI SALZWEDEL INTERVIEWS MA WAI TING SUISON, WHO LIVES AND WORKS IN HONG KONG.

Heidi Salzwedel: Tell us a bit more about yourself, Suison.

Suison Ma: I was born in the mid-90s in Shenzhen (mainland China), yet raised in Hong Kong, and I graduated from the Academy of Visual Arts, Hong Kong Baptist University, in 2017. I am a multidisciplinary artist and designer who is freelancing and doing mostly commission-based work for companies. I create work which breaks away from traditional rules in aesthetics and focuses on conveying a deeper level of meaning. I follow my intuition in the creative process and my work is usually based on my imagination.

HS: What themes and types of media do you typically use when creating your work?

Suison Ma: I often create mixed-media works (usually a mixture of hand and digital drawing), and I explore the possibilities of different creative media and styles. Digital media is convenient to edit, especially if you are working on a commission. It's pricey to have your own studio in Hong Kong so being able to work from home and keep my work on the computer is good; it only requires a small space, unlike large canvases. I can combine traditional media with digital media; like a collaboration between the old and new. I love the textures that using traditional media provides; freehand sketching with traditional media shows human emotion and seems to preserve the innocence and courage of childhood. Pencils, both black and coloured, probably were the first and simplest art materials I used in my childhood. Their texture gives me a relaxed feeling that I would like to keep in my artistic practice. I often use the daily moments of life as the theme; I want to share the sense of humour in life, and bring people happiness and warmth.

HS: What has been the path, artistically and in terms of your faith, that has led you to where you are today in your creative journey?

Suison Ma: In the past I tended to think of visual art as a worldly thing because of what I saw in the world around me. The Bible verse 1 John 2:16 explains the feeling that I used to have well: "For everything in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but

from the world." The main problem in visual art is not the media, it's the attitude or intention behind it. But I've got a new perspective towards it now after I had experiences in knowing that God also uses art to speak in the Bible. God himself is creative, beautiful and good and that's the main reason why I want to create.

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

Suison Ma: I studied exhibition design at the Hong Kong Design Institute first and this gave me experience in working digitally and using creative software programmes. I then moved on to study visual art at the Academy of Visual Art, Hong Kong Baptist University. It is there where I learnt how to conceptualize my art process and refine my drawing skills and later on, once I had graduated, I experimented a lot and managed to put my drawing skills and the digital art medium together.

HS: In what way does your culture inform your art making, both stylistically as well as socially?

Suison Ma: Growing up, my culture was informed by the predominant Eastern culture because of where I live, but was also heavily influenced by Western media as these



are the type of movies I watched and stories that I read. In my culture, creative people are often inspired by Western pop culture as seen in movies and heard in lyrics; they recreate them but create new ideas, almost like a secondary creation.

For character design, there is a set visual language related to the shape of characters. An example is that for villains the artist usually uses triangular shapes, giving them broad shoulders. If I draw a character rounder, more circular, it can make the character more approachable.

Recently I have created a series of digital artworks which reference characters from Western Disney movies. I then added my own drawing style to reimagine these characters but also to transform them into characters which show foundational biblical principles through what they are saying. These characters are superheroes in the lives of children; recognisable heroes and villains that can be reinterpreted to tell us things about God.



This digital piece, from a series of many characters, features Cruella de Vil from *101 Dalmatians*, a Disney movie which came out in 1961. It reinterprets a biblical truth about God's sovereignty by alluding to Proverbs 14:27: "The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares

of death." I have tried here, through a well-known Disney character, to show a fun way of saying that fearing the Lord, and revering him, is a good way of life.

In a famous scene from the Disney classic, *The Lion King*, the crafty Scar tries to overthrow the kingdom by saying "Stick with me and you'll never go hungry again." I'm wanting to give a new spin on Disney characters; to reinterpret these moments as Scriptures and what God is saying to us in a



way that can make people happy, amused and able to take something new from a villainous character they recognise.

Gaston from *Beauty and the Beast*, is an obtuse, strong and heroic, but probably illiterate, character who tries to read the Bible. He is a reminder to viewers that



it may be a good choice of book to read as it has words in it which, according to 2 Timothy 3:16–17, are "given by inspiration of God, and [are] profitable for doctrine ... for instruction in righteousness [so that] the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

HS: You seem to weave biblical truths into both Disney and biblical stories. What motivates your use of story and can you give an example of a biblical story that you have illustrated?



Suison Ma: What is the name of the fish that swallowed Jonah? The answer in my language is tuna fish (吞拿魚). The symbol 吞 means swallow, 拿 is the abbreviation of Jonah, and 魚 is fish. There is familiarity in these Bible stories – people know the stories and characters. Humour invites people in and makes them willing to engage with the biblical truth behind the story. In these illustrations of villains in Disney movies there is a way of turning their words around and relating the words to similar Scriptures. I am trying to redeem the villains of stories (or people who are running away from God in some cases, for example, in the story of Jonah) and I am wanting to show how God can redeem any person or story.

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

Learn more about Suison Ma (suisonma@gmail.com) at www.suisonma.com and @suisonma.

Preaching Jonah for All its Worth

Jonah is a truly remarkable book. However, especially among evangelicals, two obstacles regularly get in the way of our hearing it in its full acoustics. The first is whether or not Jonah is historical. Was Jonah actually swallowed by a large fish? This historical question is not unimportant, but it easily prevents us from listening to Jonah if we make it the main concern. It becomes a serious obstacle if we believe that only if Jonah is history writing can it tell us truth. In its own way fiction can be as truth-telling as history writing, as, for example, Jesus' parables reveal again and again. The second is whether or not Jonah is about Jesus. It is clear from the Gospels that Jonah is a type of Jesus, but to make Jesus the main focus of our reading of Jonah obscures its powerful message.



Walter Hayn, *The Murmuring Deep*

In order to really hear Jonah we need to attend to what Brevard Childs called the *discrete witness* of the OT, before moving on to how it is received in the NT. Jonah meant something to its OT audience/s, and this should be our first focus of attention. Jonah 1:1, for example, alerts us to typical OT prophetic revelation coming to Jonah, and "Nineveh" became the capital of one of Israel's great enemies, Assyria. We neglect this "historical" dimension to our detriment.

Equally important is the type of literature we find in Jonah. Amidst the twelve minor prophets Jonah, uniquely, is *narrative about a prophet*. Read Jonah in the Hebrew

and you will soon discover that Jonah is exquisitely crafted narrative. Thus, an awareness of OT narrative and how it works is an indispensable tool for accessing the message of Jonah. It is through the poetics of the text that we hear its message. See the section on "Narrative" in David J. H. Beldman's chapter "Literary Approaches and Old Testament Interpretation," in Craig G. Bartholomew and David J. H. Beldman, eds., *Hearing the Old Testament: Listening for God's Address* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), including his references to further literature in the footnotes. Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (NICOT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), and Kenneth M. Craig, *A Poetics of Jonah: Art in the Service of Ideology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), are important and useful sources in this respect.

To really hear Jonah we need *imagination*. We need to imagine ourselves sitting amidst a group of OT Israelites listening to the story, picking up on the references to other parts of the OT. As we do so we will become alert to Jonah's privilege of being a recipient of God's words, of the absolutely extraordinary commission that comes through those words, and we will find ourselves conflicted about Jonah's reaction. In the process it will gradually dawn upon us that Jonah is ... us, Israel, who have the comparable privilege of having God's oracles. We will journey with this most reluctant prophet who eventually performs God's command but then becomes exceedingly upset when God does not execute judgement on

Nineveh. On the role of imagination in biblical interpretation see Trevor Hart, "Imagination and Responsible Reading," chapter 15 in Craig G. Bartholomew, et al., eds., *Renewing Biblical Interpretation* (SAHS 1. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), and Nicholas Wolterstorff's response.

Read thus, all sorts of important themes will be pushed to the surface. Themes like: as recipients of God's words what sort of responsibility do we have to the nations? Are God's words just for his people (Israel) or are they also for the other nations? On this missional note see Stephen B. Chapman and Lacey C. Warner, "Jonah and the Imitation



Peter Laszlo Peri, *The Preacher*

of God: Rethinking Evangelism in the Old Testament,” *JTI* 2.1 (2008), 43–69. Are we really to care for our great enemies, for those who have caused us so much pain? It is hard here not to recall Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s profound point in relation to 1 Peter 3:9:

The world lives by the blessing of God and of the righteous and thus has a future. Blessing means laying one’s hand on something and saying, Despite everything, you belong to God. This is what we do with the world that inflicts such suffering on us. We do not abandon it, we do not repudiate, despise or condemn it. Instead we call it back to God, we give it hope, we lay our hands on it and say, may God’s blessing come upon you, may God renew you, be blessed, world created by God, you who belong to your Creator and Redeemer.¹

And what are we to make of unbelievers who behave far better than believers, as do the sailors compared with Jonah. See Frank A. Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), chapter 5.

YHWH is clearly the main character in Jonah and what an extraordinary depiction we receive of him. Jonah foregrounds characteristics of YHWH that are rarely found in lists of his attributes, namely his holiness, compassion and patience. Karl Barth is attentive to

God’s patience, and he is well worth reading on this. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 2.1, 406–39. In relation to God’s compassion Jonah concludes on an extraordinary note. God is concerned about the many cattle in Nineveh! His compassion extends to his entire creation.

We know from Genesis 1:26–28 that we are made in the image of God. But are we up to the journey of becoming like God? This question is posed in acute fashion in Jonah. Jonah is invited to become like God. His response is to flee but God pursues him. As he descends in the waters he finds his way back to God again but then becomes very angry with God when God relents from judging the Ninevites. In a Roald Dahl-like twist, we never learn whether Jonah finally came round to God’s way of thinking and acting. Jonah is invited, again and again, to transformation, but did he accept the invitation? Ultimately this does not matter because the book is about us! We have the privilege of being recipients of God’s words, and are we willing to carry God’s image by becoming holy, compassionate and patient? Two excellent readings of Jonah in this respect are André Lacocque and Pierre-Emmanuel Lacocque, *The Jonah Complex* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1981); *Jonah: A Psycho-Religious Approach to the Prophet* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990).

Read in this way we are in a good position to attend to Jesus’ invocation of Jonah as the only sign to be given to “this generation” in Matthew 12:38–42. See Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (2nd ed. Grand

Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 572–585.



Marc Chagall, *The Stable*

Jonah is part of the “Book of the Twelve” (minor prophets) and discussion continues about the extent to which it should be read as part of this “Book.” See in this and other respects Craig G. Bartholomew and Heath A. Thomas, *The Minor Prophets: A Theological Introduction* (Downers Grove, ILL: IVP Academic, 2023).

Jonah is dynamite. Listen in order to preach, and preach so that we may listen and hear.

1. Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 351.

What's Your Motivation?

ANDY LITTLETON

I, a minister in a post-Christian American city, found myself on a Zoom call presenting our upcoming green stormwater infrastructure project with about a dozen community leaders. On screen with me were representatives from an agency that connects and serves local businesses, a housing developer, a representative from a company that prints materials for the Phoenix Suns basketball franchise, a leader in one of our most diverse and liberal business districts and others. Midway through my presentation, I alluded to a tune they might recognize from Ken Burns's National Parks documentary. The tune is "Terra Beata" (Blessed Earth) and it floats behind many a memorable scene. I shared a poem now associated with the tune, penned in 1901 by Maltbie Babcock, a minister who loved his walks through the lush countryside of Upstate New York.

This is my Father's world,
And to my listening ears
All nature sings, and round me rings
The music of the spheres.

The poem goes on, then ends with:

The Lord is King: let the heavens ring! God reigns; let
earth be glad!

"There has always been a strong coalition in our faith tradition, even if it may not feel like it in our current cultural moment, who see the earth as a gift to be loved and stewarded," I shared. "Therefore one of our greatest callings as people is to 'make the earth be glad' because joy is one of the most powerful motives of the heart. Joy motivates us far more than shame or guilt that says 'you're going to mess everything up.' Joy enlivens the heart. We see this project as an implication of our faith, a way to make the earth glad, to love our neighbour, and to display the image of God and live out our vocation; to display the character of God who is good, pursues justice, and is especially concerned for the lives of the poor."

After this I shared some of our next steps in the project and concluded my time. The moderator asked if anyone had any questions. One woman on the call shot me a direct message. "Thank you for sharing your motivation. That was really inspiring to me." As it is with Zoom, we all went back to mute and the moderator cued up the next set of slides.

Next was the housing developer, discussing a large project that included a number of sustainable practices. I have no doubt it will be a gift to our city.

When I prepared for this presentation I was in a hurry. The agency had created slide templates for us, and I assumed I'd plug in data and little else. I thought that until I came to the slide labelled "Your Motivation." I had plenty of simple options before me. I do want to love our neighbours and care for the next generation. I'm sure the trees we put in will contribute to those causes, but I knew there was more to it. I have encouraged my church to care about the environment because it's part of our mission. It is our mandate from creation: fill the earth and subdue it. Coupled with worship, to subdue must mean to value and steward well. I teach that caring for creation is also an excellent opportunity to build bridges with our neighbours who don't acknowledge God as creator. Most of all, I teach what I fight to believe, that God changes our hearts by giving us grace and promising more. "Let earth be glad" is a statement of impending grace on earth. My entire ministry I've hoped that our community would live and speak of a gracious God in view of our neighbours and friends. Now, those very people were asking me, "What's your motivation?"

I was down to my last ten minutes before presentation time. Months back I had watched the Ken Burns documentary and noticed that every time John Muir was the subject, Burns had the score of "Terra Beata" in the background. Muir, the Scottish-American naturalist and "Father of the National Parks," was Christ-haunted, and so, therefore, was much of the documentary. The narrator had described Muir's sense of nature as a "cathedral" through his writings. These things all came flooding to my mind. I googled the writer of "This is My Father's World" and I threw in a picture of Yosemite National Park. I had to save quickly and email the presentation so the host could pre-load the slides. I sat in my desk chair absorbing the fact that I was about to present our motivation to a secular audience. I sensed that God was with me.

So how did we get to this place? How did this opportunity to share our motivation come to us?

When we first moved our church into the Arroyo Chico neighbourhood in Tucson, Arizona, we wanted to connect with the neighbours. Following the principles of Christian Community Development, we sought to learn what was



most important to them. We had a big, tan, empty wall, so we offered it as a canvas for a mural (the story of the neighbourhood) and invited neighbours to come and tell us their stories. As we heard their stories, we looked for themes. The overwhelming, and surprising, theme was plants. Older neighbours reminisced on the days when the *arroyo* (a little dry river bed) had native spinach in it and when the kids would slice and eat their own *nopales* (pads of the prickly pear cactus) after school. Younger residents wished there was more shade and a community garden. We took a lot of notes. Over one hundred people showed up for mural painting day and gave us more feedback.

Fast forward a few years; a leader in local sustainability reached out to ask if we had interest in being a part of some projects. They had heard about us from someone else. As they scanned available grants to present to us, they came upon one that funded projects that utilize stormwater to create green space. Our neighbourhood is a heat island. We also knew our neighbours wanted to see more plant life in the neighbourhood, so we knew it was time to jump at the opportunity. We pulled together eight community organizations to endorse the project. Then a programme that helps “scale up” sustainability projects was offered to us at no cost. That programme asked for our motivation, and the investment that the programme added took our presentation from good to great. The city approved the funding.

The story isn't over. Months later a large conference on water conservation heard about our story, and invited me and a co-organizer to speak in person. A city agency that operates a housing complex nearby expressed interest in collaborating. We are now in the process of attempting to fund a second phase of the project with the support of all of the agencies we connected with the first time. We have learned, people really do love to collaborate around the care of our blessed earth (*terra beata*), and sometimes they even give you the opportunity to share your motivation.

Andy Littleton lives in Tucson, Arizona, USA, where he pastors the Mission Church and co-owns a small home goods store. Visit www.andylittleton.com and www.missionchurchtucson.com for more about Andy and hymnary.org for more information on “Terra Beata” and additional resources. Photographs by the author.



*The sap rises in the maple each spring after the squeeze and release, squeeze and release of winter.... Bodies, light, sap, our language.... Would God put himself into the body of a man if what he wanted was to escape the body?*²

Winter is forgetting.

January's northwest wind blows feet of snow in drifts and eddies along the rock wall, covering last fall's leaves. The days are getting longer in New Hampshire, but the nights are getting colder. Even the stones contract and clench, defending against the sharp air.

We light a fire, and bank it with split ash and dry oak. In the evening, in the orange glow of hot coals, we try to remember, but the memory remains out of reach, buried, frozen. We sleep through the January moon, whose light turns the white snow blue.

In early February the wind calms, and the sun thaws the ice along the granite wall near the sugar maple. Snow trapped in the old tree for weeks, a white patch in the saddle

between trunk and limb, melts and falls at last, drops of water holding light.

It's time again. The sap is rising.

I put on my hat, boots, and gloves. In the barn I get my drill and my hammer; buckets and taps; the pan and the stove.

The steel drill penetrates the scaly bark of the old sugar maple. The sharp edge of the bit finds purchase, digs in, pulls deeper. Wet sugar maple flesh, soaked in sap, flies from the drill and spatters on the snow, tan tailings the colour of bread. Before I can put the drill down and pick up the hammer and tap, sap gathers at the rim of the hole, swells, expands, and then releases like a held breath, overflows in a tiny torrent, a stream, and drips down the craggy bark like oil down an old man's beard.

The end is sweetness, but we don't get there without suffering. We know this already, but we always forget, always need to remember. There is no sweetness without injury, no dawn without the long midnight watch that feels endless, no gentle puff of a southwest breeze without the arctic blast. We want to imagine an innocent past, or gain without cost, but that would be forgetting.

Sap has a sweetness in it. You can taste the hint; it's *aqua vitae*, water of life. Sugar is heat, is light; sap is springtime dissolved in water. I gather

it in buckets, refine it with fire, strain it through felt and ladle it into jars. I lick the drippings that stick to the pot: maple syrup.

The reason we pray at mealtime is to remember all of this: to remember the wound in the earth, the furrow, from which wheat rises; the wound in the tree, the hole, from which syrup comes. All of this is gift and grace, Christ in ten thousand places, calling us to remember that unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone; calling us to remember that there is no Easter without the pain of Friday and the despair of Saturday; calling us to repent of our innocence, as though we could live as gods, the original givers of grace rather than the receivers. No. Every life must affirm the negation by which it lives, or be lost.



Grant Wood, *Fall Plowing*

Out of his side flows living water. We receive it as gift, the sweetness of Christ.

The discipline is prayer, and prayer is remembering. Every day we begin again.

Rev Chris Owen (chris@ribeye-media.com) is a writer, theologian, filmmaker and boatbuilder. His project for reframing public questions using theology and moral philosophy is here: <https://www.whatingods.com>. Photograph and video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDlyBu5mqe8>) by Chris Owen.

1. The title comes from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*.

2. From "There is a Sweetness in It" in Linda Gregg, *Chosen by the Lion*, (Saint Paul, MN:

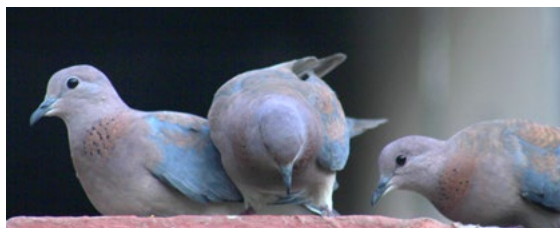
Graywolf Press, 1994), 27, by kind permission of Frederick T. Courtright, The Permissions Company.

Portals to Wonderment

MARIT GREENWOOD

across twigs and dry leaves in this bed, moving like an ancient armoured military tanker doggedly missioning into enemy territory.

On many mornings, at least thirty laughing doves descend on the feeding table in our garden to staccato-peck the birdseed. One even has a name – *Vlerkie* (Little Wing) – identified readily by her drooping primary wing feathers. She's been around for at least six years; we've watched her nest in a flimsy crook of the large avocado tree adjacent to the table, watched her mate, watched her companionably hanging around a dying dove.



Cut-throat finches also visit, squealing as they compete for place at the feeders hanging just above the table, accompanied sometimes by a miniature crowd of teeny bronze mannikins which look like wind-up clockwork toys, tails twitching from side to side as they forage under the table, behaving as a single organism with many active beaks, flying off in one corporate swoop of wing at the slightest perceived threat. "TickTocks" is our name for them.

Last autumn we witnessed a praying mantis deposit her eggs and build her egg sac on an ageing wooden stable door, the entrance to the nearby studio. No wonder Jean-Henri Fabre in his *Book of Insects* refers to her creation (called ootheca) as looking like something a confectioner would whip up! It took her hours.

Incredibly, by chance I saw the babies

emerging that spring. Wraithlike; some expending what seemed to be considerable energy to drag their back legs out of the neat nest envelopes.

Thereafter we periodically saw juniors, then teenagers, then young adults, at some distance from the nest. Her offspring? Since we had discovered five other nests elsewhere, who knows?

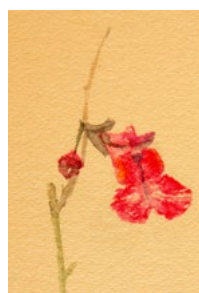
Between the massive wild basil plants, ebullient irises and unnamed pinky-red-flowering bushy plants, bees and other nectar-seeking insects, including the two-pip policeman butterfly, have options in our garden. Watching the carpenter bee crawl nose first into an iris bloom is as pleasurable as a slow lick on an ice cream cone. Once we saw one crawl feebly over the lawn grass near this garden bed, curl up, and die.



To my astonishment, of an evening I saw a sphinx moth, proboscis extended over a distance of about six centimetres, slurp up the nectar of the spider lily blooms, this lily having front-row status in the bed. (Ah, so that is why the squash plant flowers only bloom at night.) Then too we watched a large darkling beetle labour

After the mysterious disappearance of a slice of lawn, we learnt that some little creatures that like chewing grass roots were most likely responsible for this mini desert. Weeds with flat, disc-shaped leaves have moved in since. The house sparrows consider this an attractive feeding ground nowadays. Watching them, languid doves sun themselves on the brickwork nearby, wings stretched out over the warmth; ants scurrying on the feathers, vacuuming up little skin irritants that serve as their meal while cleaning up the birds.

Too busy to watch them, the Karoo thrushes attack the lawn, piercing it with their orange beaks for worm, grub or bug. Some delight in bathing in the little plastic tub on the feeding table. Fiercely protective of that water, they can return to it up to eight times, emerging eventually like wet mops, their handsome "facial" features wetted into severe sternness from the constant dipping.



I would like to tell you about the death's-head hawk moth in the nightshade tree, the mud wasp, solitary bee, and soil-caked garden snail halfway up the wall of

the house, and more.

But that will just have to wait, for now, that is.

Marit Greenwood and her husband live in South Africa. She is an artist who is drawn to contemplative spirituality and is responsible for the photographs and watercolour sketches.

NUMBER 38

CRAIG G. BARTHOLOMEW



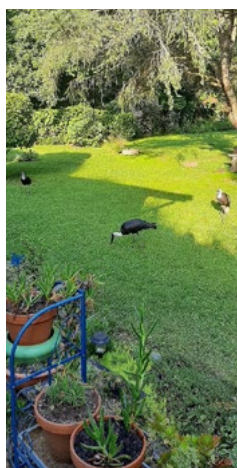
No 38 with its original gate and our rescue dog, Scampi

Place and time are basic constituents of creaturely life. However, they are easily ignored. To live a fully human life we need to be attentive to them, with the gifts and challenges they bring.

When I was studying overseas years ago my parents moved to No 38 in Hillcrest, KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa). This is an exceptionally beautiful part of the province, with its rolling hills (*Hillcrest!*), dry winters and rainy, humid summers. When they moved there it was rural. Our property is a nearly flat acre of fertile ground. My father always had the instincts of a farmer and, with the 3-bedroomed house set in the middle of the property, the back part became the orchard and vegetable garden.

It is not only humans that inhabit place, and, were it not for the roving bands of monkeys who can destroy a crop in five minutes, our garden would have produced even more than it did. Monkeys, I discovered, can forage on particular routes for some eighty years, knowledge passed down through the matriarchs. After South Africa became a democracy in 1994, the middle class evacuated many of the cities and our quiet, rural context filled up with gated communities, an additional mall, and so on.

Nevertheless, the birdlife remains



prolific, and the property retains its feel of earthy tranquillity despite the high walls, barbed wire fencing, electric gates and other security elements that are sadly standard fare among the middle class in South Africa today.

Place holds our memories and that is certainly true of No 38. My parents lived out their working days, retirement and deaths at No 38. My mother died in her bed at home.

My father was not very mobile, and we purchased a three-wheel scooter for him to use around the property. This transformed his life and every morning, after coffee and toast, he would go out on his scooter, often dangerously fast and on inclines, followed by our wonderful rescue dog, Fluffy. By then I had worked away on the front of the garden, filling it with flowers, and he would park by them and just sit, with Fluffy by him. Just after he turned ninety, he died in hospital, and I flew back from Canada and led his funeral in our back garden. *Place holds our memories.*

When the pandemic struck, it became necessary to make No 38 self-sustainable. We built a two-bedroomed cottage on the back of the property and my sister moved into it, freeing the main house to be rented out. My cousin extended his flat on the side of the main house, increasing it substantially. He had brought his London cat Tia, who had only ever known a second storey council flat in Romford, to South Africa, and she now relishes the expansiveness of our property, still choosing to take a nap in the crate in which she flew to South Africa.



Development and nature are not necessarily antithetical and should not be. Some remarkable birds began to visit No 38 during the pandemic and have remained, visiting the new cottage regularly, and feeling quite free to walk into the cottage. In the photo you can see the woolly-necked storks that are daily visitors to No 38. This species was endangered but through adapting to urban life is now off the endangered list.

It is truly the case that as we nurture nature, it nurtures us.

Craig Bartholomew is the Director of the KLC.

I lead a weekly assembly at our local parish primary school. I told the children I was writing an article about our cat, Percy, and I asked them what I should talk about. The hands shot up and there were lots of great suggestions. Where did Percy come from? What sort of cat is he? Why did we call him Percy? Are there any good stories about him? How does he contribute to family life? So, here is something of Percy's story.



Franz Marc, *Three cats*

In 2018 our daughter Fiona wanted to mark her 21st birthday with a kitten. She loves cats. I think it's fair to say that I am a late convert! Angie, a young woman who rescues unwanted animals, said she had two kittens – brothers – who needed a good home. Only several weeks old, they were adorable.

We called them Percy and Hector. "Percy" is short for "Perseus" (Fiona has an interest in the Classics!). When they were small, Hector cried and shouted for attention all the time and loved to be held like a baby on the shoulder and patted – something the more timid Percy came to appreciate too! Percy occasionally tried to say something, but nothing would come out and he seemed happy to let his more robust and confident brother do all the talking.

The first time he ventured out of the garden Hector was killed instantly by a car. We were heartbroken. He was such a character and the way the two kittens



Hector (left) and Percy

interacted was a joy. When we had brought Hector's body back into the garden, we

laid him down on the lawn and Percy spent a considerable amount of time attending to his brother's lifeless body. What sort of ritual was this? What sort of trauma was Percy experiencing? It is difficult not to attribute human-like feelings to an animal at times like that. Whatever the truth, Percy's world had changed – and to a lesser extent so had ours. We were now his only family. As she recovered from surgery, Fiona had time to lavish care, attention and love on Percy. Consequently, Percy is very relaxed around people. As one distinguished visitor (Craig!) commented: you can tell Percy has only ever experienced love. I think that's probably right!

Percy became a constant presence in our lives through the pandemic – growing more confident, and more affectionate by the day. He also found his voice! Like his brother Hector, Percy is now well able to demand attention and affection. Of course, sometimes he just wants some food or a drink. And sometimes he wants to play. When I reflect on this friendship with Percy it raises some interesting questions: to what extent do cats experience emotions? Why does Percy want to be with us? Why does Percy seem to want affection? Why does he want to play? And then there are the more mysterious sensibilities that Percy and other cats and animals seem to possess like knowing when death is near, or a person is about to have an epileptic seizure. The older



William relaxing with Percy

I get, the more I find myself being thankful to God for the comfort and friendship of pets like Percy. "O, brave new world that has such cats in 't!"

William Olhausen lives and works in Dublin as a minister in the Church of Ireland. He is also a trustee of the Kirby Laing Centre.

Photographs by Fiona Olhausen who also lives and works in Dublin. Since 2021 she has worked for the accountancy firm, Grant Thornton.

Friends from the Beginning

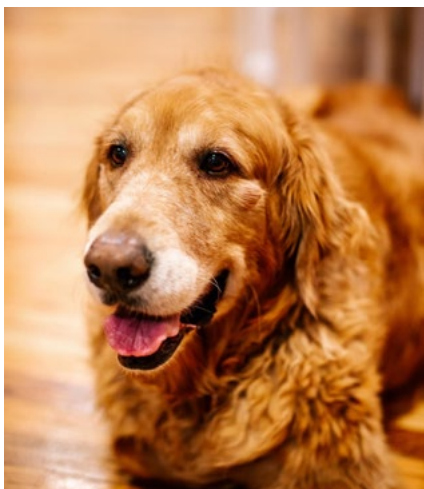
RICARDO CARDENAS

At the same time, I think there is an opposite error to avoid in our grief, and that error

In the beginning, there was Jack.

Not the beginning of time, of course, but the beginning of my marriage. Jack is the name of our family's golden retriever who just passed away a few weeks ago. I bought him as a surprise gift for my wife when we had been married for a little over a year. After struggling for a bit to come up with a name, we finally landed on "Jack." As a first year seminary student, this was a tribute to one my favourite authors, C. S. Lewis.

Jack was a loyal companion to our family for nine eventful years. Since we brought him into our home so early in our marriage, he was there before almost any other significant milestone that our family has experienced. He was there before I graduated from seminary, and before my wife ran her first half-marathon. He was there before the commencement of my career in libraries. He was there before we bought our first home, before the birth of each of our four children, and he was there before we started our church.



But now, he is no longer here.

The loss of a pet brings a peculiar type of grief. There are two common attitudes toward pets we are prone to drift toward when considering such a loss. For some, their pets carry a place in their hearts akin to the place of a child. You hear this sentiment among those who refer to their pets as "fur-babies." I was also reminded of this tendency when, in his last days, I had to take Jack to the animal hospital and the receptionist kept referring to him as my "kiddo." While completely understandable to carry this level of love for our pets, as a father to four *actual* children, this characterization is not relatable, nor is it biblical. I loved our dog, but the love I have for each one of my children is infinitely greater.

is to ascribe too *little* value to the lives of our animals and the meaning they carry. Our pets are not merely objects, material possessions or property to be bought, sold, and traded. Such a view of animals is also less than biblical. We ought to feel sad when our pets leave us. While their lives may not carry the same weight as a son or daughter, their meaning should certainly outweigh our appreciation for our favourite handbag or new tech device.

So where does this leave us? How might we think about the loss of our pets and the corresponding grief that comes with it? Theological insight is helpful here – and specifically insight from the doctrine of creation. These resources can help us to better understand our relation to our animal friends and our grief. Genesis 1 and 2 remind us that in the beginning, God created all things, and that all that he created – including animals – was good.

The creation account doesn't stop there, however. It goes on to share that in the process of seeking a helper suitable for him, the first man was invited to take part in naming these creatures – those who were formed from the earth just as he was, but who did not share in bearing the image and likeness of God.

There is a cooperation of man with God in giving these animals their rightful place and identity in the original creation. Ultimately, as we know, Adam is only able to find a suitable partner in Eve, but the creation narrative expresses a relationship between humans and animals that shares a special type of closeness, care, and even some level of kinship (even if it is of a different type than what we share with fellow humans).

If this is true, then of course we experience a particular type of grief when we lose such a relationship. It's a grief that does not measure up to the loss of a brother, but it is much



Meister Bertram von Minden,
Creation of the Animals

more than the loss of a favourite book or even a beloved plant in my garden. We've experienced the loss of a good friend that God has blessed us with. That is certainly worth mourning.

The night before we took Jack in to be put down, we sat with him and our four kids. We looked at old pictures on our phones from over the years that captured memories we had with our loyal companion. There were pictures from before we had kids, out on a walk, playing fetch at the park, or making a goofy face as I crammed for seminary midterms. We have photos of Jack welcoming each of



our newborn children home when we first arrived from the hospital. As the years go on, we have pictures of Jack becoming a pillow for toddlers reading books, or a horse for kids who don't know they're not cowboys. And in other photos, we capture moments where Jack is not the focus at all, but he is within the frame, in the background of a scene, loyally attentive as life happens around him. The pictures tell a story of our dog that we loved and for whom we took great care, but they also reveal that Jack took a special type of care for us.

And now Jack is gone, but not without a sense of deep gratitude, even if mixed with a peculiar sadness. God has given us many good gifts in this creation, and Jack was one of them. His loss brings with it the longing for the new creation; the age in which God promises to wipe away all tears and sorrow – tears that come from scraped knees, tears that come from the loss of a dear family member, and, somewhere in between, tears that come from the loss of our animal friends. Friends who have been there from the beginning.

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

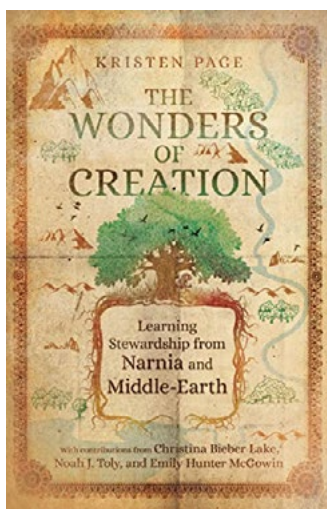
The Wonders of Creation: Learning Stewardship from Narnia and Middle-Earth

Kristen Page (Downers Grove, ILL: IVP Academic, 2022)

who has travelled the world studying human impact upon nature. Her vocation

has shaped her passion for creation care, but Page's love of nature is not

REVIEWED BY RICARDO CARDENAS



The stories we read, including fictional ones, have the power to move us in profound ways. This is a foundational point in Kristen Page's *The Wonder of Creation: Learning Stewardship from Narnia and Middle-Earth*.

Dr Kristen Page is a professor of biology at Wheaton College (where this book's material

was originally presented in a series of three lectures)

limited to this world alone. She is also a lover of nature as encountered through various literary worlds, including within C. S. Lewis's Narnia, and J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle-earth. Page's love for fictional worlds feeds her love for nature in this world, and within these lectures a central question she poses is: "[Can] literary landscapes teach us to see creation in a new way and possibly even motivate readers toward environmental stewardship?" (9).

In part one of three, Page addresses this symbiotic relationship between natural and literary landscapes and their ability to feed and inspire one another. Readers who are drawn to the grand fictional landscapes created by Lewis and Tolkien are often "awakened to the beauty of the created world in which they live. Accordingly, they may begin to care about the conservation and protection of the landscapes surrounding them" (12). Lewis and Tolkien serve as her conversation partners throughout this work because



Isaac Grünewald, *In the Realm of Fantasy*

for Page, these authors are excellent examples of individuals who allowed their love for natural landscapes to spill over into the fictional worlds they created which have captivated so many (18–19).

Christians ought to learn from the examples of Tolkien and Lewis about how to read both literary and natural landscapes, but Page's exhortation is that Christians should not stop there. Instead, her hope is that Christians should learn to take more seriously our stewardship of creation. She notes that this is especially true since conservative evangelicals in the United States are the least likely demographic "to regard environmental protection as necessary or even biblical" (31). According to Page, healthier doctrines of creation and the incarnation should drive Christians to a better understanding of the role we have to play in creation care (32).

With this, Page leads us into part two of the book, which is mainly focused around lament. This is the most challenging portion of the book, primarily because it is the most convicting. Page spends a good amount of time sharing evidence for our reasons to lament which include: over-consumption of resources (chiefly by wealthy Westerners) (48), human-caused contamination of food and natural resources (50), and the fact that the worst environmental issues tend to primarily affect those in society who are poorest (55–58). Since this is the case, issues related to creation care are not merely about taking better care of the environment, they are also a matter of learning to love our neighbours better.

With this, Page moves into her third and final portion of the book where she provides the antidote to what ails us. This section is less of a "how-to" chapter, and is more about character formation. For Page, our healing can and should

come primarily through *wonder* and *humility*. If Christians are going to become better stewards of creation, nothing short of total transformation will suffice. A more robust care for creation starts with awe: "Wonder begins the transformative work. As we pay close attention to nature, we are more likely to notice wonderful aspects of God's amazing creation. We will learn more about the Creator and begin a transformation toward stewardship based on a virtue of ecological wonder" (98). Along with this, wonder leads to a sense of humility as we recognize our place within creation (103). With these two heart postures in place, Christians can move to a healthier stewardship of the creation that God has entrusted to us.

This work by Page is valuable and worth pondering, especially among Christians who have often neglected this topic in their discipleship. While there is plenty of Lewis and Tolkien within these pages, they play more of a secondary role to start the conversation about creation, stewardship, and wonder; this book is not an exhaustive systematizing of their thoughts as they apply to creation care. That said, I think this is an appropriate place for them in this discussion. Page's expertise in this area is well worth our careful attention, and her exhortations, though convicting, are necessary for us to hear. As a pastor with minimal expertise on this subject, I found these lectures to be challenging, but also inspiring. I do not yet have an answer to the question of how the church can better equip our people to be better stewards of creation, but with Page, Lewis and Tolkien as our trail guides inspiring us toward wonder, I believe we can take important steps in addressing this issue. As Page suggests, however, we cannot make progress without the church leading the way in lament and humility.



Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis, *Evening*

Created to Create:

A PRACTICAL PERSON'S THOUGHTS ON CREATIVITY

HOLLY ENTER



Taddeo Crivelli, from the *Borso d'Este Bible*

I can vividly recall one spring afternoon many years ago when I came across an unexpected sight in the woods near my childhood home: an apple tree in full bloom, its delicate pink-tinged petals gently falling

to the ground like snow. It was a moment of wonder; not only at the magical scene I had unexpectedly entered, but because I alone was in this place to enjoy it. It seemed to me that all this beauty was wasted in its hiddenness. I wondered then, and have often wondered since, at the fact that God cares so much about beauty. He creates it even in places where no one else will see it.

This may have seemed like a revelation to a young girl, but the evidence of this is everywhere. There's no question that God cares about beauty for its own sake. He created a world that is not only functional, but beautiful. When one reads the detailed specifications for the temple and its articles, it's clear that God values craftsmanship and artistry. Further reading reveals how he cares about skilled musicians and beautiful lyrics; good storytelling and lyrical poetry. (How differently we'd feel about the psalms if they were written in prose!)

All throughout creation, we see beauty for the sake of beauty, often with no apparent practical function. We marvel at this truth on clear nights when we

look at the stars. "And He made the stars also," the creation accounts tells us, nearly in afterthought, as though the spontaneous flinging of innumerable flaming orbs throughout the universe by just a word requires no further elaboration. We wonder at the purpose of this vast universe, much of it unseen and unknowable. The psalmist hints at a reason: "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the

moon and the stars, which you have set in place ... what are human beings that you care for them?" This creator, artist, designer – the one who brings all this wondrous, breathtaking beauty into being so effortlessly – cares about insignificant you and me. Clearly all this seemingly impractical creative beauty reveals something about God's character that we are meant to discover in the midst of our practical, everyday lives.

I consider myself a practical person. My background is in nursing, not art. I only recently took up painting as a hobby, when Covid lockdowns gave time to pursue something other than the usual daily work that filled my days. But practically speaking, I struggled to find purpose for creativity. Admittedly, the impetus behind creating sometimes felt uncomfortably more like drive than pleasure.

This intrinsic creative drive may reveal itself in a variety of ways, yet all point to being created in the image of a creator who loves to create. We need not be applauded for our efforts, or punished for our lack; our ingrained desire to create and pursue beauty drives us. Like the Tolkien character, Aulë, who created "because he is the son of his father," we too long to imitate our Father in heaven. As I began to recognize the truth of this, I began to search less

for outside motivation or some practical reason for creating, and began simply to pursue creativity for its own sake.

There were other reasons to lean into this drive to create. It's easy to slip into the role of consumer (and critic) of culture, rather than putting effort into a counter-cultural offering of our



own. Andy Crouch writes extensively on this concept: “The antidote to being a mere consumer is to become a creator. Life is not about waiting for the market to offer you thrilling experiences, but to actually be someone who jumps into the work of making something beautiful and true and good for the world.” By promoting what is beautiful and true and good, we have the opportunity to offer a picture of the gospel through our work and art.

Practicality, for all its advantages, has its faults. At times it can blind us to things important and valuable. Jesus’ followers and disciples were (relatably) concerned about practical things: feeding hungry crowds, keeping pesky children out of Jesus’ way, staying afloat on stormy seas, managing the household and hostess duties. Jesus gently rebukes this way of thinking; not encouraging neglect of the practical necessities, of course, but reminding them and us that there were important things to see and learn in those moments that could be missed if our focus was only on what was practical. When a woman poured out expensive oil on Jesus, the disciples were aghast. It seemed a waste; surely there were more pragmatic uses for the money spent on this costly, fragrant oil. But Jesus does not rebuke the woman for this extravagance; rather he rebukes the disciples, saying, “She has done a beautiful thing to me.” This beautiful act continues to be told “as a memorial to her” ever since, just as Jesus said it would. Beauty has that ability to linger on in hearts and minds, inspiring others for generations to come.



It’s easy, like the disciples, to get caught up in all our cares and concerns, the toiling and spinning of every day. What will we eat, wear, and how will we get everything done? Jesus points out “life is more than food, the body more than clothes.” For those of us whose tendency is to focus solely on these practical things, he encourages us to consider the lilies of the field that “neither toil nor spin, yet not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.” All this created beauty not only points to a creative God who loves beauty, but has the further purpose of reminding us

of his great care and love for us. If he adorns even the grass of the field with such beauty, which is “here today and gone tomorrow” (beauty that is fleeting, unnoticed, even unseen; like trees in full blossom in a forest or galaxies far away), how much more will he not care for us? Truly, the business of life can steal from our sight the beauty of these truths if we don’t take time to seek them out. Creativity encourages us to open our eyes to new perspectives, drawing us into new moments of awe and wonder. We find ourselves not only seeking beauty in a new way, but also finding it in unlikely places.

Jesus made the startling announcement that “the kingdom of God is at hand,” then spent his ministry years fixing the broken, teaching the ignorant, reversing the curse, lighting the darkness. In the “already, but not yet,” we too can offer glimpses of this kingdom. Andrew



Peterson calls it “adorning the dark.” I love the picture portrayed by this phrase: giving words to how we push back darkness through our creative endeavours; motivation to spur us on when inspiration fades. We offer our gifts of creativity and beauty to the creator who doesn’t see it as wasted effort. We dive into this opportunity to reflect the creativity of God, whose image we bear. We accept his gracious invitation to create, knowing that though it may not always be practical, it is not without purpose.

Holly Enter lives in Ontario, Canada, with her family of seven where she discovers creative opportunities in the midst of a practical everyday life. You can follow her creative journey at [instagram.com/holly_enter](https://www.instagram.com/holly_enter). Paintings by the author.



The Gift of Created Time

C. HUGO HERFST

seeps into our consciousness slowly, steadily, as it shapes our heart's desires, attitudes, longings, or confronts our lethargy throughout

the day and night.

Benedictine prayers highlight the relationship between prayer and time. Consider the following examples:

At Terce (9 am):

All holy Father, at this hour when the Spirit came down on the apostles, we ask your help to live throughout this day the love they proclaimed, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

At Sext (12 noon):

Father, at midday you give us a time of rest; may we accept it gratefully, and be strengthened by it, to serve you and our neighbour through Jesus, the Christ, our Lord.

At None (3 pm):

Lord God, grant that through our work we may provide for the needs of this life, while never losing sight of what is of true value, those things which alone remain for ever and ever.

Structuring our lives to include prayerful rhythms centred on Christ and his Word, reminds us that we live as time-bound creatures in a cosmic story. Created time is truly a gift!

A suggested practice: Whether you use a traditional prayer book or not, consider setting an alarm on your phone that reminds you to pause and pray at specific times of the day. Even a short pause to seek God's face can make us aware that we live in God's presence.

Dr C. Hugo Herfst, OblSB, is an Associate Fellow of the KLC and a Benedictine Oblate affiliated with Mt Saviour Monastery in Upstate New York, who lives in Guatemala with his wife, Jackie.

In pondering the nurture of nature, how often do we stop to appreciate the *gift of time* as an integral part of creation? In the pragmatic West, time is *money*, time is something that we can *save* or *waste*. It need not be that way, and indeed, in other cultures, it is not. The African observation is telling: "Westerners all have watches on their wrist, but no one has any time!"

Interestingly, time was created as an integral part of the process that established the cosmic temple where God came to dwell. Day and night, light and darkness are skilfully woven into the creation account, culminating – not in the creation of human beings – but in a cosmic *shabbat* where God's *shalom* is enjoyed by the entire created order.

During the recent lockdowns, normal rhythms of gathering for public worship, work, eating out or taking regular trips to the supermarket were disrupted. Many of us felt that every day was "blursday." Time morphed into a monotonous mixture of minutes where the clock marked seemingly anonymous hours. Time appeared to stand still.

Yet, through the lockdown, each day dawned anew. The sun's rays lit up our rooms, our homes and our communities. Then, gradually, the shadows lengthened and once again, we were plunged into a darkness that we could not resist. Spring birds arrived on cue. Flowers bloomed. Apples ripened. Time did not stand still after all.

Time can be a cruel taskmaster that makes impossible demands. We need to ask ourselves, however, whether or not the demands that we attribute to time are actually self-imposed.

Alternatively, time can be a life-giving gift.

Following the psalmist, St Benedict suggests structuring our lives around the gift of time: "Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous ordinances" (Ps 119:164). Through the Liturgy of the Hours, of which the psalms form the backbone, Benedict invites us to enter into a different relationship with time and to experience the presence of God through a balance between work, study and particularly, prayer as *opus Dei*.

Setting aside specific times for prayer sanctifies the rest of time as the experience of the presence of God spills over into our times of work and leisure.

In addition to both Old and New Testament passages, all 150 psalms are read over a two- or four-week period. Scripture



Marta Shmatava, River of Time



The weather is impartial. It's not personal. Perfect sunny days and cataclysmic events alike are part of a global system that has nothing to do with me. I know this cognitively, and yet the weather's harsher aspects can feel so personal. In the fall of 2022, the powerful hurricane Ian hit the state of Florida where we live. One month later hurricane Nicole followed. And in between those two storms, during the full moon of October, my husband and I lost our first child through stillbirth.

When we learned we were pregnant, we did all the things. I read the books, took the courses, ate right, exercised, had perfect blood work; we prepared for the baby in every way we could. When we heard about the hurricane evacuation notices, we did all the things. We asked neighbours for advice, looked at the official recommendations, prepped the house, checked maps for proper relocation, prepared water supplies and took safety measures – all the right actions and things still went awry.

I'm no theologian, but I've been a student of the Word since childhood. I started reading my Bible daily in the 5th grade. I wrote my first theological paper in the 7th grade. I ran ministries, served in other countries, got certifications, collected degrees – I did all the things. My questions from an early age lay in that space between the goodness

of God revealed in Christ and the darkest moments of human experience. Despite all the studying and doing all the things, when the darkest moment was upon me, the old paradigm of personalizing the weather of life faced me down. When we lost Leo, I felt pinned between two impossible ideas: *God was responsible or I was responsible.*

A cycle of deep, blinding, shock-like pain that feels like I could go crazy followed by the deepest, warmest sense of light, love and comfort filling my being with moments of clarity started when we lost Leo and continued ever so slowly, with gently decreasing intensity. In the moments of light, there was a strange sense of stillness and a clarity I've craved most of my life: I could clearly see and feel a third option that was beyond theology, beyond denominational thought, beyond needing explanation. There was a perspective so beautiful it was hard to grasp; an experience of love that did not condemn or blame but truly set us free.

In those moments I had the freeing realization that the three-dimensional world we live in is like the weather; it's not personal. There are things we can do to prepare for "bad" weather and "bad" life events. But in the end, we live in a wild world with an impartial system. God, however, is not impartial. He is love. And when the wild events of life cause loss at the deepest level, I've found the reality of his other-worldly love there, in that space between all that makes sense and all that does not yet make sense.

Our child, Leopold Jackson Herfst, crossed that thin veil and made it to the other side, pain-free, on October 10th. On October 11th, after being released from the hospital, my husband Justin and I went back to our home in our little beach town. As the sun set that evening, we walked through the hurricane debris on the beach, sat down in silence and watched the moon rise. We were tired. We could barely talk. With the waves crashing on the shore, we looked at each other and I asked: "Do you want to praise

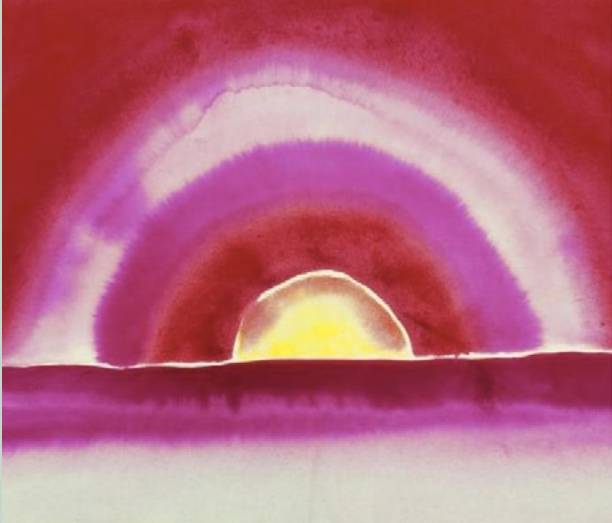
God with me?" And so together, under the impartial moon and facing the wild waves, we went through our loop of deep love and deep pain, and we praised God.



Justin and Jesska Herfst live in St Augustine, Florida. Jesska is an organizational therapist. Photographs by Justin, who is a freelance writer and photographer.

Canticle of the Sun

SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI



Georgia O'Keeffe, *Sunrise*

Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You brighten the night.
He is beautiful and cheerful, and powerful and strong.

Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Mother Earth,
who feeds us and rules us,
and produces various fruits with coloured flowers and
herbs.

Be praised, my Lord, through those who forgive for love of
You;
through those who endure sickness and trial.
Happy those who endure in peace,
for by You, Most High, they will be crowned.

Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Bodily Death,
from whose embrace no living person can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin!
Happy those she finds doing Your most holy will.
The second death can do no harm to them.
Praise and bless my Lord, and give thanks,
and serve Him with great humility.

Most high, all powerful, all good Lord!
All praise is Yours, all glory, all honour, and all blessing.

To You, alone, Most High, do they belong.
No mortal lips are worthy
To pronounce Your name.

Be praised, my Lord, through all Your creatures,
Especially through my lord Brother Sun,
Who brings the day.
You give light through him.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour!
Of You, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars;
In the heavens You have made them bright, precious and
beautiful.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,
And clouds and storms, and all the weather,
Through which You give Your creatures sustenance.

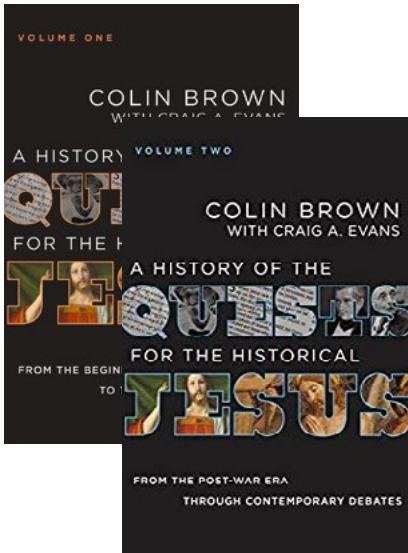
Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Water;
So useful, humble, precious, and pure.



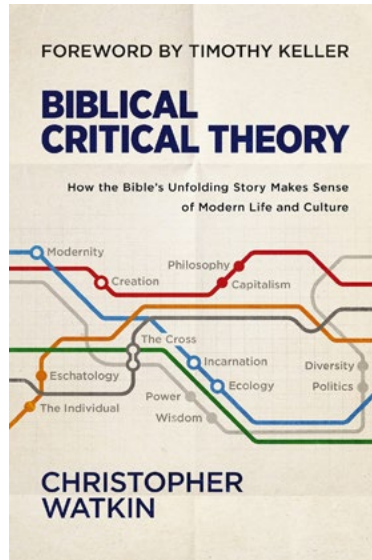
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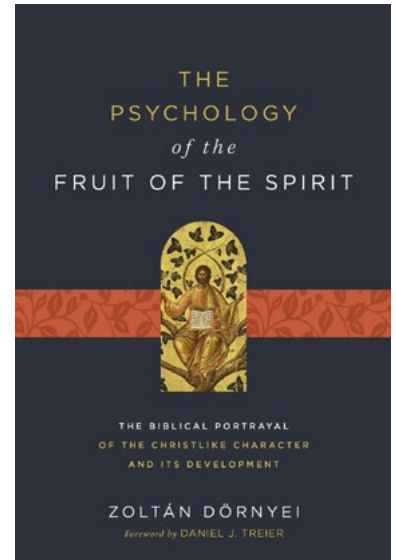
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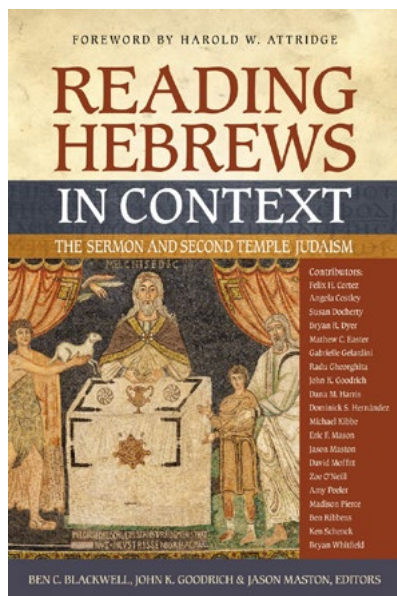
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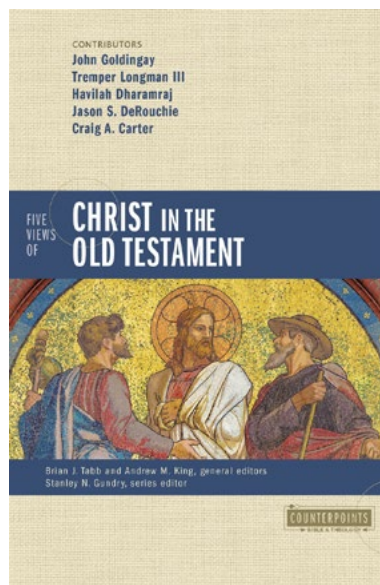
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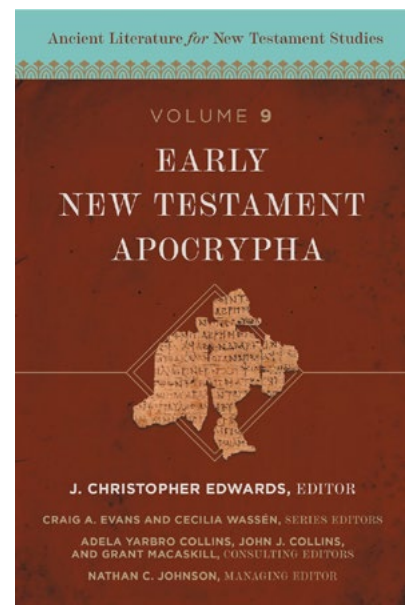
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