

# THE BIG PICTURE

CHRIST PLAYS IN TEN THOUSAND PLACES



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*The Big Picture* seeks to: (1) Educate, inform and inspire readers about public theology, (2) Ground our work in Scripture, (3) Embody the big-picture vision of the gospel with creativity, (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

Sheerah, (meaning "kinswoman"), is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 7:24. Clearly an exceptional woman, she was the daughter of Ephraim, the son of Joseph. Sarah Beth Baca's cover painting imaginatively depicts the tools of Sheerah's trade, which was a highly unusual one for a woman of her time: she was responsible for the building of three cities. The image is used by kind permission of the artist. (<https://www.sarahbethart.com/>)

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# The Glory — of the — Ordinary



CRAIG G. BARTHOLOMEW

In his classic, *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach argues that the Bible achieves something that ancient literature could not, namely “the birth of a spiritual movement in the depths of the common people, from within the everyday occurrences of contemporary life, which then assumes an importance it could never have assumed in antique literature.”<sup>1</sup> Auerbach relates this to the incarnation, and rightly so. Nothing hallows the ordinary glory of embodied human life quite like the Word become flesh.

Too often Christians fail to see the glory of the ordinary. But, once see it, and you will find it all over the Bible. Discussions of craft generally refer to the craftsmen, Bezalel and Oholiab, and others, referred to in Exodus 31, gifted by God to build and craft the tabernacle and its furniture. The tabernacle was God’s portable home amidst the Israelites. God genuinely lived amidst his people even though, of course, he could not be confined to one place. And in the Old Testament the tabernacle and the temple are designed as microcosms of the macrocosm of the world. They provide the lens through which the Israelites are to see and interpret the world. Once we see this, it is a short step to asking, if that is what God’s house is like, what does that mean for my house, humble as it may be? If God’s house is so exquisitely crafted and has its own furnishings, how does that royal glory translate into my own dwelling?

Craft is part of the ordinary, the everyday. A definition of what it means to be human is that we are *homo faber*,

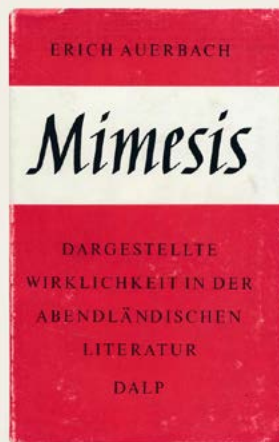
1. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 45.

makers by nature. We see this with the first couple, Adam and Eve, who are placed in the great park of Eden to work it and keep it. The creation has a dynamic to it and part of being human is being responsible and able to develop the hidden potentials of the creation, and this includes craft. Genesis 4:20–22 bears witness to this development referring to tents, keeping livestock, musicians and metal workers. And craftsmen, filled with the Spirit, play a vital role in building God’s house. And craft, acknowledged or not, plays a central role in our lives.

Art and craft should, in my view, be distinguished from each other. Every entity in the creation has an aesthetic or imaginative dimension to it, but in an artwork the aesthetic dimension dominates. Artworks are made for imaginative and contemplative engagement, which is why

we put them on our walls and house them in museums. Craft, by contrast, refers to everyday items like a kettle, a mug, a pen, a house, a city, a dress, a notebook, a freshly baked loaf of bread. All of these have a utilitarian function. A beautiful mug that leaks and cannot hold boiled water is of little value. Craft produces everyday items for our use.

Here, however, is a crucial point: craft objects also have an aesthetic or imaginative dimension to them. A good craft object will not only be well designed for its purpose, but the aesthetic dimension will be developed so that, as it were, the light of the incarnation will be allowed to seep into and enhance the ordinary glory of our everyday lives. There is a place for mass production of goods, but they easily dull our lives and clutter them full of cheap



and disposable items, making us passive consumers and disconnecting us from the world of making. In the process they serve to hide the glory of the ordinary.

Art and craft are wonderful gifts. Neither is better than the other and we need both. Furthermore, both are open to terrible distortion. The references in Genesis 4 to the origin of the crafts, is followed by a well-crafted poem from Lamech, but one breathing a spirit of revenge and violence (Genesis 4:23–24). This embodies the terrible misdirection of the good gift of poetry. Craft and art can likewise be misdirected. In my view the dulling down through mass-produced items made as cheaply and for as much profit as possible regardless of their impact on the environment or humans, is such a misdirection. But so too would be turning craft into high art available only to the wealthy. And it is not only the poor who can be aesthetically impoverished. *Shack Chic* is a beautiful depiction of the lengths that many shack dwellers go to in impoverished parts of South Africa to craft their rough houses into dwellings of ordinary glory. Such people are aesthetically rich in a way that those of us living in cookie cutter houses full of mass-produced goods will never be.

Where, then, do we find examples of healthy craft? I suspect, all around us because craft is inherently local, using the materials available locally to craft objects. If we look for them, perhaps in our own homes, we will find them. Personally, the richness of craft was brought home to me on a lecture tour in Korea several years ago. Korea is ultra-modern in many ways, but retains a delightful connection with its history and rituals and thus its crafts. I will recall being taken to a coffee shop where you sat on the ground alongside your table, to a tea ceremony, to shops where traditional Korean garments are still made, etc. Good craft is linked into rituals and traditions, and in my

## The Beauty of Everyday Things Soetsu Yanagi



experience it is in much of Asia that we find craft alive and well.

Sōetsu Yanagi (1889–1961) was a Japanese philosopher, art historian and poet. He became the father of the Japanese *Mingei* movement, the word for folk craft. Such craft refers to ordinary objects used every day by ordinary people. It must honestly fulfil its intended purpose, is neither expensive nor produced only in small numbers, it is anonymous – Yanagi argues that craft seeking to enhance ordinary life should avoid individual ambition, – it is beautiful, and it “must be wholesomely and honestly made for

practical use.”<sup>2</sup> According to Yanagi, “Folk craft is thus devoted to healthy utilitarian purposes. It is, in fact, our most trustworthy and reliable companion throughout our daily lives” (6).

It is with the work of writers like Yanagi that we find reflections on craft that can help us recover it today. Of course, craft needs to be seen, used and lived with on a daily basis. Yanagi’s books are beautifully written in a straightforward, minimalist style, dealing with a whole variety of topics, and contain many illustrations of craft. For example, he has a chapter on *washi*, traditional Japanese

paper, and notes that “Good *washi* makes possible our most ambitious creative dreams” (257).

We will need to recover craft in our own, particular contexts, learning the skills of a craft or buying good craft items. This edition of *The Big Picture* contains rich stories and images of various ways in which we are doing just that. In the process we will allow the incarnation to seep into our ordinary, everyday lives, casting a sheen of hidden glory over them.

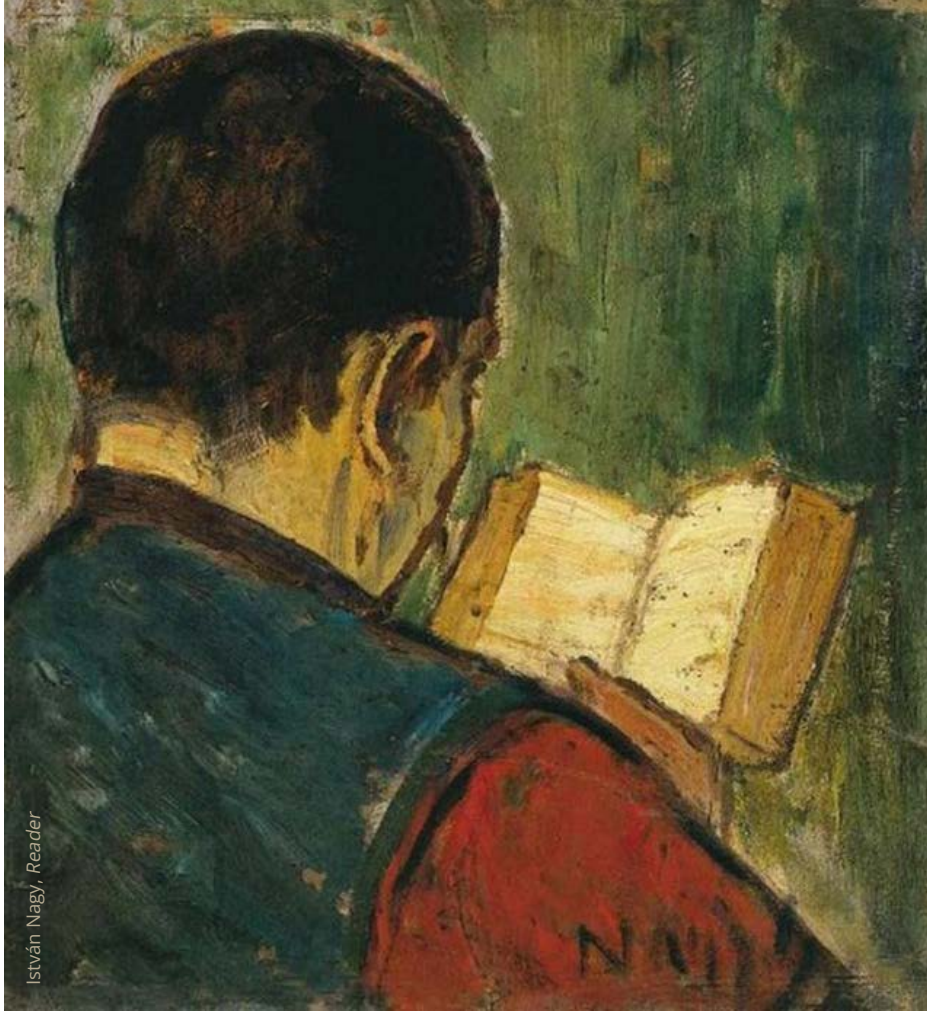
*Craig Bartholmew is the Director of the Kirby Laing Centre.*



Ohara Koson, *White Chinese Geese Swimming by Reeds* (1928)

2. Sōetsu Yanagi, *The Beauty of Everyday Things* (London: Penguin, 2018).





István Nagy, Reader

# EPIPHANIC READING

OTTO BAM

Much can be written and indeed has been written about writing as a craft. The writer is no mere medium – no mere conduit for inspiration. As a craftsman, the writer must practise and refine the craft regardless of the presence or absence of any muse. Most writing is not a matter of soaring inspiration, but of a steady sawing and sanding at the workbench. In the poem “Digging,” Seamus Heaney compares the writing of poetry to the backbreaking work of digging. The poet claims labour as his inheritance. Perhaps it can be granted, but what about that seemingly more elementary, leisurely, act of reading?

## LABORIOUS READING

As a child reading often did feel like labour to me. I did not excel at reading. I was reluctant to do it and slow when I did. I had trouble sitting still and my attention span was poor – no social media had been invented yet on which to pass the blame either. It was hard work! But my limitations had their advantages, for my slow reading, combined with a taste for symbolism, made me aware of the textures of language, and the stores of meaning in individual words and phrases. It helped me acquire a sensitivity towards *how* something was said as much for – initially perhaps, more than for – *what* was said.

As I began undergraduate studies in literature at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, I found it difficult

to finish the novels I was given to read. I admit that many a Victorian novel only saw me for a few chapters. But what I did read I read with great attention and with an awareness of what the author was doing with language. I began to see the vistas that a mere word or sentence could open out onto when issuing from the pen of a great writer. My capacity for reading expanded as a graduate student, and my years of slow reading surprisingly began to be an advantage to me. It turned out that *how* something is said has everything to do with *what* is being said.

Slow, attentive reading runs counter to the cultural currents of our age, one that places great emphasis on speed and efficiency – on finishing things as quickly as possible. It holds an instrumental view of texts as it does of so many things. Language is seen as a sort of husk that contains the information we are after. Once the information has been extracted, we can discard the superfluous exterior. The poetry lessons I received at school might be summed up with the question, “What was the poet trying to say?” – a question common to many a well-meaning English teacher, asked before an exposition of the meaning in “normal” language. Once paraphrased in comfortable and clear everyday language, the ambiguities and uncertainties of poetry can safely be done away with.

But the secret of savouring poetry is not to get at the meaning behind the poem, but to get at the meaning *in*

the poem. The poet is not *trying* to say some one thing. Rather, the poet knows how to say more than she herself knows she is saying. Poets are masters at wielding words in a way that lets loose the myriad meanings that live within the poems, lines and words themselves. They are not the masters of language, commanding sentences to deliver a pre-determined and completely known set of messages, but co-conspirators in language's stubborn resistance to being tamed – and meaning's refusal to be contained. Poets set language free to carry us across the expanse of the unknown and into the bosom of mystery for the sake of disclosure, however provisional such disclosure might be.

When reading is not a mere matter of gaining information, when literature is encountered in all its physicality – for the texture and depth of its words – it has the potential to become eventful in a true sense.

### EVENTFUL READING

Behind all reading is the desire to know. But there are different forms of knowing, just as there are different forms of knowledge. Knowledge today is commonly thought of as an object; something to be accumulated and stored. Something that we can leave and return to at any time, like an exhibit at a history museum, or files on a hard drive.

There is a different way to think about knowledge. That is, knowledge as an event. Something that is bound to time and which arrives – it is not always already there like abstract knowledge. It happens. It is as an encounter. This form of knowing is alluded to very early on in the Bible. "Adam knew his wife" (Gen 4:1). This is a bodily form of knowing. And if we think about it, there are indeed many things that we know in ways that are not easily put into the language of classification and quantification, a knowing that cannot be separated from an event – a knowing which requires our participation. A novel is a world that we move within. It is a sensory place – all our senses are harnessed in the making of meaning which is the act of reading.

Eventful reading seeks encounter, not as someone with a dead object and not as a disembodied intelligence. Great literature represents a visitation by meaning, and as a visitor, a novel or a poem is a test of the hospitality of the one visited. This points

towards something of what is contained in the Christian practice of *Lectio Divina*.

### HOSPITABLE READING

In Genesis 18 we find the story of a visitation. Abraham sits at the door of his tent, squinting under the harsh desert sun, when three men appear. The old man breaks through the lethargy of the heat, he runs to meet his visitors, bowing low to the ground. Abraham addresses his visitors as "my Lord," recognising the divinity of his guests. After imploring them to stay saying, "do not pass on by your servant," he attends to them with great generosity, offering water to drink and for washing their feet, and he offers bread for their hunger. Abraham, the ideal host, is later contrasted with the inhabitants of Sodom, who fail to show hospitality to these same visitors.

These visitations might be read as symbols for the encounter with meaning in a text. In *Real Presences*, George Steiner describes the encounter with a work of art as a "meeting of two freedoms." The first freedom is that of the artist, to make something. Corresponding to that primary freedom is the freedom of reception. This Steiner characterises as a secondary or lesser freedom, because it is a *response* – the work of art addresses us, and our



Andrei Rublëv, *Hospitality of Abraham*



response is the way we receive it. It is a freedom because we are free to pause and pay attention to the call of the meaning that is in the work of art. When encountering a work of art, we are free to “turn aside” just as Moses was free to leave the path he was on to get a closer look at the burning bush (Ex 3). It is a lesser freedom because the encounter with the artwork, the visitation by meaning, places the weight of responsibility on the visited.

The visited must respond, for even apathy is a response. The moment that Moses sees the burning bush, he becomes answerable. He can no longer go his way as he would have before being addressed by the sight. The meaning of his journey has fundamentally changed. Likewise, once you have been addressed by a work of art, you become answerable – that is, you are responsible for how hospitable you are to the visitation of meaning.

How do we take up this responsibility?

## EPIPHANIC READING

Abraham represents the ideal host because of his powers of recognition. He recognises his visitor as his neighbour – as one like him – and honours this kinship by empathising with his bodily needs for water, for sanitation and refreshment and for food. But he also recognises his visitor as one unlike him, as one greater than himself – indeed, as the Divine Other.

The text tells us that Abraham is visited by an anonymous “three men.” His response to these men is, however, to the Lord himself. What were the characteristics by which Abraham recognised the divinity of his visitor/s? We are not told. Instead, the text focuses attention entirely on Abraham’s response. We see the identity of the visitor by means of the hospitality of the visited.

The Gospel of Luke gives us another account of hospitality and recognition. Two disciples are on their way to Emmaus. They have been witnesses to the unspeakable events of Jesus’ crucifixion. Walking along, perplexed by and discussing all they had seen, they are met by a man – it is the resurrected Jesus. Again we are not given any details about the appearance of Jesus. But we are told that the disciples fail to recognise him. Even after he teaches them from the Scriptures, they do not recognise him.

Pretending that he would be journeying onwards, in an act of hospitality, the disciples implore him, “Abide with us” (Luke 24:29), echoing Abraham’s “do not pass on by your servant” (Gen 18:3). It is in the breaking of bread, in the participation in the Divine body, that the disciples at last recognise Jesus, that “their eyes were opened and they knew him” (Luke 24:31).

The conclusion I have been working towards is to suggest that the encounter with the text is but one form of encounter with meaning and that it is similar to how we encounter the world. We might even say that we encounter the world as a text – and that we are visited by meaning in all of creation. And all of this meaning issues from a sacred source – *the Logos*, the Word behind all words. For those who learn to encounter the world in this way, everything is alive with God’s glory. This way of encountering both text and world might be described as “epiphanic.” Reading epiphanically could be a training ground for the eyes to see rightly. This is the craft of reading.

G. K. Chesterton writes in *The Everlasting Man* that, “The most wild and soaring sort of imagination [is] the imagination that can see what is there.” We need imagination to see the world rightly; to see not only what is there, but *who* is there. The kind of imagination that was the spark of Abraham’s recognition of the divine in the face of a stranger, which lifted the veil from the disciples’ eyes in the breaking of the bread, and helps us lovingly see our neighbour, is indeed the light which gives light to all men, the Spirit who abides with us.

*Otto Bam is the Arts Manager for the KLC, the ArtWay.eu editor and an Associate Fellow of the KLC.*



Lambert Jacobsz (workshop of), *Supper at Emmaus*





# In the Woodshop

WITH ERIC PETERSON

JARROD HOWARD-BROWNE  
INTERVIEWS ERIC PETERSON

Eric. E. Peterson is the pastor of Colbert Presbyterian Church in Colbert, WA, and a keen craftsman. He is the author of *Letters to a Young Congregation*, and *Letters to a Young Pastor* (with his father Eugene H. Peterson).

**Jarrold Howard-Browne:** *Eric, thank you for taking the time to have a conversation with us about the craft of woodworking. As we begin, can you tell us a bit about yourself – who you are, what you do – and share with us where your love for and practice of woodworking comes from?*

**Eric Peterson:** I'll start by saying that vocationally I identify as a village pastor, and I serve the church I founded twenty-six years ago. I very much like being rooted in a particular community over a long stretch of time, and it's important to me that I know everyone's name. Even more importantly, I want to know every person's story and to have a role in shaping how those personal narratives develop as they continually intersect with the gospel story and its redemptive arc.

And while I have long been persuaded that this is the work I was made for, the call to pastoral ministry is something I initially embraced reluctantly and only came to accept slowly. Part of my strategy in delaying a response to my calling was to become a carpenter. For a couple of years after college I built houses and did some remodelling. It was work I delighted in and never fully left behind when I went to seminary and was later ordained. It took me a while to realize that I didn't have to give up the one in order to embrace the other, but eventually I came to see that our avocations can be integrated into our vocations. "Both-And," I believe, should be favoured over "Either-Or" whenever possible.

Consequently, to this day the smell of freshly-cut wood (especially the primary framing materials of fir and oriented strand board) invariably evokes a sense of well-being within me. Sometimes I fire up my table saw and rip a length of wood just for the beneficial effects of the aromatherapy.

My wife Elizabeth and I have a blended family that includes six children, and we live in a cedar home on a ten-acre woodlot. Being surrounded by trees, I have found, is good for my soul. I walk and pray among them every morning, often thinking of the image that the prophet Jeremiah gives us: "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord, he is like a tree ..."

**JH-B:** *What is the earliest project you remember working on?*

**EP:** There were three large oak chairs in our basement when I was growing up. They came from an old church that had closed its doors and were given to my dad when he started a new church the same year

I was born. It wasn't long before those antique chairs had been replaced with something more modern, and Eugene and I recycled the material for other projects when I was a teenager. I think the first thing I made was a four-legged stool that he helped me with. I still have it and still use it.

**JH-B:** *Woodworking requires real attention and intention, and a craft like it, that has been practised for as long as you have practised it, surely shapes you over time. In what ways has carpentry shaped you into who you are today?*

**EP:** Well, to begin with, I still feel like a rookie in a lot of ways. I do not consider myself a fine craftsman. But even though I have yet to master the art of the dovetail joint, for example, I find that working with wood is altogether enjoyable and meaningful. I suppose one of the things I like about it is that it has an easy entry point: with a few basic tools anybody can make a footstool. But those skills can be honed and developed over time resulting in growth and maturity (if not mastery) in our craft.

And that's pretty much my understanding regarding the life of discipleship: Anybody can begin a relationship with God by saying "yes" to Jesus, and then, over time, that relationship grows in intimacy as we apprentice ourselves to the Master. Like woodworking, the Christian

faith is a combination of fits and starts, delights and discouragement. Perfection may be the ultimate end goal, but the *means* is what we focus on: the attention to our subject matter; honouring what is before us whether it's God or wood.

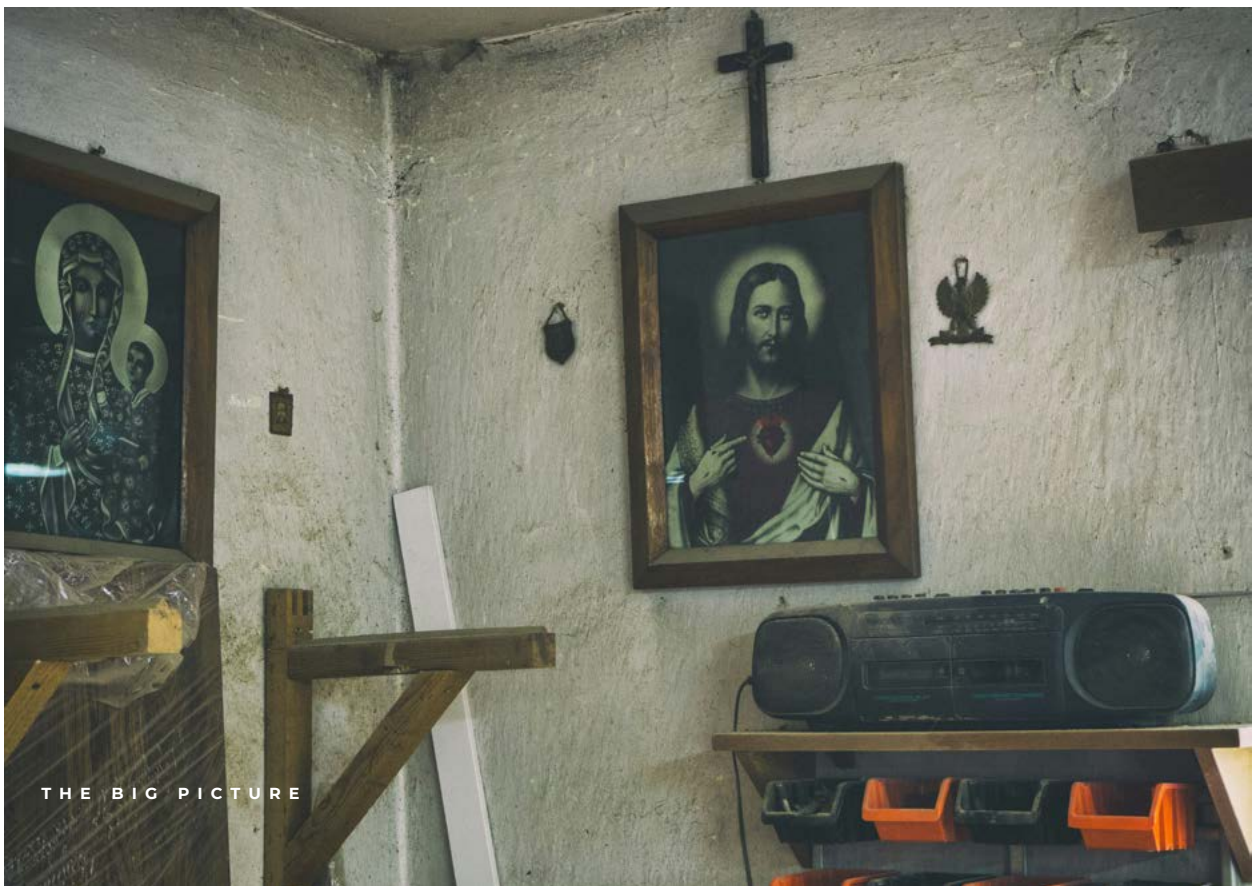
*Anybody can begin a relationship with God by saying "yes" to Jesus, and then, over time, that relationship grows in intimacy as we apprentice ourselves to the Master. Like woodworking, the Christian faith is a combination of fits and starts, delights and discouragement.*

I think the other thing that carpentry has taught me as a metaphor for my life is that nearly everything can be the raw material for creating something good and beautiful when it's in the right hands. When I'm intentional about putting my life in God's hands I have hope that there is a better version of me in the making.

**JH-B:** *You shared with me that as a minister having a woodshop is as important to you as having a study. Can you tell us more about what kind of place and importance woodworking has in your life today?*

**EP:** Well, I may have romanticized that a bit based on how little time I actually get to spend in my woodshop these days compared to my study. But I am hoping that disproportionality will realign in the next months as I begin to step away from my pulpit and transition to part-time pastoral work. But I do think that it's right to integrate those environments as spaces that reflect who I am and what I do: I work with words and with wood. Books and boards are my raw material for creativity. The tools I reach for in my

Photo: Mateusz Butkiewicz





study include such things as commentaries, reference books, a concordance and original language texts. My shop, on the other hand, contains tools for cutting, shaping, joining and finishing various species of wood. In either case, I find that I really like using the tools themselves.

But whether it's working with words or with wood, it involves *craft*: honouring what you've been entrusted to care for, putting things together, rearranging simple raw material to create new versions of the transcendental virtues of truth, goodness and beauty.

I find it to be instructive that Jesus, introduced to us by St John as the "Word," began his life in a manger, presumably made of wood. Thirty-three years later his life ended on a cross, obviously made of timber. So, in both birth and in death, the body of the Word made flesh was in intimate contact with wood. The coupling of wood and words, it seems to me, is a marriage made in heaven.

**JH-B:** *Do you think your Christian faith has shaped your practice of woodwork, and, conversely, has woodwork shaped your Christian faith? If so, how?*

**EP:** Undoubtedly, but I don't know that I've always been consciously aware of it. I have a quote that I staple-hammered to the wall in my shop by Desiderius Erasmus, one of the lesser-known 16th century reformers. "By a carpenter was mankind made, and only by that carpenter can mankind be remade." I take that to mean that all the creative and re-creative practices in the world – whether by the hand of God or the hands of humanity – are, in the lovely words from the Abbey on Iona, "fashioning us for a truer beauty." Redemption – the primary activity of

God – is the work given to us as well: taking what is and reshaping it for a righteous purpose.

I have also noticed an evolutionary process that has coincided in faith and in carpentry. In both cases my early years depended on a plan with clear instructions. As I've matured, I have come to rely on instincts and sanctified common sense that has developed through years of practice. Both in the journey of faith and as a journeyman carpenter, sometimes you have a template to follow, and other times you just have to figure it out as you go.

**JH-B:** *What have been some of your favourite carpentry projects to work on and why?*

**EP:** The last thing I turned out of my shop was a "learning tower" for my grandson. It was a simple project using Baltic plywood and dado joints, but the particular enjoyment of it came as I imagined how Callen would be able to safely stand at the kitchen counter and "help" as his parents were preparing a meal. I think that's been a pretty consistent experience – that I especially enjoy those projects that are useful and meaningful for the people I love.

**JH-B:** *In your late father Eugene Peterson's biography, A Burning in My Bones, there is a poignant image of his body just barely visible in the coffin he was buried in, with a brief note saying that you crafted the coffin yourself. You shared with me that you also crafted the urn that held your mother, Jan's ashes. What was the process like of working on those two pieces for your parents in their passing? Why did you decide to craft them and what impact did the process have on you?*

Photos by Eric Peterson (left) and Winn Collier (right).





**EP:** It originated in the family meeting we had a few years before my parents died. I was asking them a series of end-of-life questions so that my siblings and I could honour them well if they were to be somehow incapacitated as they were heading down the home stretch of their lives. And it was then that Eugene expressed his desire for a full meal deal funeral with his body present. Then he looked at me and said, “I want you to officiate at the service, and I want you to make the casket.” In that moment it felt like a burden, but I eventually came to recognize them both as gifts.

I had initially planned to recycle material from an old Montana barn, but that ended up not being practical, and so I used pine boards that were distressed to give a rustic look, and I fastened a cross to the lid that I had made following a design I first saw at Christ in the Desert Monastery. It was finished with six rope handles so that his six original grandchildren could carry him into the church and then out to the cemetery. He had previously carried each of them; this was the only time they ever carried him.

When I finished constructing it, I climbed in and lay in it for a few minutes, partly just to reassure myself that his body would fit, but also to sort of experience what it would feel like to lie down in my father’s final resting spot. That’s when I realized that I should add some padding.

And so ostensibly I did it to fulfil a dying man’s request. But the three days I spent building the casket evoked just a slew of memories of the projects we had worked on together as well as the pastoral vocation we shared and discussed at length. My shop had never been used for such a purpose before, but I found it to be a cathartic environment for my grief and my gratitude to co-mingle. The wood had become well sprinkled with tears by the time the casket was finished. Additionally, I discovered that the process also activated my imagination, and without

really working at it, my homily for his service was also being created, the shaping of the wood helping to shape the words. The primary images that came to me were cradle and casket: containers for life and death. One that represents the beginning of a life, the other an end. He had built a cradle for his first grandchild (my son), and I built the casket for him. I had them placed next to each other at his funeral as I reflected on the containers that hold us throughout our lives and even in the life to come.

It was a similar experience for my mother. She chose to be cremated, so making an urn was the obvious container for her and it allowed her remains to be interred with Eugene’s. I made it out of purpleheart wood – a particularly dense species – because purple was her favourite colour. And I used maple splines in the corners as an accent, then hand rubbed it with teak oil. That level of detail is typically reserved for a piece of fine furniture, not for a box that’s going to get buried forever in the ground. But beauty was important to her, and so it felt like an important thing to do for her.

**JH-B:** *Why do you believe it is important for human beings to pursue and engage in practical crafts like woodworking? At the same time, why is it important for Christians to do so?*

**EP:** At its most basic level it’s who we are. To be human is to be creative inasmuch as we are created in the image of a creative God. I actually think that the way you framed the question is exactly right: we’re talking about how art is an important aspect of being fully alive, our true selves. The only reason to ask why it’s important for Christians *specifically* to engage in various forms of craftsmanship is because people of faith are in a deliberate, lifelong process of becoming fully human. That happens as we apprentice ourselves to Jesus who is ever redeeming – or recreating – the world in which original goodness has become significantly tarnished by the effects of sin and evil.

So, we reflect the work that God does. And while it is, as you suggest, often practical, I believe it’s also important that we not limit our craft to that which is merely useful. When God landscaped the Garden of Eden with plants and trees, many of them had the practical benefit of being good as food to eat. But there were some that were simply “pleasing to the eye.” I take that to mean that God values aesthetics. And so sometimes we should be making things only for the sheer beauty they add, and sometimes we should do things solely for the pure delight they bring us. I’m not sure how to think about it proportionally, but I want to make sure we’re involved in work that is aesthetic as well as utilitarian.

*Jarrod Howard-Browne is a member of the KLC staff team.*





# The Ethics of Craft

## Part 2: Responding to Korn

CRAIG G. BARTHOLOMEW

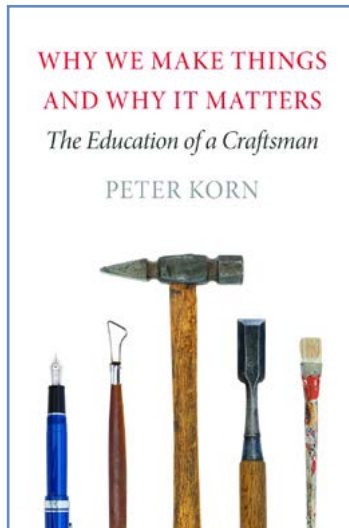
An Engagement with Peter Korn's  
*Why We Make Things and Why It Matters:  
The Education of a Craftsman*  
(London: Vintage, 2013)

Korn's book is full of fruitful insights. Through finding his vocation he has, as it were, backed into a host of crucial insights about furniture, craft, the problems with contemporary culture, the meaning/s of life and the role of worldviews. There is so much to affirm and to celebrate in his book. From a Christian perspective it is as though Korn has stumbled across a dimension of reality and pursued it faithfully, thereby coming up with a host of refreshing insights.

One way for us to respond to his journey is to spend time with well-made furniture, craft and art. In working with craftsmen and artists I have always found it to be a different order of experience when moving from talking about art or craft to actually experiencing it. In one form or another craft is part of our everyday lives and a place to begin is to take note of it. In our consumerist West we may well find that our houses and workplaces are full of cheap mass-produced goods. Does this matter, you might well ask. Isn't it the spiritual that really matters whereas our cups and mugs, the furniture in our houses and offices are of altogether secondary significance? In brief, No!

Korn's work serves to remind us of the ever-present danger of that ancient heresy of Gnosticism, so ably

rebutted by the early church father Irenaeus (c. 130–202 AD), whereby we denigrate the earthy/ly as somehow not spiritual. I love Korn's reference to the "earthly nature of our spiritual appetites." Christians too often succumb to a Greek dualism between spirit and matter so that all that really matters is the spiritual. The biblical distinction is, however, between Creator and created so that, while we should never equate the creation with the Creator, nor should we fail to recognise that, as creation, all of our earthly existence was created good and, in this sense, is thoroughly spiritual. Humans are embodied creatures, which is one reason why we choose to have chairs to sit in, and cups to drink out of. Different cultures actualise our embodied needs in surprisingly different ways, but the nature of our embodiment means that, one way or another, they will be actualised.



The critical question is, does it matter how we go about living out our embodied existence? To cut to the chase, if our embodied nature is a result of God's good creation, and if through Christ he has worked at great cost to redeem the whole of life and to lead it towards its destiny, not back in Eden, but in the new heavens and earth in which are gathered the treasure of the nations, then we dishonour God when we fail to take these earthly dimensions of our lives seriously.

The theologian Karl Barth speaks of ethics as a response to “the question what is good human action” (CD 3.4, 3). He rightly situates ethics as a “task of the doctrine of creation (CD 3.4, 3),”<sup>1</sup> read through the lens of God’s grace to us in Jesus Christ. Creation leads us to take the whole embodied person seriously. Barth observes that

The command of God does not hang ineffectively in the air above man. Its particular aim and concern are with him and his real activity... man’s real activity is always concrete. The acting man himself is concrete, i.e., this or that man who in his place and skin cannot be compared, let alone exchanged, with any one else. And the field of his conduct is a tremendously varied sphere of conditions and possibilities determined by time, space, nature and history (CD 3.4, 5).

Craft is one of those varied possibilities open to humankind, and thus rightly comes under the purview of Christian ethics.

1. Cf. Oliver O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), for one of the best articulations of the relationship between Christ and creation.

Barth speaks evocatively of the human response to the way in which God has come to us in Christ as “not monotonous, colourless and formless” but “articulated, colourful and contoured (CD 3.4, 17).”<sup>2</sup> Ethics does involve the “invocation of God” but it is not the reductionist “work is prayer.”

What is added is the statement that the Christian life must be a reference to the work of God, a reference that is formed by the work of God to correspond to itself. Our living becomes a mirror of God’s action (CD 3.4).

When we gather for worship our lives should be re-centred in the life of God, but this is the living God, creator and redeemer. Far from detracting from the visceral creation, we should leave church with a sense of the whole creation

before us as the theatre of God’s glory, in which we are to live and work, spreading the fragrance of his character in a riot of song, love, dance, music, work and craft. As O’Donovan perceptively says of post-communion liturgy: more can be done “to spread before us the glory of a fully human life into which we are now free to enter... rich in possibilities of every kind of action and relationship,”<sup>3</sup> including craft!

What then of talk *about craft*? O’Donovan notes the indispensability of speech: “The speech of ethical discourse shapes and gives structure to the action; only because it is formed by speech can our action ‘refer,’ speak back to God’s act” (*Liturgy and Ethics*, 5). Here, I think, is where Korn’s need for a discourse within which to understand his passion with furniture-making fits. With time he experienced the need – and has the ability – to articulate how his passion fits within human life and the world around us.

O’Donovan identifies three levels of ethical discourse: basic moral categories, integration into a whole moral vision, and interpreting the world in the light of that vision (*Liturgy and Ethics*, 5). Intriguingly, he employs a furniture metaphor for the second element: “If the categories are the furniture of the mind, what we are talking about here is arranging the furniture to make a room. You can put good pieces of furniture together in a way that makes a furniture depository! To make the room, each piece of

2. I am indebted to Oliver O’Donovan, with response by Michael Vasey, *Liturgy and Ethics*, Grove Ethical Studies 89 (Bramcote, Notts.: Grove Books, 1993) 4, for drawing my attention to this easily overlooked statement by Barth.

3. Oliver O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 9.

Isn't it the spiritual that really matters whereas our cups and mugs, the furniture in our houses and offices are of altogether secondary significance? In brief, No!



Photo: Jeffery Ho



furniture needs to be in the right relation to the others, it has to be deployed, and so it is within our moral categories. To have a moral vision which will enable us to think out into unfamiliar and strange tasks, we need more than a collection of ideas. They have to interact to make a structured whole” (*Liturgy and Ethics*, 12).

Here we arrive at what Korn calls mental maps and what I prefer to refer to as worldviews. Mike Goheen and I define a worldview as

an articulation of the basic beliefs embedded in a shared grand story which are rooted in a faith commitment and which give shape and direction to the whole of our individual and corporate lives.<sup>4</sup>

A crucial difference between us and Korn is that he sees mental maps as entirely human constructions formed from the materials of history available to us at our time and place. While a Christian perspective affirms the constructive role we play in forming – albeit subconsciously – our worldview, Christians find in the grand, sprawling, capacious metanarrative of Scripture the true story of the whole world, and – should – allow it to be their default mode and the primary source from which they construct a vision of the world.

What I find so intriguing about Korn is the way in which he regularly resorts to Christian language as he seeks to explore his own worldview and how it relates to furniture making. Perceptive readers will have noted this

4. Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 23.

Amadeo de Souza-Cardosa, *Kitchen of the House of Manhufe*



in Part 1. Even some of his chapter headings are telling in this respect: “Second Epiphany”; “A Miracle at the Heart of the Ordinary.” The latter seems to me utterly central to Christian spirituality and also reminiscent of Eric Auerbach’s extraordinary discussion of the narrative in Mark’s Gospel of the betrayal of Jesus by Peter,<sup>5</sup> in which narrative Auerbach discerns a movement of the spiritual among the most ordinary, something which Greek and Roman literature was unable to achieve, and which Auerbach, a Jew, relates to the Christian doctrine of the incarnation.

I am grateful for Korn’s exquisite book. One longs for the day when such passion and exploration characterises Christian communities. At the same time, I think that Korn tends to absolutise craft in the context of human autonomy and so ends up with the

ambivalence with which he ends his book. A place needs to be found from which craft can be decentered so that its true brilliance can shine forth without it becoming an idol. A place needs to be found where craft and virtue embrace. Christians believe that such a place is Jesus Christ.

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5. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953).



Geoffrey Holt, *Grille and Mission-House Window (Interior)*

# Spirit-filled Art, Craft and Skill

*Bezalel and Oholiab:  
Exodus 31:1–11*

CHRIS WRIGHT

Ballymote Church of the Immaculate Conception, *The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin* (detail showing the High Priest's garments, including the turban and gold plate; the jewelled breastplate, woven robes and sash. See Exodus 28; 39.)



When God tells Moses that he has chosen Bezalel and Oholiab to supervise the mammoth task of constructing the tabernacle, it injects a winsome moment of down-to-earth practicality into the narrative. All these beautiful textiles and embroidery, carved wood and moulded metals, leatherwork, engraved precious stones, etc. – they would not just arrive like the manna from heaven. They needed human skills, human planning, human art and craftsmanship. And God provides it in the form of people he had already prepared with just such skills as part of their ordinary humanity.

## SPIRIT-FILLED WORK

We must appreciate the role of the Spirit of God in such earthly tasks. If ever we are tempted to “spiritualize” the work of the Holy Spirit as concerned only with the non-material world, or the “sanctification of our souls,” we should remember Bezalel and Oholiab.

Being filled with the Spirit is something many Christians aspire to, though not many Christians expect the experience to do for them what it did for Bezalel and Oholiab. What did the filling of God's Spirit do in their lives? It enabled them to be craftsmen, working in metal and wood and precious stones, and all kinds of artistic design – and to be able to teach others the same skills...

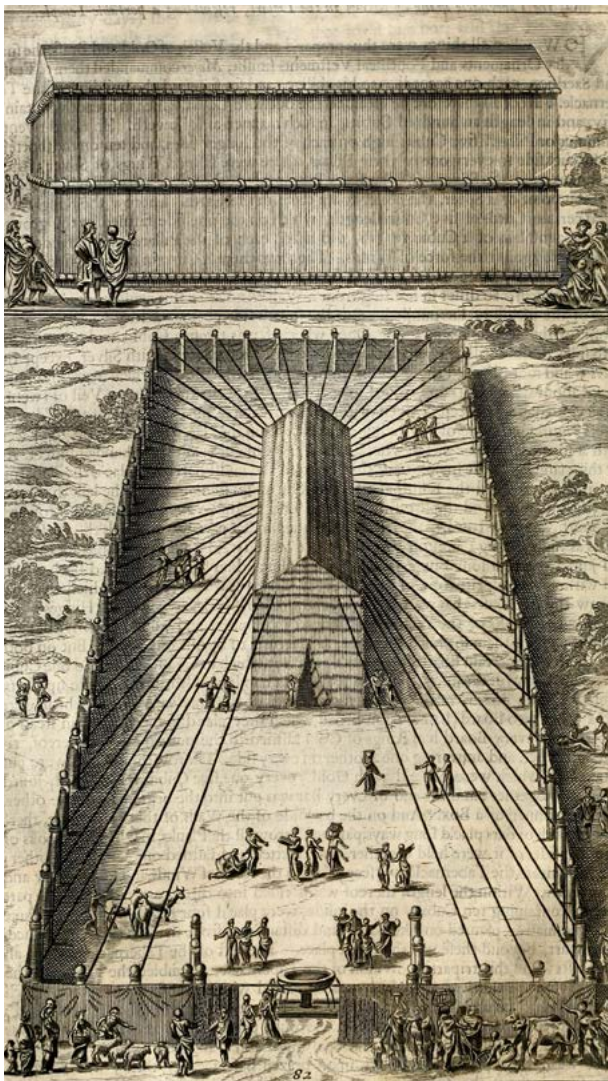
Putting these things together like this gives great dignity to such skills. I love the fact that on this first occasion when the Spirit of God, which had been so active in all the wonderful craftsmanship of creation itself, is said to fill a human being, it is to enable that person to exercise the same kinds of delegated skills. There is something so wonderfully creative (and therefore God-like) in what this passage describes: craftsmanship, artistic design, embroidery with rich colours, carving wood and stone. I fondly wish I had some of these skills and greatly admire the work of artists who do. We should take seriously that these things are said to be marks



of the filling of God's Spirit. Of course, Bezalel and Oholiab were so filled for the purpose of working on the tabernacle – the holy tent of God's presence among his people. But I don't think we need to limit the action of God's Spirit in this gifting only to "sacred" purposes. Presumably Bezalel and Oholiab had these skills as gifts from God's Spirit and exercised them in ordinary life before and after they were employed in constructing the tabernacle.

The creation narrative ... portrays God himself as the universal master craftsman who rejoices in the goodness and beauty of all he has so wonderfully designed and executed. This text encourages us to believe that the same Spirit of God who was at work in creation is also at work in that same wider sense, in all those who, as human beings made in God's image, enrich our world with all kinds of creativity in art, music, colourful design, beautiful craftsmanship [etc.] ... When we honour and admire such art, we give glory to the Spirit who empowers it.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing the Holy Spirit Through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 37–39.



The works of Josephus, the Tabernacle

We should also notice the way these so-called "secular" skills are put to work within the realm of the "sacred." Or rather – *the fact that there is no dichotomy between them.*

## NO SACRED-SECULAR DICHOTOMY

We should also notice the way these so-called "secular" skills are put to work within the realm of the "sacred." Or rather – *the fact that there is no dichotomy between them.* The God who will sanctify the tabernacle and its priests is the same God whose Spirit will enable "ordinary" Israelites to build the tabernacle and clothe the priests by the use of their everyday workmanship. Indeed, Zechariah foresaw the day when the words that were inscribed on the medallion on the high priest's forehead, "Holy to the LORD," would describe every ordinary part of life (Zech 14:20–21).

If this was so in Old Testament times, how much more should it govern our thinking in the light of our calling as a whole community to be God's priesthood, and the temple of God's dwelling. God has hallowed all of life and all creation and all work. For the earth is the Lord's and it is the Lord Christ we are serving in every area of life (Eph 6:5–8; Col 3:22–24). There is a very urgent missional need to eradicate the paralysing "sacred-secular dichotomy" that deceives so many Christians into an exaggerated view of "God's work" (in the church, or paid for by the church) and a negatively diminished view of their "secular work" as of little value to God and God's kingdom.

The Cape Town Commitment, the statement of the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism 2010, addressed this very pointedly.

The Bible shows us God's truth about human work as part of God's good purpose in creation. The Bible brings the whole of our working lives within the sphere of ministry, as we serve God in different callings. By contrast, the falsehood of a "sacred-secular divide" has permeated the Church's thinking and action. This divide tells us that religious activity belongs to God, whereas other activity does not. Most Christians spend most of their time in work which they may think has little spiritual value (so-called secular work). But God is Lord of *all* of life. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as



working for the Lord, not for men,”<sup>2</sup> said Paul, to slaves in the pagan workplace....

a) We name this secular-sacred divide as a major obstacle to the mobilization of all God’s people in the mission of God, and we call upon Christians worldwide to reject its unbiblical assumptions and resist its damaging effects. We challenge the tendency to see ministry and mission (local and cross-cultural) as being mainly the work of church-paid ministers and missionaries, who are a tiny percentage of the whole body of Christ.

b) We encourage all church members to accept and affirm their own daily ministry and mission as being wherever God has called them to work. We challenge pastors and church leaders to support people in such ministry – in the community and in the workplace – “to equip the saints for works of service [ministry]” – in every part of their lives.<sup>3</sup>

In 1874, one hundred years before the first Lausanne Congress, Charles Haddon Spurgeon preached a sermon on Paul’s teaching that, in every area of life, we serve the Lord Christ (Col 3:24). He draws heavily on the imagery of the tabernacle and priesthood, and applies it to the Bezalels and Oholiab’s of today’s world – however humble their calling and labour. The persuasive power of his preaching is greatly needed today.

<sup>2</sup> Colossians 3:23.

<sup>3</sup> Cape Town Commitment IIA.

To a man who lives unto God, nothing is secular – everything is sacred! He puts on his workday garment, and it is a vestment to him; he sits down to his meal, and it is a sacrament; he goes forth to his labor, and exercises the office of the priesthood; his breath is incense, and his life a sacrifice; he sleeps on the bosom of God, and lives and moves in the divine presence! To draw a hard and fast line and say, “This is sacred and this is secular,” is, to my mind, diametrically opposed to the teaching of Christ and the spirit of the gospel!

Paul has said, “I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself.”... The Lord has cleansed your houses, my brothers and sisters; He has cleansed your bed chambers, your tables, your shops; He has made the bells upon your horses holiness to the Lord! He has made the common pots and pans of your kitchens to be as the bowls before the altar if you know what you are, and live according to your high calling. You housemaids, you cooks, you nurses, you plowmen, you housewives, you traders, you sailors – your labour is holy if you serve the Lord Christ in it, if by living unto Him as you ought to live! The sacred has absorbed the secular! The overarching temple of the Lord covers all your houses and your fields! My brothers and sisters, this ennobles life!... This ensures us a reward for all we do!<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> All for Jesus! Sermon #1205, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 20 (available at <https://www.spurgeongems.org/vols19-21/chs1205.pdf>).



Blankets from the “67 Blankets for Mandela” organisation



# THE HORNS AND THE CRAFTSMEN

ARTISTRY AS POWERFUL, PEACEABLE WARFARE

JORELLA ANDREWS



Christoph Weigel, *Zechariah's vision of the four horns and four craftsmen*, 1695 (engraving)

*"Then I looked up and saw four horns. So I asked the angel who was speaking with me, 'What are these?' And he said to me, 'These are the horns that scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.' Then the LORD showed me four craftsmen. I asked, 'What are they coming to do?' He replied, 'These are the horns that scattered Judah so no one could raise his head. These craftsmen have come to terrify them, to cut off the horns of the nations that raised their horns against the land of Judah to scatter it'."*

(Zech 1: 18-21 HCSB)

The German engraver, art dealer and publisher Christoph Weigel the Elder's copperplate engraving, *Zechariah's vision of the four horns and four craftsmen*, is an early modern attempt at picturing Zechariah's singular vision. In Weigel's rendering – one of 830 images contained in his remarkable pictorial *Biblia Ectypa* (Augsburg, 1695) – the prophet's everyday reality, a tranquil rural setting with distant city, is being rolled away. Mediated by an imposing angel, a schematic alternative realm of crisp symbols against a white background comes into view in which four immense, twisting animal horns are being pursued by the craftsmen who are wielding the tools of their trade like weapons.

Over the millennia, art making and craftsmanship have often been associated with warfare, literally and

figuratively.<sup>1</sup> Think of the many works designed to uphold violent or deceptive ideologies as well as those created to oppose, expose or undermine social, political, cultural or economic factors regarded as malevolent – as in modern and contemporary protest art. In each case, albeit for opposing reasons, intentions and actions are in play that are marked by degrees of aggression.

At first sight, Zechariah's apocryphal account of craftsmanship and Weigel's rendering of it appear to fall into the category of oppositional art making. As such, it appears at odds with the dominant ways in which godly craftsmanship is described elsewhere in the Bible, notably with respect to the construction – to God's specifications, and yet with immense technical and spiritual imagination – of physical places of worship in which God would manifest his glory on earth (Ex 31, 36; 1 Kings 5; 2 Chr 2). The first such place, created during the Israelites' post-Egyptian years of desert wandering under the leadership of Moses, was a mobile structure, the tabernacle; the second, built 500 years later, during the reign of King Solomon, was intended to be a permanent structure, a temple in Jerusalem. In each case, the overt focus was on collaborative divine/human making, not breaking. God's instructions indicated environments of precisely measured and yet exceptional, even extravagant, material beauty and symbolic<sup>2</sup> resonance. And the craftsmen, skilled at working with wood, metal, stone, dyes, yarns, fine linens and precious stones, were also described as full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom. In Proverbs 8, significantly, wisdom itself is defined as "a skilled craftsman," "brought forth by God as the first of his works" and positioned alongside God before the creation of the world.

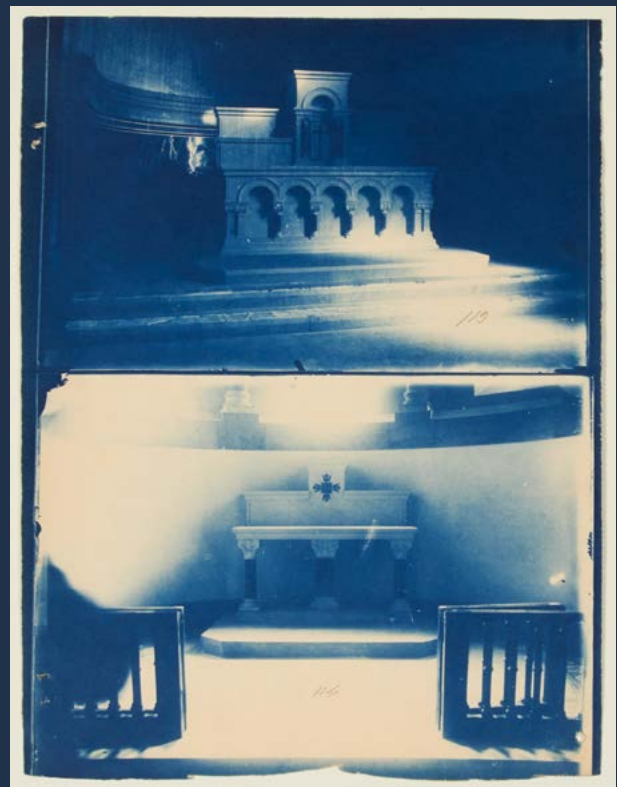
In Zechariah's vision of the horns and the craftsmen, by contrast, an art of war and, conversely, a war of art, take centre stage. But when this passage is considered with reference to the book of Zechariah as a whole, we see, in fact, that exceptional, unforeseen forms of creativity are again at issue and warfare of an entirely other, unworldly, and counter-cultural nature. As such, this account of craftsmanship – not, as far as I am aware, commonly discussed in Christian apologetics for the urgency and worth of Christian art making – offers exceptional insight, especially, as I will show, for

1. In the ancient world, the potency of craftsmen was widely acknowledged. Thus, when the tragedy of Jewish exile into Babylon occurred "all the men of might, even seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, all that were strong and apt for war, even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon." (2 Kings 24:16 KJV, emphasis mine).  
2. From the Greek *symbolon*, meaning to throw or cast together, that is, unify.

artists who want to see their work play a collaborative role in refashioning the sites of human brokenness that surround us. "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:10).

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The historical context of the book of Zechariah is crucial here. It references the post-exilic period when God's people had been released back to their own land after seventy years of bondage in Babylon. Specifically, it is a powerful, prophetic call to resume the building project begun some twenty years earlier as authorised by a remarkable edict published in 539 BCE by the Persian king, Cyrus the Great, whose forces had destroyed Babylonian supremacy: the core task of reconstructing Jerusalem's long-ruined temple and public spaces. As indicated in Haggai 1, most people had become more focused on building homes for themselves. Crucially, the rebuilding of the temple and the city was to be neither retrograde nor defensive. It was meant to convey an enlarged post-exilic vision that God had already begun to communicate to, and through, the pre-exilic prophet Isaiah: "From now on" (Isa 48: 6b-7), "I will tell you of new things, of hidden things unknown to you. They are created now, and not long ago; you have not heard of them before today. So, you cannot say, 'Yes, I knew of them!'" And indeed, in Zechariah (2:4-5; 10-13) we read that Jerusalem was to be "inhabited without





walls because of the number of people and livestock in it.” Why? Because God himself would be “a wall of fire around it” and “the glory within it.” Witnessing this, “many nations” – namely, Gentiles, including former enemies – would “join themselves to the Lord.” God’s desire was for a profoundly non-self-protective approach to re-establishing Jerusalem, with the intention of welcoming as many as wished to come.

God’s expansive, hospitable vision for Jerusalem is reflected in and underlined by the name by which he persistently announces himself in Zechariah: namely, as Yahweh Sabaoth, or Lord of Hosts. This has two inflections. In Hebrew, hosts may refer literally or figuratively to a mass of people assembled for war. Thus, Yahweh Sabaoth speaks of an almighty and victorious Warrior King (Lord our Warrior) who wins our battles. But Lord of Hosts also refers to the lordship of God over *all* the multitudes of earth as well as heaven. Where scriptural logic is concerned, these aspects of God’s name are deeply aligned rather than contradictory. The doubled character of God’s name also relates to the image of the coming Messiah prophesied in the final chapters of Zechariah. For here, as also already in Isaiah 53 – I am citing teaching by theologian Roger Forster – the promised Lord our Warrior is shockingly portrayed through “four beautiful ‘Suffering Shepherd King’ songs that point to the death and resurrection of Jesus.”<sup>3</sup> Here, saving peace for *all* nations is proclaimed (Zech 9:10b) and, again, warfare of a very particular and paradoxical nature. Centuries later, in Jesus’ own self-presentations and self-explanations, these were the portions of Scripture he would most consistently cite. For Jesus as Lord our Warrior was a saviour not solely of the Jews but of the whole world (John 1:29), and not of a military kind, as the Jews expected, but humble and sacrificial while nonetheless established in authority over all that exists. In him, King, Priest and Peace Offering are intertwined.

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What, then, of this paradoxical Christ-like warfare to which, in Zechariah, godly artistry is called? This “terrifying” and “cutting down”? Here, Forster is again insightful. He says that Zechariah’s second vision is fundamentally about “breaking the horns (the

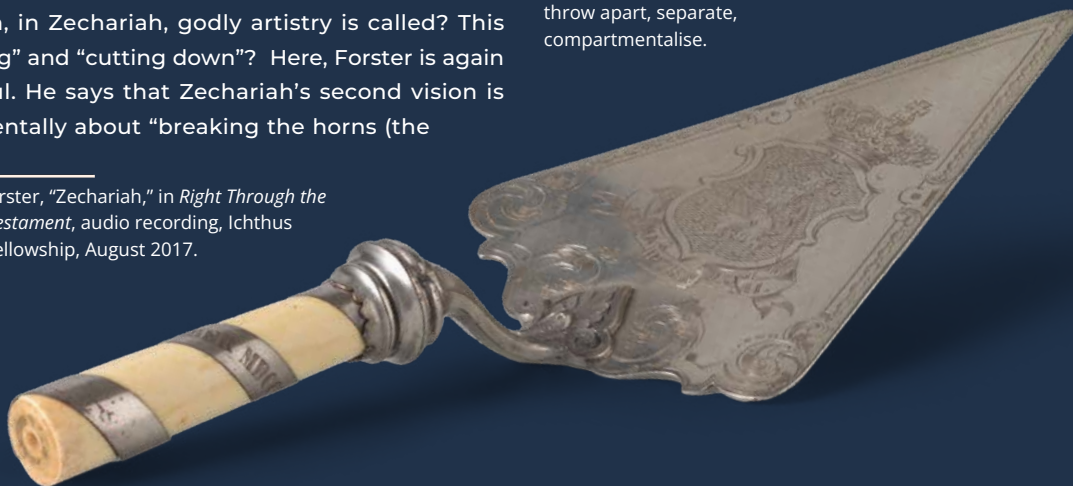
3. Roger Forster, “Zechariah,” in *Right Through the Bible: Old Testament*, audio recording, Ichthus Christian Fellowship, August 2017.

power) of disunity by forging unity among God’s people” – understood not in racialised terms but indicating those of every nation who are turned towards him.<sup>4</sup> For what terrifies the powers (literally diabolic<sup>5</sup>) that seek to scatter, un-home and devastate? Not the varied responses of counter-violence that are so easily deployed including, as noted, by oppositional forms of art-and-craft activism. For violence loves violence, feeds off it, and multiplies it like a virus. Required instead, is a radical movement informed by an entirely alternative spirit, proceeding from a platform of peace, by which attention, matter, hard truths, beauty and symbol can intersect to serve the human/divine, human/human, and human/world realignments we need today. But working in this way persistently and well needs divine empowerment. Zechariah 4:6 is instructive. “Not by strength or by might, but by My Spirit,” says the Lord of Hosts to Zerubbabel, the Prince of Judah who was responsible for the rebuilding work in ruined Jerusalem, that seemingly impossible task. “What are you, great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become a plain. And he will bring out the capstone [a term drawn from the building trade] accompanied by shouts of: Grace, grace to it.”

In times of pressure, a commitment to craftsmanship, within devastation, for the sake of unity – which horns am I called to terrify? – requires unflinching focus on Yahweh Sabaoth who throughout Scripture, from the creation accounts in Genesis to the re-creation accounts in Revelation of a new heaven, new earth, and new Jerusalem, also reveals himself as Master Craftsman. We must remember that in Zechariah a devastating effect of

4. In Jewish tradition, Zechariah’s craftsmen have been variously interpreted. Some interpreters understood them as symbolic representations of Gentile kingdoms who exerted a kind of redemptive power by overthrowing nations that had themselves overthrown God’s people (such as Persia, whose victory over Babylon meant that it was possible for the long-captive Jews to return home). In the Talmud there is a tradition of identifying the four craftsmen with four figures of redemption “The Messiah the son of David, the Messiah the son of Joseph, Elijah, and the Righteous Priest.” (See: Sukkah 52b, Dr Joshua Kulp, *The William Davidson Talmud*, accessible via <https://www.sefaria.org>.)

5. From the Greek *diaballein*: to throw apart, separate, compartmentalise.





Gert Swart, *Jorella's 9 Findings*, 2019 (jelutong wood); Photo: Jorella Andrews

“the horns that scattered Judah” was that “no one could raise his head.” That is, physical and, above all, spiritual vision were diminished. No wonder then that before that call to rebuild, the book of Zechariah opens with God’s insistence that the geographically returned people of God also return to *him* (Zech 1:1-6). Here, again, the promised Messiah, Jesus, – who for most of his life on earth worked with his human father as a craftsman (Mark 6:3) – is our paradigm as we witness him, in Scripture, continually configuring and reconfiguring his constant orientation of turned-ness towards God. Recently, the psychologists Joshua J. Knabb and Kevin P. Newgren attempted to account for “the firm sense of self” displayed by the scriptural Jesus throughout his lifetime. They described him as “ripe with temporal continuity, self-esteem, ambition, values, ideals, and a sense of belonging, purpose, and power.” How and why? Because he was rooted in an ever-deepening relationship of apprenticeship to God the Father as his Master Craftsman.<sup>6</sup> This “firm sense of self” was vital since, as indicated, his saving work would so definitively counter long-held Jewish expectations. To repeat, it would be sacrificial, not militaristic.

On my desk is a wooden tray. It holds a series of small

6. See Joshua J. Knabb and Kevin P. Newgren, “The Craftsman and His Apprentice: A Kohutian Interpretation of the Gospel Narratives of Jesus Christ,” *Pastoral Psychology* 60/2 (2011), 245–262, 24.

works of art, a set of strange “tools” – or peaceable weapons? – crafted by the South African artist Gert Swart. He calls these objects “Findings,” a term that refers to the clasps, links and rings that hold pieces of jewellery together and make them wearable. Swart’s *Findings* were made to be handled and accompany me as I work. I see them as God-inspired, urging me to keep reaching into as-yet unknown terrain, glimpse something of God’s ways and thoughts, so much higher than our own (Isa 55:8–9), and participate as skilfully as I can in forging the new, diverse, sacrificially-generated unities that are certainly in God’s sightlines.

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Joannes Galle, *The Power of Peace* (1648)







PREACHING THE BIBLE  
FOR ALL ITS WORTH:

# Revelation

## THE BIG PICTURE

The book of Revelation has, since the Church's earliest days, proved challenging for the people of God. Challenges include speculation over its authorship, its place in the biblical canon, and its usefulness for Christian living. In a more positive sense, it challenges Christ's church to live faithfully during difficult times and in the face of opposition from the Enemy.

Jan van Eyck, *Day of Judgment* (1420-1425)

Given the Christian belief that it is inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore of apostolic origin and written for our instruction, how, then, are we to read it profitably? How can we hear it as the Word of God for the people of God? More particularly, for those of who serve in ecclesial contexts, how can we faithfully proclaim and preach it? Below I want to offer a few broad guidelines for preaching John's Apocalypse, and then mention some key resources for the preachers in their study.

The first key feature of Revelation to remember while reading and preaching is that it is a *New Testament letter*. In fact, it serves in many ways as the culmination of the NT letters, with its emphasis on the universality of Christ's church in the letters to the seven churches (Rev 2-3) and its connection to the other NT letters in the language and structure of chapter 1 and 22:6-21. As with other NT letters, this means that Revelation is written to a particular people at a particular time facing their own particular challenges, but is also meant both by the human author and the divine author to speak to Christ's church throughout space and time.

As we read and preach Revelation, we should recall often the fact that it was written to Christian churches throughout the Roman Empire facing challenges related to local and imperial persecution, socially-pressured opportunities for sinful pleasure, and a growing number of false prophets attempting to subvert the claims of Christ's lordship over all things. While Revelation speaks to us today, it does so first of all to those believers within the first century of the church's post-apostolic life. Attempting to understand its relevance for today thus means first understanding its relevance for that initial audience.

A second key feature of Revelation is that it is an *apocalypse*. That is, it is intended to communicate to its audience the nature of the end of the current age and the beginning of the eschaton, and it does so through heavy use of figurative imagery. We cannot miss that John begins his letter by giving us a figural key in 1:20 – the stars are messengers, or angels, and the lampstands are churches. John is telling us clearly that the contents of his book are intended to be read figurally. That is, John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, uses figurative images to communicate the truth about reality. And, while he explains only two at the beginning of the book, stars and lampstands are but the surface of the deep well of images that John uses.

While attempting to understand and communicate the truths of Revelation's imagery, we should also remember that the images John uses are taken primarily from the Old Testament. The Apocalypse is steeped in OT imagery (and textual allusions!), from the throne room scenes (chapters



4 and 5) to the woman in the wilderness (chapter 12) to the New Jerusalem (chapter 21) and everything else in between. Because of its nature as a letter, we cannot understand what John is saying to his readers without understanding their socio-historical context, and we also cannot understand what he is saying to his readers without understanding the Old Testament and the ways in which John deploys its imagery throughout his book.

A third (but by no means final!) feature of Revelation we should remember as we read and preach it is that it has a particular *structure*. John is teaching us how to live faithfully in between the inauguration of the last days in Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension, and their culmination in his impending return in glory. The contents of the vision, from 4:1–22:5, concern this eschatological period, between the already and the not yet. Thus, the book moves toward the finality of Christ's return, final judgement and renewal of creation as described in chapters 20–22.

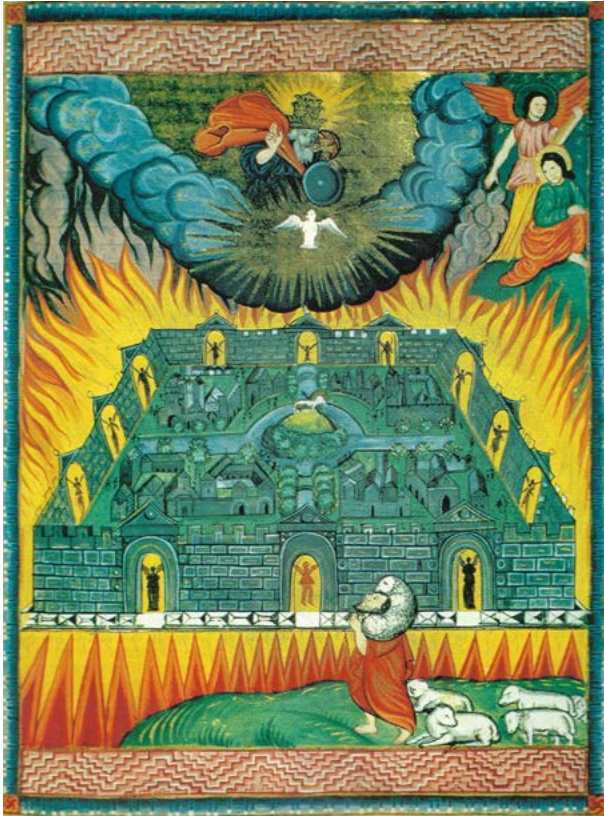
The remaining material describes the period between his first and second coming, and in two overlapping structures. First, there is a narrative thread that stretches throughout this middle section of 4–19, beginning with the throne room scenes in chapters 4 and 5; including the great war between the witnesses and the woman and their enemy, the Dragon and his servants, in chapters 11–14; and through the fall of Babylon and Armageddon in chapters 17–19. But there is also a cyclical structure overlaying this narrative, describing the ongoing but partial judgement of God poured out on sinners in the seven seals, trumpets, thunders and bowls. In each of these sequences, judgement is only partial, not final, highlighting both the righteousness and the mercy of God. He is righteous to judge sin and merciful to bring only partial tribulation and therefore to give time for those who remain to repent and believe. Each of these sequences, though, does end in final judgement (the sixth and seventh seal, and the seventh trumpet, thunder and bowl are each universal, cosmic, global judgements). It should go without saying, but we need to say explicitly – there can only be one final judgement. Therefore, these judgement sequences are intended to be describing the same period, the time between Christ's first and second comings. As we preach through Revelation, it is important to keep in mind, then, that John is both pressing us toward final judgement and also doing so in a way that is not always sequential.

Ultimately, then, Revelation is a book about *King Jesus*. Through his life and work, he is King of kings and Lord of

lords, ruling over all things. As believers, we can therefore face persecution, temptations to sinful pleasure, and false prophets with confidence that he is faithful and just to deliver us from our enemies. Resistance to our enemies thus comes by faith in the risen and victorious Christ, not by our might. Even when we are facing serious opposition all around us, Christ remains faithful to us and present with us by his Spirit and to the glory of the Father, and one day soon he will return to judge the living and the dead. This is the good news of Revelation, and the good news we can preach to our people.

In terms of resources, Matt Emerson's *Between the Cross and the Throne* (Lexham, 2016) is a short introduction to the book. For an introduction to Revelation's major theological themes and literary features, Richard Bauckham's *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge, 1993) and Craig Koester's *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Eerdmans, 2001) are both excellent. In terms of commentaries, G. K. Beale's *The Book of Revelation* (Eerdmans, 1999) is technical but very insightful. Wilfrid Harrington's *Revelation* (Liturgical Press, 1993) and Leon Morris's *Revelation* (Eerdmans, 1987) are no less insightful but also a bit more accessible.

**We cannot understand what John is saying to his readers without understanding the Old Testament and the ways in which John deploys its imagery throughout his book.**



Malnazar and Aghap'ir, *New Jerusalem*





Giorigiko, *The Spectacle, the Tragedy, the Passion*, 2023

# The Spectacle

DAVE BELDMAN

When the centurion saw what happened, he began to glorify God, saying “This man really was righteous.” All the crowds that had gathered for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, went home, striking their chests. But all who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things. (Luke 23:47–49)

While the authors of the Gospels make the focal point of their narratives of Jesus his death (and resurrection), the composition of their rendering of Jesus’ suffering and death includes various spectators.

Spectators of Jesus’ crucifixion are the subjects of a recent piece of artwork by Darren and Trisha Inouye, the duo behind Giorigiko. Ever since I was introduced to their work, I’ve been intrigued by the fictive world they have created – a world populated by sweet-faced, childlike characters against the backdrop of an ominous, post-apocalyptic-looking landscape. The adorableness of the characters and the bleakness of the landscape are by no means the only contrasts to be found in Giorigiko’s work. We recently met to discuss their painting *The*

*Spectacle, the Tragedy, the Passion*. Like James Tissot’s work, Giorigiko’s portrayal of the spectators is from the perspective of the cross.

Darren and Trisha pointed out that for Christians the day of Jesus’ crucifixion is the most significant day but for others it’s just another day. They understand, as did the authors of the Gospel accounts, that there were – and still are – different responses to Jesus’ death, and through this painting, wanted to create hospitable room for people to relate to spectators from different times and places. Anachronism and other types of juxtaposition characterize their artwork and certainly feature in this piece, especially (but not only) in the way the characters are dressed. Styles cross cultures and times, including a Renaissance outfit (with the frilly collar or “ruff”), contemporary skateboarder wear, a nun’s habit and an astronaut suit. Many spectators have their heads uncovered but some don ball caps, turbans, beanies and more (the figure close to the bottom right corner who looks to be a soldier from some era wearing a soldier’s hat/helmet). Characters are both male and female, from different places and times, both modern and classic.

The setting of the painting is also fraught with tension. The marble staircase and column evoke the Graeco-Roman architecture of Jesus' day (though probably not in first-century Jerusalem), but the spray-painted graffiti gives it a modern feel. The thick ominous sky and foreboding mountain range in the background might be the most historically accurate part of the painting.

The variety is meant to communicate that no matter who or where or at what time in history you are, you have to reckon with the crucifixion. Although that's what Darren and Trisha are trying to evoke with this work, they clearly are not trying to dictate *how* viewers ought to respond. The faces of the people that occupy the world that Giorgiko has created are not easy to read. It's not accurate to say the faces are blank or emotionless; however, their expressions are extremely muted and only very subtle differences exist from face to face (a slight upturn or downturn of the lip). More is revealed through the postures of the characters (turning to look, staring, not looking at all, peering around others, etc.) but even those are subtle and sometimes ambiguous. For example, I pointed to the two figures who seemed to be shielding their eyes to get a better look, and Trisha asked if the hand to the forehead might not be a salute. The painting invites viewers to engage deeply and reflect thoughtfully.

We talked about some other peculiarities of the piece. The dark-coloured dogs with pointy features and blank white eyes intrigued me. They are the main subjects of some of their past paintings and appear in others. At least six, by my count, make a cameo in *The Spectacle, the Tragedy, the Passion*. Darren and Trisha explained that in their work the dogs started out more sinister but have developed into a kind of extension (and reflection?) of the human self. Dogs in general (and here in the painting) are human companions – they are typically generous with their love and affection and can bring a sense of peace and joy. In the wrong environment or with the wrong temperament, they can be dangerous, causing fear and violence. The spears and flags are also curiously placed in the composition and are symbolic. Darren described the practice of planting flags – sticking a pole with a bit of fabric on the end into the ground (or the moon!) as an indication of ownership. It's absurd and futile to think that a planted flag could secure territorial rights. The flags and weapons, for Darren and Trisha, are symbols

of human grasping and human pride.

There are further subtleties in the work that make it worthy of detailed study (e.g., beyond its title, there is a clue in the painting that the spectators are indeed looking at the crucifixion). Darren and Trisha honoured me by introducing me to a few of their "friends" (maybe family members) from the world of Giorgiko. The focal point of the painting is the figure in the white T-shirt and baseball cap front and centre, who seems to be in the spotlight. This is Brother who is part of a larger redemption story in the Giorgiko world.

Watching from a distance, Wonder and Jay appear perched atop the mountain in the top left corner. And an intriguing character, Judith (blue dress with a white collar), is peering through two people between the columns in the top right. Judith, they explained, has a regrettable history of betraying her friends. In the painting, it's as though she can't look away from the crucifixion, but she also doesn't know what to do with it ... should she keep her distance in the shadows or look it fully in the face and in turn have to examine her own broken self. (I caught a sense of hope for Judith from the artists!)

Giorgiko invites us to ponder: What do we do with the crucifixion? Of course, as Christians, Jesus' death is a world-changing event, but are there ways in which we betray an indifference, a disdain or even ignorance? Here's a challenge: practise *visio divina* with *The Spectacle, the Tragedy, the Passion*. May we be drawn again into the mystery of Christ and look full into the horror and beauty of our Saviour's death.

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***I pointed to the two figures who seemed to be shielding their eyes to get a better look, and Trisha asked if the hand to the forehead might not be a salute.***

James Tissot, *What Our Lord Saw from the Cross*





# THE CRAFT OF RESURRECTION: JOHN 5:19-29



Ciro Palumbo, *The Lightness of the Spirit*

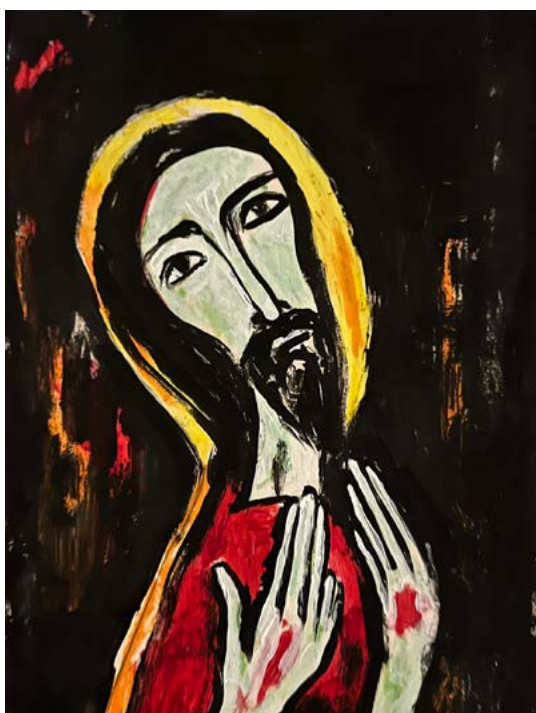
Accused of “making himself equal with God,” Jesus Christ responds with an apologia that ends ironically with his accusers on trial for their disbelief and cheap products:

So Jesus answered and was saying to them: “Amen, amen, I say to you: *the son* is unable to *make* anything for himself except what he sees the Father *making*. For whatever he should *make*, the son also likewise *makes these things*. For the Father loves (as a friend) *the son* and shows him *all things* that *he is making* [Gen 1:1; Prov 8:27–30]. And greater works (of creation) than these he will show him, that *you all* will wonder. For as the Father raises those who are dead and *makes* them *alive*, likewise *the son* also *makes alive* whomever he desires [1 Sam 2:6]. For the Father does not judge anyone but has given all judgement to the *son*, that all might honour him as they might honour the Father. The one who does not honour *the son* does not honour the Father who sent him. [...] Amen, amen I say to you: the one who hears my word (*logos*) and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and does not come into judgement but has crossed over from death into life. [...] Amen, amen I say to you: the hour is coming and now is when those who are dead will hear the voice of *the son* of God, and the ones who hear will live [Dan 12:2]. For as the Father has life in himself, in the same way he also gave life to *the son* to have life in himself. And *he gave to him authority*

to practise judgement because he is *the son of man* [Dan 7:13–14]. Do not be astonished by this. For an hour is coming in which all who are in tombs will hear his voice and will come out – those who *make* good things to the resurrection of *life*, but those who *make* cheap things to the resurrection of judgement.” (John 5:19–29, my translation)

Jesus presents himself as a master apprentice: “whatever he should do, the son also likewise does ... shows him all things.” In context, we learn that God has been working ceaselessly to repair creation (17). The Father’s craft, which is beautiful, useful and “good,” has captured the Son’s attention and become his own practice. Twice, Jesus stops speaking, watches, listens and responds: “Amen, amen.”

A son learning a trade from a father is a very familiar path of apprenticeship. The Synoptic Gospels present Jesus as a “craftsman” (*tektōn*) – not necessarily a carpenter since woodworking was fairly scarce – from Nazareth like his earthly father (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3). As a youth, he probably assisted Joseph with repairing and enlarging the nearby city of Sepphoris that had been destroyed by the Romans shortly after his birth but which, by the late first century, the Jewish historian Josephus



describes as the “ornament of all Galilee” (*Antiquities* 18.2.1). John modulates the Synoptic tradition into a cosmic apprenticeship: responding to his heavenly Father’s direction, Jesus is now repairing and enlarging all creation in his own person, offering his flesh as temple and groom. Jesus says, “Destroy this temple,” referring to his own body that will be torn apart by the Romans, “and in three days I will raise it up” (2:19, 21). This resurrected flesh will also become a home for his bride, the church, so that we might abide in him and that he, the Father and Holy Spirit live and work in us (John 14–15).

The master apprentice grounds this ambitious defence on Ancient Israelite Scripture, a shared, revelatory authority between defendant and accusers, presenting himself as the antitype (or fulfilment) of Wisdom, Messiah and Daniel’s “son of man.” Often obscured in English biblical translations, Jesus employs the Septuagint’s opening verb – “In the beginning God made (*poieō*) the heaven and the earth” – to describe God’s craft, who, like a potter, moulds Adam’s body with clay, imbuing it with life (Gen 1:1; 2:7). Proverbs goes on to make Wisdom a participant in the creation story:

When he [Yahweh] established *the heavens*, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of *the deep* ... [Gen 1:1, 2] when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I [Wisdom] was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always. (8:27–30 ESV)

A “master workman” or “artist” (*amon*), Wisdom joyfully implements Yahweh’s creation plan, collaborating as a friend. Jesus then alludes to the first explicit reference

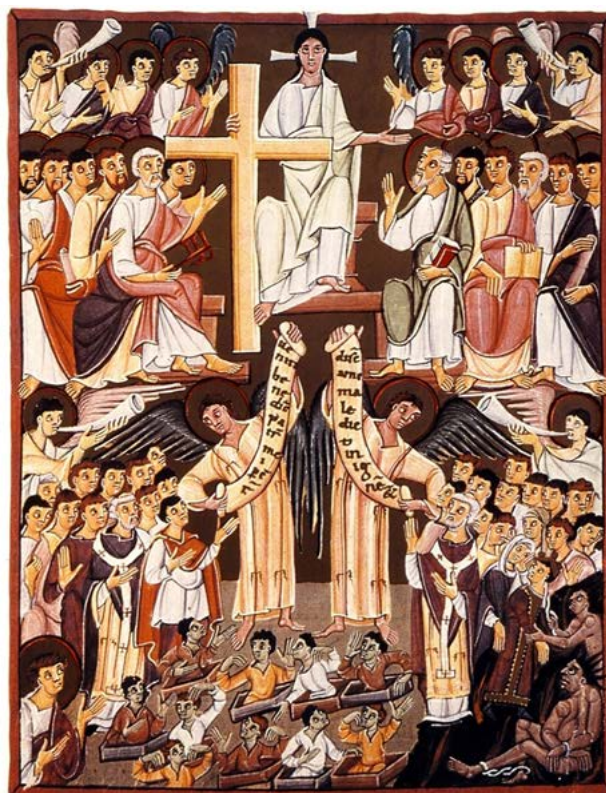
to the Messiah (*masiach*) in Scripture, which unites resurrection after Adam and Eve’s fall with his exaltation:

Yahweh kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up ... he will give strength to his King and exalt the horn of his Messiah. (1 Sam 2:6, 10 my translation)

Finally, Jesus employs *gezerah sheva* – an exegetical rule attributed to the contemporary rabbi Hillel that allows different passages to be linked by a common word or theme (see Tosefta Sanhedrin 7:11) – within Daniel, so that “son of man” has authority to judge after Yahweh brings the dead to life from Sheol:

With the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him ... And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above. (Dan 7:13–14; 12:2–3 ESV)

“Dust of the earth” brings us full circle: God created Adam from “dust” (Gen 2:7); he and his descendants would be resurrected from the same material. And by these three types or shadows, Jesus presents himself not



Bamberg Apocalypse, Last Judgement



only co-participating in creation and resurrection but also determining their course by his exaltation and judgement.

The accused, then, turns the tables on his accusers, promising to judge them at the resurrection for the quality of their craft – as either “good” (*agathos*) or “cheap” (*phaulos*). Here, and in an earlier occurrence, *agathos* also means valuable, presuming the utilitarian beauty of craft: Nathanael asks, “What good thing (*agathos*) can come from Nazareth?” (1:46), as if the small village had little to offer. It may already have been the case – at least it was so in medieval Europe – that “all” apprentices at the end of their initial training were required to submit a masterpiece to the guild for recognition. Something like that will take place at the general resurrection of the dead, as the apostle Paul describes:

Now if anyone builds on the foundation [Christ] with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, the work of each will become clear because the Day [of the Lord Jesus] will make it clear because it is revealed in fire. And the fire will test the quality of each (person’s) work. If anyone’s work remains, which he built, he will receive a reward. If the work of anyone is incinerated, he will suffer loss. (1 Cor 3:12–15a)

While Jesus apprentices the Creator Father, his accusers follow theirs: “You are from your father, the devil” (John 8:44).

Breaking the fourth wall (metalepsis), as John often does, the passage terminates with a summons for readers to recognize their own apprenticeship and father because everyone’s work will be evaluated: “all who are in tombs will hear his voice and will come out.” But what Jesus invites is not the fallen expression of apprenticeship, a kind of slavery in which apprentices (“interns”) are exploited for free labour, but family, friendship and “wonder.” Much has been written on salvation as adoption into the Trinity and friendship with God. Perhaps less on the wonder of craft.

Elie wrote this for the *Boston Herald* in 1954:

For the last half hour, I have been standing, mouth ajar, down on Arch Street watching them lay bricks in the St. Anthony Shrine now “abuilding,” and I have come to the conclusion that laying bricks is a fine and noble and fascinating art.

Every skill has a scale of perfection, so that even proficient mastery invites wonder from the novice looking for beauty and order. Apprenticeship cannot be separated from the community that requires excellence in each skill for its well-being. Kingdoms can survive for a time without a king but not without trades whose masters have no need to justify their existence, though, like God, often go unappreciated. Why did the Bostonian feel the need to write the obvious?

We too, like children standing “mouth ajar,” may wonder our way again into the kingdom of God. Their self-perception is smaller than adults’, so that the greatness of any craft may be seen. Little ones are more easily yet rightly astonished by the everyday work of the towering grownups around them. For many, our adult work began this way. (I wonder if a youthful Jesus beheld Joseph’s craft – cutting away, shaping, forming – and was drawn.) I teach the Bible for a living because I grew up watching my father (b. 1949) preach it well. I paint because

Ray Swanson (1937–2004), celebrated for his honouring depiction of Native American children, invited me to his studio where he had set up two canvases before a flower in a cup. I watched his brush move with effortless intentionality like my father’s tongue; my shaky, undisciplined hand followed. At the end, there was clearly a gap in the scale of perfection between the two works, but I was hooked forever.

Wonder (*thambos*) also seized Peter and his partners as they beheld Jesus modulate their earthly livelihood with a miraculous catch (Luke 5:1–11; see also 4:36).



Charles Demuth, *Cottage Window*

Adoption into God’s family means, at the age of maturity, taking on the trade. The beauty and goodness of new creation, like St Anthony’s Shrine, will be our humbly collective yet individually perfected labour: “We who cut mere stones must always be envisioning cathedrals” was a medieval quarry worker’s creed. I am not at all convinced that we take our bricklaying or noodle-making skills or our signed artworks or publications into eternity, but we will all behold New Jerusalem as our city. (Cheap nick-nacks are for tourists, and there will be no more tourists.)

Nevertheless, we must not push spiritual children to grow up too quickly. There is time for milk, for play, and



Unknown artist (Ethiopian),  
*Mary and her Son, Christ, Teaching the Apostles*

for celebrating their first freedom from the evil one. At the time of Christ, apprenticeship began with pre-practice observation. This is the most natural way for tiring of toys. We can trust the power of proximity, that “good things” will be on display in the body of Christ, the church; and, at the right time, if their faith is genuine, they too will be attracted to the craft, especially if the community is deeply rooted in the Gospels. As modelled by the Triune God – more on this below – apprenticeship is essentially communal. We mirror the Son to one another as the Son images the Father. We are apprentices to the Apprentice, our work echoing God’s. (Although the master’s name is often the only one remembered, most great works in human history are necessarily collaborative.) For today’s apprentice, as Jesus will reveal in the Upper Room Discourse, the most immediate master is the Holy Spirit in that we are all anointed with “wisdom and understanding” distributed among the members of Christ’s body:

The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name – he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance everything that I said to you. (John 14:25 my translation; see Isa 11:2)

The Advocate mirrors the Son: both come from the Father, dwell with disciples and offer truth. The Spirit makes us participants in Jesus’ circle, allowing us always to have the Apprentice before the eyes of our heart but also the freedom to create new things in his name. In the restoration of our Jesus-centred imaginations, apprenticeship moves from distraction to wonder, from imitation to creativity. Perhaps, at some point, throughout

the day we will stop arguing with the world, watch, listen and respond: “Amen, amen.”

Jesus reveals something of the trinitarian craft of resurrection, the healing and perfection of creation, by presenting the general resurrection of the dead as a co-participation between the Father and Son. With the Holy Spirit, they are acting inside and around one another, in perfect, joyful community, as any apprentices know who carry the master’s spirit with them in their work. They share the same agency and operation: *opera trinitas ad extra sunt indivisa* (“the works of the Trinity on the outside are indivisible”), so that all creation will be a unified work. The Father resurrects and judges in the Son, who still operates with personal agency

inside the freedom of friendship, anticipating the doctrine of dyothelitism (“two wills”). The Son has a divine will and a human will that he surrenders to the leading and inspiration of the Spirit; a second will and a second nature, which makes our own union with God possible. He is the last Adam, as we are the last Eve; and we have become one flesh, so that we might also become Wisdom, the Creator’s “helper,” while still being formed as part of creation (Gen 2:18).

Today, whatever our craft is, whatever we do well that has been determined to be attractive, necessary and useful for the common good, as a reflection of God’s creative activity, it is inside the scale of perfection, which ought to hook us forever. The master apprentice is always capable, never satisfied, always attracting the next generation to discipleship. God has captured our attention in Jesus Christ whose crucified yet resurrected body perfects creation, and we cannot look away. We may not see our city, our collaborative masterpiece, until our own resurrection – “all who are in tombs will hear his voice and will come out” – but there is something of his transfigured flesh in every village, family, friend and garden. There is space in God’s creative presence for imperfection, for personal growth, for the joy of learning better (never best) practices, but also for the less appealing, tediously boring, labour-intensive, even tragic moments of apprenticeship that sometimes feel more like slavery that are nevertheless essential to the constrained, mysterious freedom of any master.

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# Crafted

## Writing into VIRTUE

SARA OSBORNE

As both a writer and a writing instructor, I am often reminded of the multifaceted nature of the writing task. The writer – student and teacher alike – both acts and reacts to the words and sentences that build paragraphs and articles and essays. As he works, he simultaneously shapes and is shaped; she both moves and is moved. And somehow, in this mysterious craft, more than thoughts and poems and stories arise from such labour. The writer is himself transformed, his character honed by hammering out his art. Writing is a formative act.

Formation begins early for the writer with eyes to see the truth that confronts all honest artists: we are weak, dependent, fragile makers – yet God calls us to the task of sub-creation: "... made in [his] image, [we are] privileged with the gift of speech and language, and allowed by [him] to be word-bearer[s]."<sup>1</sup> How can we ever approach such a calling, much less pursue it? By following the clear path of Scripture: *weakness is the way* (2 Cor 12:9).<sup>2</sup> Remembering the age of

Abraham, the speech impediment of Moses, the poverty of Ruth, and the backstory of Paul, we begin from a posture of humility. The Spirit of God enables the Christian writer to see dependence as good, humility as proper. In their book *Charitable Writing*, authors Gibson and Beitler argue that "humility ought to be understood as the *first* writing virtue, just as humility has been traditionally considered the 'first' of the Christian virtues."<sup>3</sup> In order to embrace the power of the gospel, we must first recognize our need for it; likewise, in order to create under the banner of Christ our King, we must first acknowledge our utter dependence upon him to overcome our weakness with his power. We turn our eyes towards Jesus and seek to imitate his example: we lead by serving.

While a writer's service to her reader may take numerous forms, all stem from the Scriptures' greatest commandment (Matt 22:36–40). In order to love God and love my neighbour through what and how I write, I must begin by considering my neighbour: *Who is he? What are her needs? What else is vying for his time? How much fatigue or energy*

*might she bring to the reading task? What suffering has he endured? What gift can I give to encourage her soul?* While different genres of writing may call for different kinds of questions, one truth is clear: it is difficult for a writer to serve a reader he or she has never considered. An awareness of the *other* is an essential element of good writing, and in God's divine economy, cultivating this posture shapes the writer as much as it serves the reader.

Care for the reader compels a writer toward empathy, and such empathy shapes the writing task in surprising ways. More than content or tone is shaped by considering the *other*; the writer must also labour to remove obstacles to understanding, increase ease of connection, vary sentence length and structure in a way that delivers ideas to the reader with ease. A compassionate writer keeps an eye on her reader at all times, looking for ways to best serve the feast of poetry or platter

1. Malcolm Guite, "A Liturgy Before Writing," in vol. 3 of *Every Moment Holy*, ed. Douglas McKelvey and Pete Peterson (Nashville: Rabbit Room Press, 2023), 80.  
2. I am also indebted to J. I. Packer, whose book, *Weakness is the Way: Life with Christ our Strength*, has influenced my use of this phrase.

3. Richard H. Gibson and James E. Beitler III, *Charitable Writing: Cultivating Virtue Through our Words* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 37.



of persuasion. Such focus shapes a product, of course; however, it also shapes the writer, as he struggles to strip off his pride and attend to another. Any writer attempting such a feat becomes instantly aware of the friction produced from fighting sin: pride is not so easy to shrug off! Empathizing with someone entirely unlike us requires kindness, perseverance, patience and self-control: fruits of the Spirit! (Gal 5:22–23). Here the writer’s humility must meet her hope – the very Spirit of God at work in his vessels.

This Godward hope propels the writer to steward her craft well. Indeed, the craft of writing comes with great responsibility:

[Author] Richard Weaver argues ... that the capacity to fashion sentences is a wondrous, even terrible power: “The liberty to impose this formal unity is a liberty to handle the world, to remake it, if only a little, and to hand it to others in a shape which may influence their actions.”<sup>4</sup>

Wielding words well requires a certain grace – Spirit-borne help for a difficult task – because sub-creation entails a mysterious power. Crafted words may either build up or tear down (Eph 4:29). The virtue of humility must be ever learned, an attitude of prayer always present. Author and poet Malcolm Guite offers a beautiful liturgy to tune our hearts for the writing task:

Lord may I not so much find the  
right words  
as allow the right words to find me,  
not so much compose  
as allow you to compose me.  
And when the words come,  
Lord, help me to welcome them,  
to listen for their wisdom  
and to care for them.<sup>5</sup>

In essence, *Lord, help me steward these words*. This too reflects the creation of Genesis 1:28–31; here “we ... engage in another creative activity present in the Genesis account. After making humans, God tells them to care for what he has made.”<sup>6</sup> The labour of writing demands that the writer slow his art enough to consider his words – each one, its neighbours and counterparts. Such toil presses us further into dependence on the Spirit, as if returning to the feet of Jesus with each subsequent draft. In that posture is the writer’s hope: “From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no one has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him” (Isa 64:4).

The Christian writer does not wait in vain. Throughout the tasks of editing and revision – even in the seemingly futile moments of staring blankly at an unsatisfactory page – the Spirit of God is still at work. While we attempt to shape our words, He is shaping *us*. The triune God is teaching us community and hospitality: “[t]o revise is to welcome the stranger into our thinking.”<sup>7</sup> We may begrudge this time-intensive labour, but Scripture offers a different perspective: through trials and obstacles, our writing

is not the only organism being moulded; our very faith is being refined – and that by a generous God who gives grace to all who ask (Jas 1:2–5).

To craft a piece of writing is both a labour and a gift, not unlike the Christian faith. We come to the cross empty-handed, “but God ... even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (Eph 2:4). That same grace moves within us through the Holy Spirit, calling us to lives of good works lived in dependence on grace. The works of a writer – whether an essay turned in to a teacher, an article submitted to a journal, or a manuscript delivered to a publisher – are rarely handed off with complete satisfaction. Yet even in its final act, the writing process offers us one more opportunity to grow in faith as we submit our craft to others. Remade, we pursue good works; crafted, we write our way into increasing virtue.

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4. Scott F. Crider, *The Office of Assertion* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2005), 73.  
5. Guite, “A Liturgy Before Writing,” 81.

6. Gibson and Beitler, *Charitable Writing*, 147.  
7. Gibson and Beitler, *Charitable Writing*, 155.



# Crafty Sight

DRU JOHNSON

Though a term related to handiwork, craft is sight too.

I watch too many YouTube videos, most made by experts in forming concrete, car repair, woodworking, cooking, passive home construction and many other things I want to understand before attempting. If I just wanted to learn how to *do the thing*, then watching a single video that shows me *how to do the thing* will do. But *I want to see what these experts see*.

Sometimes, I just want the straight dope on how to fix something. My car gives me a code that signals a problem with the ignition coil. I only want to watch videos that help me diagnose ignition coil problems. Other times, it's hours later and I've caught myself watching a dozen short videos on ignition coils, timing chains, how small block engines work, manufacturing cars, welding, and so on. I fed the algorithm my time and attention, in kind, it fed me networks of rabbit holes.

I might begrudge the overflow of information, the attention-grabbing algorithms, or those evil empires vampiring my time away. But that's not necessarily the case. Most often, I start with a specific need – like ignition

coil repair – and end up with an expert talking to me about all the various ways an engine can break. They patiently explain how these systems interconnect and usually with a flair of entertainment.

In the 1970s they had books that basically did the same thing. I remember my dad using John Muir's illustrated VW "step by step" repair manual "for the compleat idiot." The US military employed the same sense of humour and artistry to explain mechanical principles to the troops and to give practical tips for maintenance and repair of rifles, missiles and jeeps (i.e., *PS: The Preventive Maintenance Monthly*).

Knowing how to do basic maintenance and repair is good enough for government work, I suppose. But from the complex messes of our communities to the creative vision needed to design buildings, plumbing, family life, gardens and workplaces, we need well-crafted sight honed by repetitive experiences and experiments.

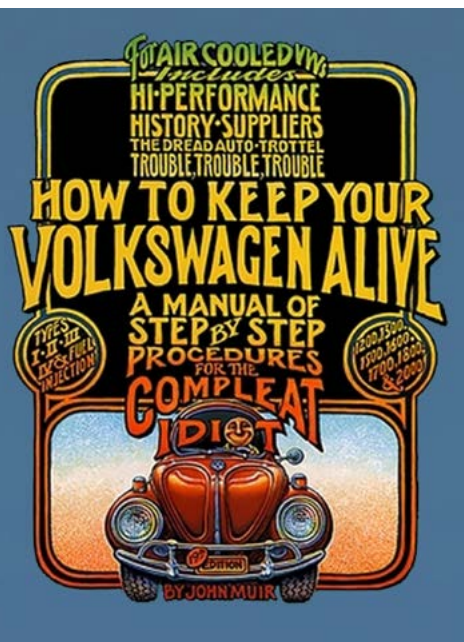
We often think of craft as the hand on the engraving tool, like Aaron's hand to the calf. But craft is sight too. Craft sees beyond the superficial features of appearance, the seemingness of the cosmos, into the deeper structures that scaffold and interconnect the world. The impenetrable (to me) symptoms of plumbing problems in my 125-year-old house require well-crafted insight to fix, honed by years of disparate experiences with pipes, pressures, leaks and boilers. The plumber's physical techniques of soldering, pipe bending, joining and more can be learned quickly. Their plumber's sight cannot.

It's the sight that God has in the creation. Creation is not instant. God does not say, "let the cosmos exist in final form." God formed habitats and filled them with creatures

through sexual reproduction. Over and over God famously "saw that it was good." I ask you to hang with me here on this seeming diversion into Genesis 2-3.

With the man too, God crafted his sight to find his "strong ally" in the woman.<sup>1</sup> God says, "it is not good for the man to be alone." The solution was not, "then God made the woman and presented her to him." Rather, God led the man-of-dirt (*ha'adam* who was made from *ha'adamah*)

1. Leslie Bustard, of blessed memory, gave me this phrase "strong ally" as a better attempt at translating *ezer kenegdo*, rather than "helpmeet" or "fit helper." It makes better sense of both Hebrew terms as they are used throughout the Bible.



through a process of naming other dirt-formed creatures and not finding his ally in any of them (Gen 2:19–20). What is remarkable here? That God crafts the man's vision of a “strong ally” through a repetitive act of naming. The climax and resolution to this little story confirm that his poetic eureka is the goal of process. Interpretations struggle to capture the sense of finality after repetition in the man's cry, but “this, at last” does the trick (Gen 2:23):

This, *at last*, is bone of my bones,  
and flesh of my flesh.  
She shall be called *ishah* (woman)  
because she was taken out of *ish* (man).

Craft is skilled sight. So is craftiness. The serpent is called “more prudent (*arum*) than all the creatures of the field God had made” (Gen 3:1). Translators often slant this language prejudicially against the serpent, saying the serpent was more “cunning” or “crafty.” Genesis 3 acts like the first five minutes of an epic film (i.e., the whole book of Genesis), and so it seems unwise to stack the deck against the serpent when we're just learning the characters. And, the serpent is shown to be prophetic by the narrator.

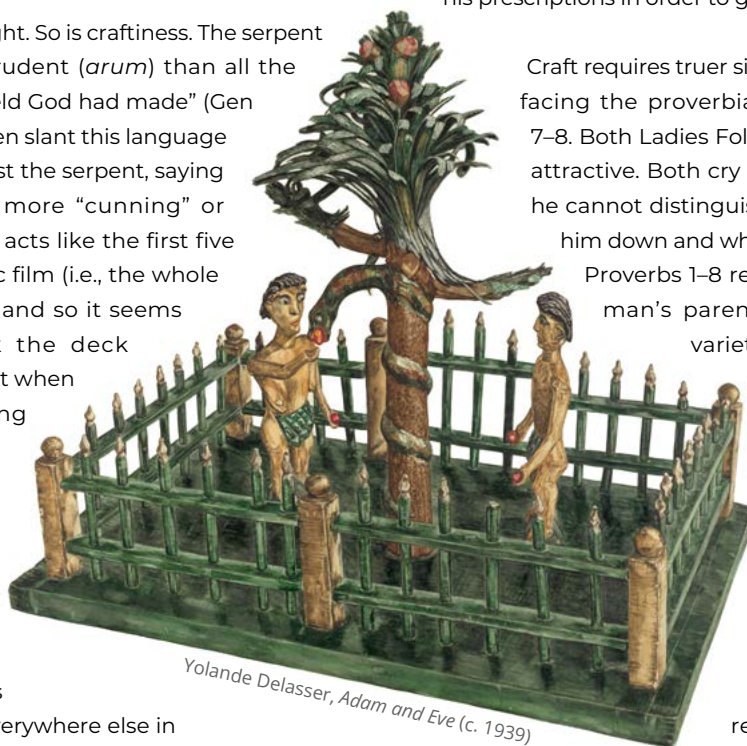
But the term “crafty” means prudent or wise everywhere else in the Bible. This use of wisdom language here in the garden begs us to ask the question: Is the serpent wiser than any other creature of the field? Yes, even more than the man and woman. As Old Testament scholar Walter Moberly once argued, everything the serpent says comes true.<sup>2</sup> Even more, the narrator uses the exact words of the serpent to show that they came true. I've mapped it in a handy chart here for your perusal:

2. R. W. L. Moberly, “Did the Serpent Get It Right?,” in *Journal of Theological Studies* 39, no. 1 (1988): 1–27.

God (2:17)	Serpent (3:4–5)	Narrator
“... <i>in the day</i> that you eat of it, dying you will die.”	“Dying you will not die ...”	“Thus all the days that Adam lived were 930 years, and he died.” (5:5)
	“... your eyes will be opened ...”	“Then the eyes of both were opened ...” (3:7)
	“... you will be like God knowing good and evil.”	Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like us knowing good and evil ...” (3:22)

Again, it's the narrator who tells us that the “eyes of both were opened” and it's God who says, “the man has become like one of us knowing good and evil” – precisely as the serpent had said.

Whatever the author wants us to know, we should not think that shrewd insight alone is the goal. The crafted vision of the serpent is not wrong on the facts, but wrong in its aims. It's not that the serpent doesn't know what it's talking about. Rather, God's question to the found man: “Who told you?,” reveals the actual problem. The serpent was indeed wiser than all the animals of the field, but the man wasn't meant to heed his instructions and embody his prescriptions in order to gain God's vision.



Yolande Delasser, *Adam and Eve* (c. 1939)

Craft requires truer sight. This is the very problem facing the proverbial young man in Proverbs 7–8. Both Ladies Folly and Wisdom are sexually attractive. Both cry out to the young man. Yet, he cannot distinguish which woman will strike him down and which will offer life abundantly.

Proverbs 1–8 repeatedly places the young man's parents over his shoulder in a variety of situations developing his sight. Representing faithful guidance from God through the family, they are the voice to whom he should be listening, inclining his ears toward, in order to see the situation more truly.

Well-crafted sight requires that we inhabit the prescriptions of our traditions and families. Scripture imagines

an ideal upbringing, where our bodies have practised experiments from our youth like the young man – parents over our shoulders pointing and honing our vision of what is and what could be.

When we speak of craft, we must be honest about the vision required for it. And when we picture that honed vision, Scripture asks us: To whom are we listening, and,



what rituals are they prescribing for us in order to see what they want to show us? Such traditions, communities and rituals produce what we commonly call “a craft.” In various points of life, we might want the final product of the craft: someone to fix our boiler, settle a child or recover files from a dilapidated hard drive. In those moments, we wish for the vision of a master plumber, experienced mother or skilled technician. But these modifiers – master, experienced, skilled – only mean as much as the traditions that shaped them, the voices and the rituals within the communities that honed their sight. An experienced mother still might be an abusive mother. A master plumber might not care enough to seal every leak or may see subtle leaks as potential for creating future business. Serpents can be the wisest person in the room, but that doesn’t mean we should listen to them!

And so, we must attend to the social bodies that surround the craft, that form the person into the craft. According to Deuteronomy 4, Israel’s vocation to the world was to be a wise and discerning nation. For what? For the sake of wisdom? No! Through the repetitive rituals and guidance of God’s *instruction* (often translated “law”), Israel’s wisdom aimed at justice and righteousness for creation itself, loving the neighbour as oneself (Lev 19:18),

loving the foreigner as oneself (Lev 19:33–34), and thereby fulfilling God’s command to love, well, God (Deut 6:5).

We require well-crafted vision in order to love neighbour, stranger and God in ways fitting to creation and our vocations. Scripture poses a more substantive muddle for us: to whose voice are we listening and what repeated rituals are they prescribing in order to craft our vision. What anchors the social bodies to whom we submit our bodies, energies and attentiveness? Or in biblical metaphors, in whose soil are we planted? Craftiness doesn’t guarantee that our expertise will be properly aimed.

The dirt of our traditions, its voices and rituals, must find a source in the instruction, the voice, of God through Scripture and the living Holy Spirit in our communities. That is our only hope of being a blessed canvas stretcher (like Paul), builder (like Jesus), civil court judge (like Deborah), or any of the technical vocations in which we hone our skills.

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# The Medieval Mind of C. S. Lewis

RICARDO CARDENAS

## HOW GREAT BOOKS SHAPED A GREAT MIND

A review of the book by Jason M. Baxter  
(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022)

Photo: John Towner

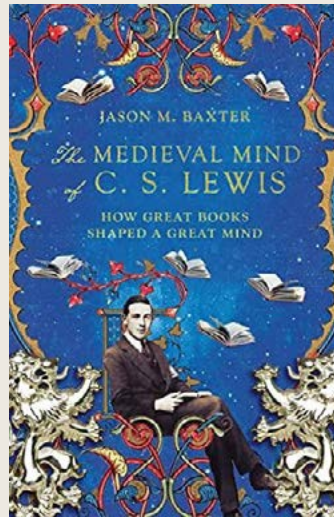
If you have ever tried to learn a new language, you have likely also learned about the value of seeking to learn the language by being fully immersed in it. There is a type of learning that can only happen when we are fully steeped in our material, as opposed to merely passively observing it from the outside. Richard M. Baxter invites us into this type of pedagogical experience in *The Medieval Mind of C. S. Lewis: How Great Books Shaped a Great Mind*. In this classroom, however, our subject is not a new language, but rather, it is the intellectual life of Lewis himself.

Of course, Lewis is known by many for his popular fantasy fiction like *The Chronicles of Narnia*, as well as his apologetic and philosophical work, but in this book, Baxter seeks to introduce us to the “third Lewis,” the medieval scholar and professor. This book, however, is not simply an overview of Lewis’s medieval scholarship. Rather, it is an effort to “explore how this third Lewis is just beneath the surface” of all that he wrote, whether it be his fiction, non-fiction or devotional literature (6). For Lewis, medieval literature was not simply a subject to study, but it provided an urgent, timeless way of seeing the world that had been lost with the advent of modernity, and therefore needed to be recovered and translated for a modern age (11).

In chapter 1, for example, Baxter shows us that, for Lewis, the universe was not simply a random assortment of material phenomena, but a “finely ordered multiplicity” that had been transposed from, and which pointed to, a deeper reality beyond this world (20–21). This was a way of seeing the world that Lewis received from Plato, but also Boethius, and it seeped into much of his writing. One notable example can be found in his Narnian creation narrative as Aslan sings the universe into being in *The Magician’s Nephew* (30–31).

Similarly, chapter 2 introduces another Boethian theme that the avid reader of Lewis will recognise, which is the

idea that literature and ideas are not simply facts that are meant to be observed intellectually, but they are worlds to be entered into and felt from within. Of course, this will remind readers of the fantastical worlds that Lewis created, but it also draws to mind captivating ways that Lewis could argue and spiritually exhort in works like *Letters to Malcolm*.

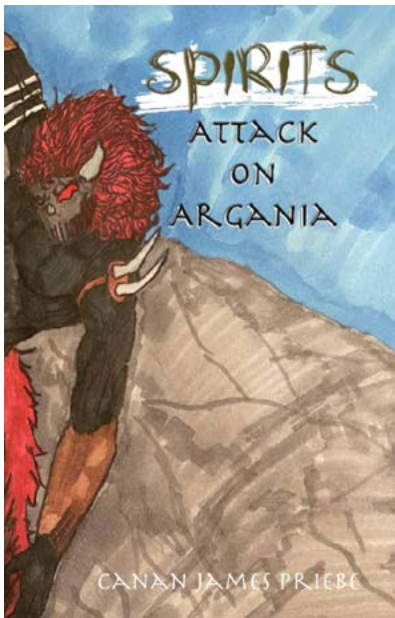


Chapters 3 and 4 explore the moral and psychological implications of abandoning a medieval cosmology for the sake of a modern cosmology. Some of Lewis’s most scathing critiques of modernity were grounded in his concern that an overly mechanised worldview limited one’s moral imagination and understanding of what it means to be human. One such critique is seen in Lewis’s memorable picture of “men without chests” in *The Abolition of Man*.

This is the pattern of the trip that Baxter guides us along throughout the book – tracing the medieval roots of Lewis’s thought, and then showing their manifestation in one, or sometimes more, of his works. Sometimes, these themes are displayed in personal correspondence with friends, other times in his most memorable fiction, and still at other times in essays such as “The Weight of Glory.”

*The Medieval Mind of C. S. Lewis* is a worthwhile read for any student of Lewis. Those familiar with “Jack” are sure to appreciate the introduction to the “third Lewis” that Baxter provides, while newer students will gain a helpful entry point into the brilliant mind that has captivated so many. All, however, will be challenged to recall the enchantment in the world that Lewis laboured so furiously to capture in his writings, as well as the future glory that this enchantment points us toward.

*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.*



### CANAN PRIEBE

Writing a book has been anything but forgettable. The process has been difficult, inspiring, challenging, tedious and fulfilling. I am a beginner in many ways, but publishing my first book was a big step in a long road ahead of me that I'm very excited about. *Spirits: Attack on Argania* is an action-adventure fantasy novel inspired by many of the greats from the genre: TV, books and video games (such as *The Legend of Zelda* and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*).

While I wasn't very into reading, I was good at writing. I was inspired, blessed with motivation and creativity, and wanted to make a story that had an impact on the reader. Even if you think you can't write, if you have an



# ON WRITING *Spirits* Attack on Argania

idea so ingrained in your brain and you really understand it, with some effort you can express those thoughts and ideas in words. As my urge to start a business and create something I would really enjoy grew, I finally decided to act. At age eleven I got started on my first book and it felt incredible to make something of my own.

Covid-19 hit the world hard as I started 6th grade. Like millions of others, I had to participate in online school, which I disliked even more than normal school. Thankfully, my friends and I would finish our work quickly so our teacher let us make short stories using the vocabulary of the week. This was the one thing I enjoyed because it brought a sense of community back into school. We shared our unique ideas with each other and I had a lot of practice as I wrote many stories during this period, some with my friends. The more I wrote, the more fun I had. Eventually I decided to make my own story that I would one day publish. I proposed the idea to my brother who later worked with me as an illustrator. From there I would write an hour a day each week as I brought my passion and ideas to life.

I enjoy spending what little free time I have during high school working on the second edition of the series (I'm starting to read more as well) and I hope to publish it sooner rather than later. There's much I've learned from writing my first novel and much I can improve upon. While I did take some breaks, the writing process took about three years. It's been fruitful in many, many ways. As I got older, my

skills improved, yet I still had to edit and revise several times over. With the help of my parents in editing and publishing, my book finally made its way to Amazon in July of 2023. I invite comments and reviews on *Spirits: Attack on Argania* to help me build an active and healthy community where I can provide more entertainment in the future.

I owe much to my twin brother, Jonas, and to Samantha (Sammy) Placencia. In 6th grade, when I first met her, she was already a very talented and devoted artist. I wouldn't have chosen anyone else to make the cover art. Whether the book is successful or not, the true joy was using the gifts God gave me to create my own world I could be invested in, just like he has done for us.

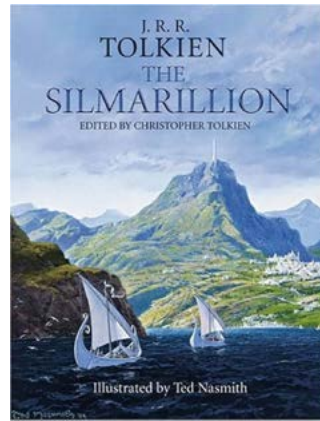
*Canan Priebe is a fifteen-year-old Moon Valley High School freshman who enjoys sports and video games. He lives in Glendale, Arizona, with his parents, younger brother and twin brother.*







Having raised humanity above the beastly level of survival struggles, we will now aim to upgrade humans into gods and turn Homo sapiens into Homo deus. (Yuval Noah Harari)



Like the people of Númenor, Transhumanists who seek to overcome death are seeking to wrest the power of life and death from God. Science and technology have been the instrument of much material good in the world by alleviating various aspects of poverty, sickness and pain in life. But there is a forbidden fruit which Transhumanists want to reach out and grasp, just like the race of Númenor – to live forever on man’s own terms and be like gods. Contentment with one’s lot in life and the relative prosperity we have access to is not what is being advocated. In many ways, here is an atheism that is not content to embrace the claimed “nothingness” that lies on the other side of death. On the other hand, it betrays a kind of Gnosticism which seeks to advance humanity to become divine. On the island of Númenor such pursuits ended up in very dark places. The temple to the creator of Middle-earth, Ilúvatar, was torn down and human sacrifice began to be practised. And the discontentment grew.

But for all this Death did not depart from the land, rather it came sooner and more often, and in many dreadful guises. For whereas aforesaid men had grown slowly old, and had laid them down in the end to sleep, when they were weary at last of the world, now madness and sickness assailed them; and yet they were afraid to die ... and they cursed themselves in their agony.” (328)

Unsurprisingly, the people of Númenor were mistaken. Tolkien argues that living forever would not be a utopia even if it were achievable. The elves of Middle-earth had perpetual life, yet they had to endure the grief and frustration of a world marred by evil over millennia – unless they could bear it no more and wasted away in grief.

The hubris of the king of Númenor eventually reached its peak. Setting sail to make war on the Powers and wrest the gift of eternal life from them, the people of Númenor met their end. The Powers stood aside and petitioned Ilúvatar to act. Apart from that remnant that chose not to follow such evil, the island and its people are swept away in total judgement.

Tolkien’s Middle-earth saga portrays the beauty of the earth and the beautification of bodily life. It also portrays the grief of life marred by evil. The saga’s history of the Númenoreans show the perils of dissatisfaction with

the shortness of life – even though this brevity itself is a gift. Tolkien’s tale seems prophetic of current technological aspirations. His observations of human nature are drawn from his Christian faith, in which the same pride is evident at Babel and returns again and again.

Death is both a judgement and a gift. Although God’s judgement of death came because of Adam’s sin, it is also a mercy. For a person to bear with the toil of this life century after century is no easy task – especially if evil people themselves have enduring power. Death is also crucially a judgement: decreed by God for sin. One of the key issues with Transhumanism is that it aims to overturn this judgement and outwit the judge who gave it. But God cannot be cheated and judgement is only taken away in and by Christ:

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

“O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 15:53–57)

This has been accomplished in Christ alone for all who will trust in him.

*Aston lives in Nottingham with his wife and is part of a local church who meet there. This article has been shortened for this edition of TBP.*



Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis, Fairy Tale (I)



# WRITING THE KINGDOM: A Covenant Manifesto

LEAH BELDMAN

Craft is a covenant. As an artist, I have entered a covenant of writing – a commitment to be faithful in my creativity and creative in my commitment. This is a breathing promise to be *truthful* and *disciplined*, allowing myself to shape and be shaped by imagination.

**Truth.** The words I write must be truthful. True to me. True to God. True to others. Not truth that is loud and obnoxious – the kind that is preached from stiff pulpits or picket signs, determined by gavels. This truth accompanies the spit flying from the mouths of debaters, landing on audiences who long for connection.

Neither will my writing include quiet truth – truth whispered behind people’s backs which is accompanied by quiet snickers and pointed fingers. This truth worms its way into places where it is unwelcome, disguised as a friend who disarms you with a smile, stealing the one from your face. Unproductive. Unfeeling. Undoing. Undone. Deceitful truth greets you with a warm handshake but leaves you exposed, cold and naked. It pries open your closet door revealing dusty skeletons for the whole world to see.

No. The truth I write will be unifying, not found between the lines of legal documents or under the sour melodies of gossip. Like the laughter and singing coming from the kitchen, this truth will be loud. Like the hidden “I love you” between a mother and daughter walking hand in hand, this truth will be quiet.

The truth I write requires coaxing. It is wild and majestic, like an antlered deer waltzing through the underbrush beneath shadowy sunshine. Truthful ideas must be captured, sometimes tamed, and folded up like crisp, sweet-smelling laundry. *Fresh* and *fitted* into compact drawers, they are ready to use.

**Discipline.** Writing takes practice and experience which is built through effort and mistakes. Discipline means opening drawers full of truthful ideas, pairing those that match and creating a cohesive ensemble. Some

days I may be gripped by the fist of divine inspiration, knowing exactly what to write and how to write it. However, divine inspiration is sporadic and passionate. Meetings with inspiration are infrequent and unreliable, leading to work riddled with grammatical errors and mismatching socks.

Discipline is organized and methodical. Habits, although they feel like repeatedly banging your head against a wall, help you to transcend pain, cultivate and practise inspiration. Discipline is suffering. Discipline is suffering that *refines* you within the laws and covenant rituals of syntax and grammar. Out of these arises a meaningful and truthful story.

In this way, disciplined and truthful writing is an easter narrative. Uncomfortable. Slow. Transformational. Writing demands that you die to your innate nature with all its rebellion and distractions. Death leads to a rebirth or *resurrection* that allows you to see and write anew.

This new seeing involves more than just your eyes. Simply wearing rose-coloured glasses distorts your vision – a band-aid fix that emphasizes beauty and overlooks brokenness. Seeing anew transforms your eyes. Your mind. Your heart. *Your soul*. True transformation touches the core of your being, flooding it with imagination and rendering it unrecognizable. It allows you to see the whole story. Plot and subplots. Tension and resolution. Narrative and metanarratives. It introduces a truth that transcends understanding and ushers you into a divine kingdom.

This transformation is why I commit to writing the divine kingdom and letting this kingdom write me.

*Leah Beldman is finishing her fourth year of university, studying social sciences, music and theology.*





# 31 Days of Drawing to Inspire

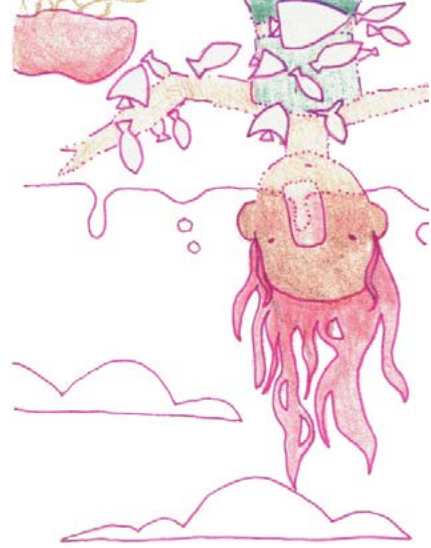
**KATE BELDMAN**



I love art. I love art because I can express myself without words. It helps me calm down when I am angry, sad or worried. I love being creative and doing work for a great result. But sometimes it is hard to be motivated or have ideas of what to make. That's why I tried out Inktober.

Inktober is a drawing challenge created by Jake Parker who puts out a list of 31 drawing prompts for October. On each day of October, you draw something inspired by the prompt for the day. Many artists participate each year. I enjoyed Inktober a lot because it challenged me to draw something every single day.





I didn't anticipate it being so hard, but I learned I didn't have to create a masterpiece for it. When I started getting frustrated with a piece, I would take a break and try something easier. It was great fun to try using different things to draw with. Inktober is for ink drawing, but I allowed myself to use whatever I wanted.



Most of my drawings were made with watercolour. In 2022 I tried it out but, unfortunately, I could only make a few drawings. I had a hard time actually committing to drawing every day. This time I did all of the drawings but by the end I was not putting enough effort into the drawings – I was pretty burnt out. One of my favourites, which I really enjoyed creating, was the painting for the prompt word “Dream.” I definitely put the most effort into that one because it was the first prompt. I also really liked the way *Castle* turned out – it is so bright and fun. Inktober was hard but now that it is done, I find myself drawing a lot more. I draw almost every day now.

*Kate is 12 years old and lives in Phoenix, Arizona. She would like to have a career in art when she grows up. All paintings by the author.*



# Crafting a Legacy

LAUREN MULFORD

George Bignell was the first pastor of an Episcopal Methodist Church in what was originally called Washington Center, just west of Lansing, the capital of Michigan. He had two sons and a daughter. He preached well, saw many converts and served his community tirelessly, even performing a marriage ceremony one month before his death. He died of the flu – aged 35.

Bignell is buried quite close to my house in a neglected and vandalized grave. This town doesn't remember him. It's been 165 years since his death. No one visits his grave; no one knows his name. His own church has forgotten him. His name and his legacy are completely gone, lost to the void of time that takes us all eventually.

So many Christians get caught up in *leaving a legacy*. We think we have to craft our identity, especially in the social media age. We try to find our eternal life here on earth instead of in the kingdom of heaven. Even as Christians, we might fool ourselves as we pursue immortality by what we write or speak. Will our legacies let others know what we valued? Is our legacy the only lasting inheritance we can leave our children? Or maybe our children are our legacy. What kind of legacy will you leave? Will God be pleased with it?

We *should* write papers and books or speak at conferences and churches. However, we shouldn't invest our hope and desire in crafting an image that others will see momentarily before it fades into oblivion. Instead, we should put our hope in the only thing that will last beyond the grave. The desire to live forever is innate to all humans; yet that desire to craft a legacy is an attempt to grasp eternal life without grasping Christ.

Crafting an earthly legacy (even when we claim it's for God or godliness) is only of earthly value and will die before us, with us or shortly after us. *Those who write history will conform our stories to what benefits their narrative*. It's a vain pursuit (Eccl 1:11).

We forget that where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also (Luke 12:34). As long as we put our treasure into an earthly eternal life, we will be forsaking a heavenly eternal life. Remember the call to live a quiet life (1 Thess 4:11), to be slaves to all (Mark 10:44), especially the lowest of the low (Matt 25:40): we must decrease, Jesus must increase (John 3:30). No one remembers the slave. We need to remember the name of the Lord our God. Our legacy is his name, not ours (Ps 119:55; Prov 18:10).

I think Reverend Bignell isn't sad that no one remembers him. I think he's happy that people remember Christ. There are many people history remembers who have no place in the kingdom of heaven.

The high calling of the Christian life is not to any specific profession, but to humbly be forgotten while serving the least of the brothers and sisters of God (Matt 25:40). It takes faith to accept that eternal life in Christ is superior to eternal life on earth (Ps 118:8). I hope I can eventually learn this lesson and have that faith too. I must not craft a legacy of me, but instead take refuge in the promises of God (Eccl 12:13-14).

*Lauren Mulford, an MA student in Theological Studies, is the KLC Postgraduate Studies Administrator. She lives in Michigan with her husband and eight children. All photos taken by the author.*



George Bignell's grave





## Notes of Rest:

### *Black Music as Cross-Cultural Medicine for the Soul*

**JOSH RODRIGUEZ IN CONVERSATION WITH JULIAN DAVIS REID**

*Josh Rodríguez interviews Julian Davis Reid who trained at Yale College (BA in Philosophy) and Emory University's Candler School of Theology (MDiv). Reid sees himself as an "artist-theologian" and his work certainly reflects this calling: he is equally comfortable with preaching, writing, and creating and performing music. Julian, now based in Chicago, manages several projects including a jazz-electronic fusion group he co-founded called The JuJu Exchange, his own original music project called Julian Davis Reid's Circle of Trust, and Notes of Rest, a spiritual formation ministry. The following is a conversation about how jazz can minister today.*

**Christianity is often not restful for the church or for anybody else.**

**Salvation, sabbath, sleep, stillness and sanctuary. God has given us these kinds of rest ... and Black music can be seen as a resource to help us practise them.**

– Julian Davis Reid

**Josh Rodríguez:** During the pandemic, you began a ministry called Notes of Rest. What is the aim of this ministry and why do you feel that it is important today?

**Julian Davis Reid:** Notes of Rest is a spiritual formation ministry grounded in Scripture and Black music that invites the body of Christ to receive God's gifts of rest. During the pandemic I was burdened by how much restlessness I saw in the church and surrounding world. We were weary of staying at home and being cocooned by the threat of the pandemic, and the essential workers amongst us were dying trying to take care of us. We all needed rest. And it was during this time that I realized I could help us practise rest and reflect on it theologically and musically through combining my loves for theological education with music, and thus, Notes of Rest. The goal is to walk people through in-person experiences and online curricula that help their communities practise different kinds of rest God has given us: salvation, sabbath, sleep, stillness and sanctuary. God has given us these kinds of rest present in Scripture, and Black music can be seen as a resource to help us practise them.

Notes of Rest addresses three problems: Christianity is often not restful for the church or for anybody else. Rest is too often regarded merely as a commoditized good (e.g., just buy a new mattress or take a vacation). Black music is not seen as formative (but rather as mere entertainment or relaxant.) The way I stitch together Scripture and Black music in communities helps people see that God, through Jesus, has called us to diverse notes of rest, that rest is inherently a spiritual matter, and that Black music can form us to desire rest. This is why this project is called a spiritual formation ministry.

**Rodríguez:** I'm intrigued by The JuJu Exchange's latest endeavour – JazzRx. You've set out to engage your audience with a "trust-building exercise" in which you ask people to send a personal story of "love, pain or anything in between," and you then create music inspired by that story. What sorts of stories have come your way? What is the creative process like?



**Reid:** That project has been a gift of ministry to the wider world. Our fans on Patreon have sent us a wide range of prompts to which we've responded with sonic medicine. We made music in response to prompts about miscarriage, about incarcerated persons re-entering society, about vaccines to COVID on the way (back in 2021) and about incurable sadness. In response, we took our time crafting musical sketches to accompany them along the path of their pain or joy.

**Rodríguez:** "Music as medicine" seems to be a recurring theme in your musical life. Does this come from specific musical experiences you've had? What music helps you heal?

**Reid:** Great question. Because I grew up in a Black church space and still attend a church, Renewal Church of Chicago, that is grounded in Black church music traditions, Black music always helps me heal – old Anglophone hymns, traditional choral gospel songs and Black modern-day praise music. And of course, all jazz records I've been listening to have helped me heal. My deepest entry points have been with Herbie Hancock, McCoy Tyner, Thelonious Monk, Wynton Kelly and of course most things Miles Davis. The work of Miles Davis's

Second Great Quintet is my favourite music on earth: Tony Williams, Ron Carter, Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter. I still can't believe those cats made all of those records together. Robert Glasper is a newer voice who really helps me receive and heal too.

Finally, the music I make also helps me heal. The record I made with The JuJu Exchange this year (2023) called *JazzRx* is literally all about helping people heal and thus I healed with them for, as Richard Rohr notes, we are all bound together in the circle of life. But my solo artistry has also been a site of my own healing. My newest record, *Candid* EP, chronicles my journey into being a solo artist, which has been a journey of healing. I took that one song, "Candid," and played it in various settings over the course of several years. And when I listen back to the record, I hear how I have been healing from wounds about being an artist, wounds inflicted by myself and by society around me. I have believed too many lies, that music is frivolous or not a real profession, or that I cannot compose and write exactly what I want to say, only what someone else would rather I say. And so, over the course of the record you hear me opening up slowly but surely: me being candid with myself and with God and with you. The arc of that recording bends towards the joy of the Lord.

**Rodríguez:** I'd like to conclude with a question about literature. Like you, many of our readers are interested in the intersection of theology and culture and are familiar with people like Abraham Kuyper and C. S. Lewis. For readers who are unfamiliar with Black theologians exploring similar topics, who would you recommend that they read?

**Reid:** Here is a smattering: James Cone (*The Spirituals and the Blues, The Cross and the Lynching Tree*), Delores Williams (*Sisters in the Wilderness*), Willie James Jennings (*The Christian Imagination; Acts: A Theological Commentary*), Jay Kameron Carter (*Race: A Theological Account*), Howard Thurman (*Jesus and the Disinherited*), Barbara Holmes (*Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*), Emilie Townes (*Towards a Womanist Ethic of Incarnation*), Tricia Hersey (*Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto*) and Karen Baker-Fletcher (*Dancing with God: Trinity from a Womanist Perspective*).

*Josh Rodríguez was born in Argentina and raised in Guatemala, Mexico and the United States. He currently serves as Associate Professor of Music Theory and Composition at the Elmhurst University and is an Associate Fellow of the KLC ([joshrodriguezmusic.com](http://joshrodriguezmusic.com)).*

*You can hear Julian's music and join the Notes of Rest journey at [juliandavisreid.substack.com](http://juliandavisreid.substack.com).*



# Meditations through Art:

## THE TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY OF AN ARTIST

SARA BETH BACA

Have you ever found yourself wondering why an artist's work evolved – what made them explore or wholly shift the direction of their work? If you compare the early work of Lee Krasner or Henri Matisse with their later work, you'll see an intriguing change in style, theme and colour. This visual representation of an inner transformation fascinates me as an artist. In a sense, art gives us a graphical documentation of the stages of a person's life.

Like many artists who came before me, there have been seasons in my life when my art has undergone considerable renovations. As an artist who grew up in the Christian faith, this visible change was directly connected with my inner faith journey. But, before my craft could change, two things had to take place. First, I had to be willing to step into the uncomfortable, and second, I had to muster the courage to tell a story.

As a beginner art student in college, my ideas and concepts for what my art could say or mean were solely informed by my professors and limited life experiences. I didn't know much, but I knew I loved to paint. Art gave me a voice to speak a new language of colour, shape and texture. Still, I painted out of assignment; I painted what I saw in magazines; I painted the ideas of other artists I admired. Eventually, I began to paint things I enjoyed but only what felt safe ... sticking to trees, boxes, chairs, impressionist landscapes and plants.

A shift happened in my early art career, and concepts like redemption, forgiveness, transformation and renewal rose to the surface of my work. I felt a tugging in my spirit to start conversations and bring hope and courage to others through my art. Instead of simply building skills and creating visually appealing work, I wanted to impact the world around me through art.

As a young mother, I encountered another crossroads when several troubling passages of the Bible surfaced, and I was challenged to face them head-on. For the first time as a Christian, I

took a deep dive into theology and women in Scripture. You see, throughout my life, I'd felt overlooked by God as a woman. I'd avoided addressing this feeling for decades, but I couldn't run from it any longer. If my relationship with God was to go deeper, I needed answers.

After several years of wrestling through the misconceptions I'd grown up with about the Bible and being a woman in the church, I grew deeply in my faith connection to God, coming to see myself and women in the Bible through a new lens. This immersion of learning and conversation was a formative time that produced a desire to tell the stories of these biblical women through my art. I didn't know it yet, but my learning process was about to birth a new venture. For the first time in my artistic journey, I wanted to tell visual stories. But, unlike my previous creative endeavours, I didn't feel equipped to take on the task before me.

With no clear plan in sight, I swallowed my fear and stepped into the unknown. After spending time studying the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, also known as Saint Photina, I sketched out half of a face inspired by traditional Orthodox iconography. I added some colour and line work. Unsure, but excited to share what I was learning, I shared my reimagining of Saint Photina on social media along with her story. The response to my unique perspective was astounding. In my small network alone, I saw a hunger to reexamine familiar (and some less familiar) biblical stories of women.

The dialogue sparked through that one piece energized me, motivating me to continue and see where the road would lead. Next, I painted a second portrait, Abigail, sharing her image and story. As time went on, I developed a rhythm. Armed with a list of women I wanted to portray, I'd pick one and then start learning as much as I could about her by reading multiple translations and commentaries. I'd then dream up a colour palette, following my



Sarah Beth Baca with *Bright Side*

Puah (left) and Shiphrah (right) (Exodus 1:15–21)



instincts with watercolour paint, using whatever skin tones, hair colours and details came to mind. Then I would identify symbols that related to the woman’s story and, finally, add ink for detail. Each woman was depicted with half a face and a halo in the background.

Before I knew it, painting these portraits of women became a meditation for me to connect with the lives of women who’d lived generations before me. I was using my artistic skills to tell stories in a new way, and in a way, I was finding myself in the process. Inspired by elements of their lives, I was empowered to engage in my faith in the most profound way I’d ever known. I wasn’t just painting; I was growing deeper in my calling and purpose. And, somewhere along the way, as the ink dried on the pages, the weight of expectations and stereotypes I’d carried for decades sloughed off, and I was finally free ... to be myself. But I wasn’t the only one who changed in the process. As I shared those women’s stories, others also connected with the work in ways that inspired and encouraged them to live out their own callings.

So, back to my original question – what sparks an artist’s work to transform throughout a lifetime? My struggle with faith and discovering my identity as a woman of faith set me in a new creative direction of illustrating stories I wanted to share with the world. Lee Krasner’s work visibly changed from cubism to a

looser abstraction as she worked through her grief after her husband, Jackson Pollock, died. Henri Matisse altered his style and technique because of sickness and limited mobility. Painting had become difficult, so he redirected his creative flow to cutting out coloured paper in order to “paint with scissors.”

Perhaps it’s not the outer shifting of an artist’s work that holds the most weight but the inner transformation that remains unseen. That burning off of the old self and the welcoming of the new is a risk we artists take. Hoping to bring what’s underneath the surface into the light, old mindsets and methods are cast off as we step tremulously into the unknown. But as we take that chance of exposure, of being seen for who we are, we give our audience the courage to do the same.

When I share new and untried artwork, there’s almost always discomfort. Inevitably, I feel exposed and laid bare before the world. But then, miraculously, someone reaches out with a journey that echoes my own. And, then, somehow, as if it had a life of its own, the art that came out of so many things in my life being reborn offers that same gentle nudge to a perfect stranger, pushing them out of old habits and mindsets and into a new story all their own.



Giving Back

*Sarah Beth Baca is a painter, illustrator and entrepreneur who lives in Houston with her husband and three children (sarahbethart.com).*



# Crafting Girl Power

JAN KALISH

*Craft, the creation of the beautiful and useful with practice and skill, has lifted many out of poverty, saved families and, most importantly, conferred dignity and self-respect upon those in want.*

The Cape Flats, an impoverished area located to the east of Cape Town, South Africa, is not a hub for craft. The school playing field is a gang boundary line and battleground: boys, afire with drink and drugs, cross the lines to lose their lives settling gang scores. Children watch from the school window, and then, as yet another life is needlessly lost, and another mother's heart irreparably breaks, the police are called and the children go back to play.

Yet if you listen with eyes shut you might hear the sound of hope: marching steps, heavy and light, long and little legs in mismatched rhythm, a drum majorette practice at the beginning of a new school year. This is not a posh, polished group from the suburbs in glimmering silk but a band of faith-filled, laughing girls, aged 5-13, from the Dr Van Der Ross Primary School. This is the good gang of Drummies, learning, practising and displaying their skills.

Decades ago, Carol and Morisha began a majorette squad with 25 girls and a dream: that teaching these girls a craft and making them a team might rescue some from their harsh surroundings. Morisha is coach and mentor, a skilled and zealous trainer; Carol is initiator, supporter and school vice-principal these 23 years. The teams began tentatively, with little support and no funding. They endured scorn, painstakingly working out the majorette steps. Gaining confidence with their hard-won skills, the girls carried carved broomsticks as proudly as if they were the gold-capped maces of more affluent teams. Equally



proud mothers made costumes, and girls blossomed into skilled potential winners, heads held high.

Dr Van Der Ross is the only school combining all ages in one team, enabling more to compete and the older girls to mentor the younger. First practices require no ability, only enthusiasm and determination; submission to fair but fierce discipline and, of course, long practice hours. The craft demands much of the girls and their parents, too. Many can only watch, with competition entry fees and costs of transport and costumes required to make annual national finals beyond their reach.

However, the alternative threat of their children becoming victims on the streets, lured into "gangsterism" or drugs, motivates parents to make sacrifices. Carol notes that families take out extreme loans, doing whatever





possible to facilitate their children joining. Parents accompany the girls on bus trips, sew, help fundraise and wait and watch for long hours of practice. In this crucible, for a time, they are separated from the chaos on the streets around them. Carol says, "Our parents believe in their children and fight through the impoverishment of our lives to get the best for them."

A mother speaks from her home in the more dangerous Delft area. She describes her daughter doing schoolwork, concentrating to block out the sound of sudden gunshots in the background. She says, "We pray and trust God for our safety," adding, "I walked three hours a day to get my child to school and with every step I asked God to make a way for her to attend Drummies and then to go on to high school!" A seamstress, she buys fabric enough to make one dress at a time, selling it to make enough for more fabric and a small profit split between living and Drummies.

This craft brings hope to families: a chance to learn, perhaps gain recognition and practise believing in themselves. Parents watch together as their children grow in strength and self-respect, breaking into dance, cheering as well as marching in unison, developing a pride almost unknown in a world where strife and poverty are daily challenges.

Here two strands of narrative intersect and, for a time, wind together.

Half a world away, another craft, filmmaking, is being mastered and honed by two young women, Taryn and Liliane, graduate students in science media production studies at Imperial College, London. Seeking a subject for her graduating documentary, Taryn glimpsed a faded photo of her mother as a drum majorette in South Africa – and then an Instagram post of a drum majorette squad overcoming







huge challenges in the Cape Flats. Grippled by the young girls in the photos – impoverished but strong, challenged yet exuberant – she felt compelled to tell their story.

It took Taryn and Liliane a dozen applications and months of battles to obtain faculty permission for safety and insurance purposes, without which they couldn't travel. They settled on taking limited gear – in an area where murder can be committed for a cell phone, check-in safety measures, early curfews and private security support: promising not to leave the school grounds, stay overnight or enter homes. They never booked the security, and immediately, had broken every rule.

Early on their first morning after arrival, still orientating themselves to their task, Taryn and Liliane boarded a bus of excited drummies heading to the national competition in Oudtshoorn. Over the long bus journey, they came to know, admire and love Carol and Morisha and their team of dancing, singing girls. Because the school generously got them a room at the same venue as the team, they could synchronise their schedules and continue to strengthen their bond with the girls and their families, which proved important for later interviews.

While the drummies had to build up resources to excel in their craft, the filmmakers had to strip theirs down. They took only what they could carry and move around with – quickly, if need be, out of danger: two Sony cameras, a tripod, one external microphone, 50 mm lenses, hard drives and a Zhiyun gimbal. At Oudtshoorn, there was only one electrical outlet in each room, making charging the equipment challenging. They finally managed to negotiate with their neighbour, seven-year-old Ra'eeshah, to use the plug in her room as well, without which filming may have been impossible.

About the equipment, Taryn noted:

In theory, we were happy to be working with two different Sony cameras. However, their differences ... proved a major

issue with editing. Although the cameras were ideal for their discreet size, we learned – far too late – these small cameras as tools are much more susceptible to sensor dust – and hair – than others. The small size also meant the LCD screen was equally small, making it a bit more difficult to tell if all was in focus. Working in these conditions, shooting handheld, without specialty gear: audio, dollies, or reflectors and a running approach, hearing about days of extreme violence while focusing on accurately telling the stories of victory in these young hearts was difficult to accurately balance.

Surrounded by challenges and not knowing what to expect from the girls' responses, they decided to craft the film unscripted, day by day, with a decision to only film an older, quiet girl with the youngest, to tease out the mentoring relationships. They benefitted from their relationships with the children, families and coaches. Carol communicated their concept to the families, which allowed the genuine circumstances to be captured. The girls were open to being filmed and excited to learn to use the cameras.

Like many crafters, the filmmakers had to be resourceful:

Most of the interviews took place after school, so we used the dusk winter lighting as the key light. This worked well if the interview was less than an hour. We had no other choice, also relying heavily on the audio from our cameras. Thankfully, we had help to sound mix this combination of synced and unsynced audio back in London.

Back in London, the film took Taryn nearly four months to edit, carefully crafting each frame; coaxing short edits to capture the vulnerabilities and the hearts of the people they had met. The result was a raw, striking film, true and honest. The lack of budget, fancy gear and





assistants – other than over-eager children – produced an unblemished telling. However, what these crafters did with little, expressing the heart of this story, went beyond any expensive technicalities.

The finished feature-length film was screened in London, Germany and in Cape Town, where the drummie girls saw their lives on the big screen – although many will be unable to afford to enter a cinema again. Importantly, it received Carol's approval. In addition, the documentary, *Drummies*, won four awards at the Hollywood New Director's Film Festival, as well as the Audience Choice Award at the New York Lift-Off Festival and has been shown at film festivals around the world. This film and further evidence of her skill in her craft won Taryn the coveted British "One to Watch" TV Documentary Award.

This winter, 45 drummies, 5 teachers and 10 young coaches who help with costumes, dressing and food on-site, travelled for two days to Durban for nationals. The organisation "67 Blankets for Mandela" with short notice, donated hand-made blankets for the long bus journey. Friends rallied: a photographer stopped work and provided lights to enable the girls to practise by night; another friend delivered them. Some brought sweet treats, and two friends kindly added throw blankets for girls perpetually cold in the winter. Over recent school holidays, they had been practising so intensely that they – and Morisha – slept in the school hall, rising early, going to bed late, honing their rhythm, their dance steps, baton throwing and unison.

After a week of unrelenting competition pressure, the Dr Van Der Ross Team, with their mismatched age groups, little legs marching double time to keep up, triumphantly won the nationals competing against 93 teams, some of

which had professional coaches. The hard work, cheering, enthusiasm and fighting dedication had found the mark in these young hearts; their skills had earned them triumph and the national trophy. Victory belonged to all at Dr Van Der Ross in the Cape Flats: the trophy was displayed at school and in community parades – and recognition poured in. Carol and Morisha expressed pride in their girls' skill, perseverance and exemplary manners.

To date, the craft of the drummies, however refined, has only intrinsic rewards. The girls cannot use it to attend high school, support their families or even pay for transportation to the national competition. However, for these girls, the sacrifices are worthwhile. Their craft provides them with dignity and accountability – along with what Carol laughingly calls "Mean Girl Power," the strength to steer clear of constant street danger. Many have great academic potential, though sponsorship is critically needed for drummies and a chance at further education.

Through this film, intertwining the craft of the drummies and the film makers, Taryn has been able to gather some donations for the drummies, providing meals for children during COVID and augmenting sponsorship for a student chosen for the South African national team to compete in Europe. These rewards make the countless hours, long days, nights and working weekends, on the field and crafting the film, to build hope – and perhaps a future for these girls – worthwhile!

*Jan Kalish is a South African and Canadian award-winning photographer who loved being a school drummie. Her daughter, Taryn Kalish, is a London-based filmmaker who recently won an Emmy Award along with the team responsible for the show José Andrés and Family in Spain. Jan and Taryn share a love of encouraging youth especially in underprivileged places.*





# The Mastery of Malick

CHRISTAN BARNARD

Eugen Jettel, A Mountain Pasture (Austria)

Cinema at its mightiest and holiest. A movie you enter, like a cathedral of the senses.

Owen Gleiberman, *Variety*, on *A Hidden Life* (Malick, 2019)

One may be forgiven for not recognising the name Terrence Malick. He is among the great writer-directors in cinema, and nonetheless remains shrouded in mystery. He does not attend the premieres of his films, does not do public interviews, does not attend awards ceremonies and does not allow pictures or videos to be taken on his film sets. He certainly does not have social media. He has been described as being reclusive, unapproachable and taciturn. But for all his avoidance of public attention and the award-ceremony limelight – two standard tools filmmakers use to position themselves as *worth knowing* and *worth working with* – Malick remains one of the most sought-after writer-directors in Hollywood, with collaborators including Brad Pitt, Natalie Portman, George Clooney, Jessica Chastain, Sean Penn, Ben Affleck, Cate Blanchett, Christian Bale and Ryan Gosling.

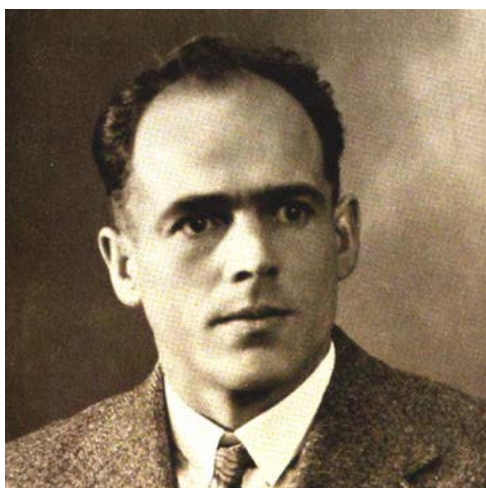
With Malick's latest film, *A Hidden Life* (2019) – a seemingly simple story of an Austrian farmer, Franz Jägerstätter, who faces execution for refusing to fight for the Nazis during World War II – the filmmaker once again reminds filmgoers of the unique transcendent power of cinema. It is a film so saturated in beauty and suffering

that it assumes a holy quality, while showing the deep humanity of a man and his family in turmoil, agonising to know what the right way to live is in the face of terror. But it is not the content of the story that sets the film apart as *cinema at its mightiest and holiest* – it is Malick's singular film style.

## FILM STYLE

Renowned for his naturalism and an ability to capture moments that seem impossible to script, critics and analysts have approached Malick's work from *auteurist*, semiotic, phenomenological, statistical and theological angles in an effort to make sense of the films. Writer-director Christopher Nolan noted that Malick's style is immediately recognisable but that it remains difficult to describe exactly what it is about the work that makes it so distinct. Which begs the question, how do we define and describe the film style of any particular director?

There is an easy answer to the question of film style and there is an answer with substance. At face value, visual style may be defined in relation to a director's particular



Franz Jägerstätter



John MacWhirter, *June in the Austrian Tyrol*

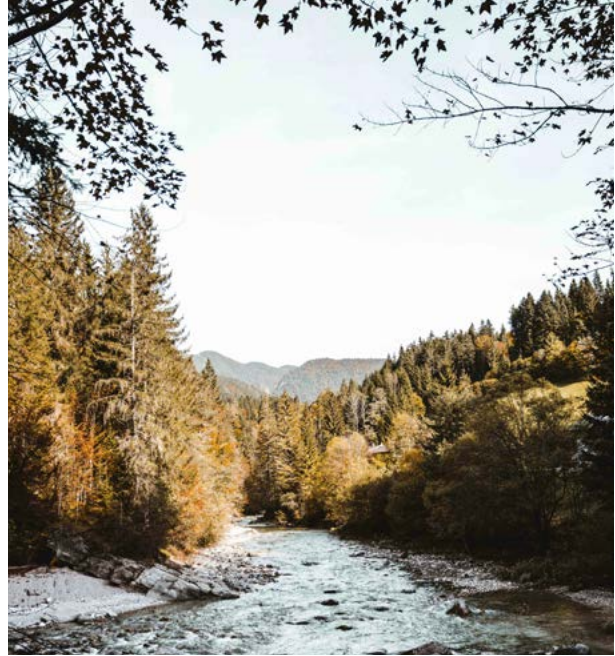
use of camera movements, camera angles, shot scales, colour palettes and cutting patterns. The content may be categorised according to genres or recurrent themes. Along those lines, Malick's film style is not hard to explain: Shoot on a *steadicam*, use wide-angle lenses, film in natural light, primarily shoot during golden hour, use extensive poetic voice-over dialogue, posit nature as a protagonist and the man-made machine as an antagonist, and saturate the film in classical and orchestral music. These technical approaches can be imitated to achieve a film style reminiscent of Malick's, but the spirit will be missing. One may, however, consider the true substance of Malick's singular mastery of the cinematic form by considering his intentions and methods of creating.

This discussion on Malick hinges on the following premise: Malick has achieved mastery in the cinematic form, implying that he has assimilated the guiding principles (or rules) thereof, and has elevated them to a new plane of application. Essentially, he has written his own set of rules. Concerning the work of *auteur* directors such as Malick, I propose that the way the artist creates will have an indelible effect on what is created. This article is therefore concerned with a different approach, one that seeks to make sense of the way in which Malick makes films – the mastery he exhibits in his mode of writing and directing – and the effect this has on his film style.

## MALICK'S RULES OF FILMMAKING

### 1. BE BORING

The first rule of the film industry is: Don't be boring. Audiences want to be entertained. End of story. Boring actors and bored audiences cause producers sleepless nights and end directors' careers. If a young writer-director wants to build a sustainable career, achieving commercial success and keeping mass audiences entertained are imperative. This usually results in original storylines that may have an inkling of artistic integrity being changed to suit the producers' latest hunch on what audiences want to see. And what audiences "want to see" are predictable storylines where complex characters are flattened to make them more likeable. Any ambiguities are clarified and slow



moments in the film are buffered with snappy dialogue, superficial conflict or unmotivated plot twists. Malick, in this regard, chose the road less travelled.

He's looking for a truthful moment, or an interesting moment. Also for boring moments. For normal moments. He gets what he wants through a very patient, never demanding, questioning and curious way of directing.

*August Diehl (on A Hidden Life)*

I wanted to remove any distance from the public. It was my secret intention; to make the film experience more concrete, more direct. And, for the audience, I am tempted to say, experience it like a walk in the countryside. You'll probably be bored or have other things in mind, but perhaps you will be struck, suddenly, by a feeling, by an act, by a unique portrait of nature.

*Terrence Malick (on Days of Heaven)*

Malick manages to maintain a meandering pace on set that allows for the filming of the ordinary, boring moments. For these moments seem to contain some of the essence of what he is searching for. It is no secret that this meandering pace on set results in films that maintain a similar pace, which polarises audiences. Some hate it, some see something transcendent in it. What remains astounding is that Malick has made film after film in this mode of creation. He has broken the first rule of the commercial film industry, and it has not ended his career.

Terrence Malick filming *Days of Heaven*





## 2. MAKE THE FILM SET REAL

Very few filmmakers can craft a cinematic experience that, at times, feels more concrete than real life. This difficulty stems, at least in part, from the artificial environment from which most films are birthed – green screens, scenes filmed out of chronological sequence, rushed production schedules, masses of people and machinery crowding the film set. It comes as no surprise that it is a hellish task to create something *real* by such artificial means, which renders it fascinating that some of the cast on Malick's *The New World* (2005) reported that being on set felt *more real* than returning to their trailers or hotel rooms after the day's filming had been wrapped. Valerie Pachner, musing on the filming of *A Hidden Life*, concurs:

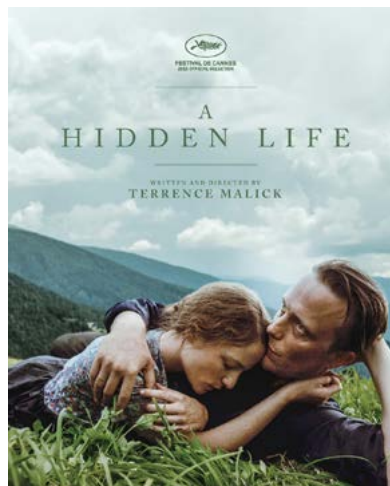
During the shoot, we were doing farm work all day. We were actually doing more farm work than acting. This was so wonderful and made it so real.... It was possible to just be there as a human being.

*Valerie Pachner*

Small production crews, the use of natural light, and schedules that allow for improvisation and creativity during filming all contribute to the unique atmosphere of a Malick film set. It seems Malick's ability to craft cinematic moments that strike audiences as vivid, sensory experiences of real life may stem from an ability to work with his collaborators in such a way that the film set – traditionally one of the most artificial and contrived settings conceivable – becomes akin to reality.



## 3. BE A TRUE COLLABORATOR



Alfred Hitchcock the tormentor, Ingmar Bergman the ticking time bomb, Stanley Kubrick the perfectionist, James Cameron the self-proclaimed king of the world, David Fincher the quiet dictator, Michael Bay the boisterous scourge, William Wyler the prima donna and Otto Preminger the theatrical bully. These are no doubt one-dimensional assessments of these filmmakers, but the fact remains that it is unnerving how commonplace tyrannical traits are among some of the greatest, or at least most commercially successful,

directors of all time. This tendency may be explained in light of the hierarchical structures in the film industry, the necessity of a dominant personality to rally an army of crew members, the competence required to navigate the power struggles between creative crew and financiers, and the singular ambition required to rise to the top in a cut-throat industry. This begs the question: Where does the reclusive, or shy, Malick lie on the spectrum between collaborator and tyrant?

He told me to experiment and try anything. And he said, "I will never use any shot that will humiliate you or make you feel bad. You can come to the editing any time you want, and you can take anything you want out of the movie." In that moment, I felt I could truly try anything – I could shoot without lights, I could make mistakes – and I would have Terry's support. He is a true artist and a true collaborator.

*Emmanuel Lubezki*

As an actor, you're not only there to deliver your lines. You're also there to create the scenes and you're invited to come up with ideas. He's not afraid of letting people take control.

*Valerie Pachner*

Malick's genuine collaborative approach stands in contrast to the director-as-tyrant personality that still permeates the contemporary film industry. Malick, who at first seems distant and unapproachable, defies the stereotyped expectations of such a venerable director. His collaborators repeatedly describe him as gentle and humble, a soul seeking answers to life's ultimate questions. Martin Scorsese tells of a letter he received from Malick after he'd seen Scorsese's film, *Silence* (2016), wherein Malick asks, "One comes away wondering what our task in life is. What is it that Christ asks of us?" Evidently, Malick sees a collaborative effort in creating art as a means of exploring these questions.



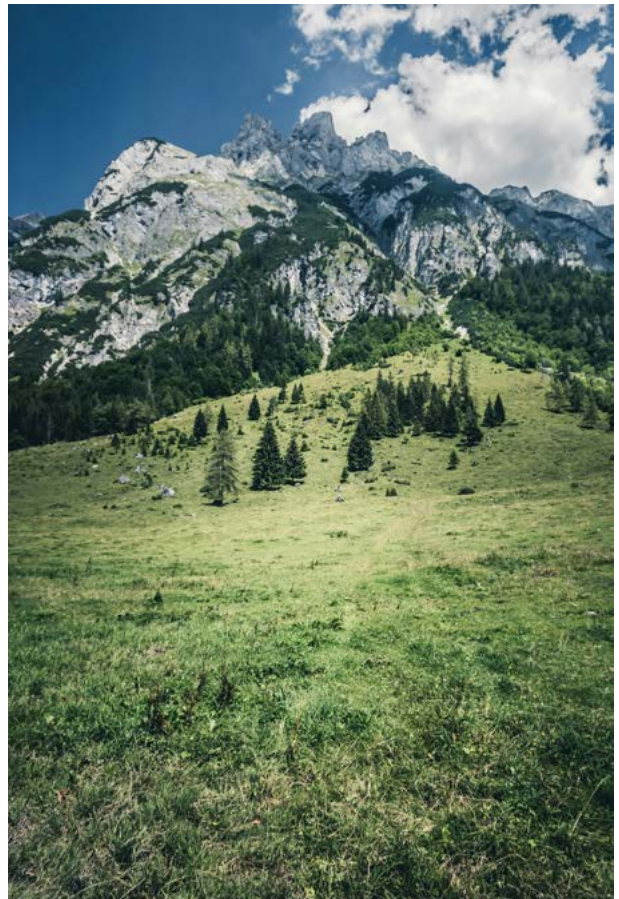
## **MALICK'S HIDDEN LIFE**

Malick's mastery has allowed him to build a decades-long career as a commercially successful director who embraces boredom, his naturalistic approach has allowed him to create vivid, sensory cinematic experiences and his humility and sincerity have allowed him to make true collaborators of his cast and crew. Malick's mastery of the cinematic form stands as a testimony to his character as a human being. The mystery and ambiguity give way to a man who appears humble and curious: a master in the art of asking pertinent questions and seeking intimate answers through cinema.

For an hour, or for two days, or longer, these films can enable small changes of heart, changes that mean the same thing: to live better and to love more. And even an old movie in poor and beaten condition can give us that. What else is there to ask for?

*Terrence Malick (on Days of Heaven)*

*South African writer-director, Christan Barnard, earned his PhD in Industrial Engineering (Stellenbosch University). He pioneered applying machine-learning algorithms to analysing film style, focusing on the silent-sound transition in 1920s cinema and Ingmar Bergman's work.*



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## CRAIG BARTHOLOMEW

It's a new notebook, fresh and pristine, well crafted. Opened, the spine sits flush against the desk, just as it was made to do. As the thoughts come, the fountain pen glides across the smooth-textured paper. Ordinary glory.

All workmen know that doing a job well requires quality tools. This goes for the student, the scholar, the writer, the artist, the administrator, as much as any other worker. Good painters know the difference between a good brush and a bad one, between quality paint and cheap, inferior paint. Workers feel bereft and inadequate without their tools. Good work involves far more than the right tools, but the right tools provide the confidence and context for good work to be done. It is the same for the writer.

Writers' tools have changed dramatically over the last 35 years with the communications revolution: computers, software and keyboards now take pride of place, displacing the pen and the notebook. We doubt, however, that the pen and notebook will become redundant. Most of us move relatively seamlessly between the notebook and the computer. They are very different mediums, and we do well to retain their complementarity. When in a supermarket, I make sure to walk past the stationery section even though I am fairly sure that there will be nothing there to attract my attention. I am somehow drawn to the tools of my vocation. I am called literally to be a writer. But writing is an indispensable part of many vocations, and in this respect the same rules apply.

It is the notebook and the pen – *stationery* – that is the focus of this article. Not just any tools provide the writer with the confidence and context for good work. Alas, having outsourced most of our industrial base to China and other countries, we welcome back with open arms a tsunami of cheap, disposable, poor quality stationery. We all know that plastic is polluting our oceans and rivers, but again and again we buy and dispose of cheap plastic pens and other stationery. Perhaps this is just the price of progress, but I think not.

I learnt from Calvin Seerveld that cultural implements like the pen did not have to develop the way they have. Even as humans open up the hidden potentials of the creation, we make choices to go one way rather than another, some far better than others. The ubiquitous plastic, disposable pen serves neither the environment nor the writer well. No writer wants their hard-won work to be hastily received and then quickly disposed of, so why use blunt tools that exude such an ethos? Although there is something endearing and nostalgic about the quill in Harry Potter, we need not go that far back to find the tools we need!

I am an advocate of the fountain pen. Invented in 1827 by the Romanian Petrache Poenaru, he described it as a "self-fuelling endless portable quill with ink." A good fountain pen – I have 2 Lamys (<https://www.lamy.com>) – can last a lifetime and be handed on from generation to generation. And one can easily avoid plastic cartridges with what is nowadays called a "converter." Quality inks come in a variety of colours which make a welcome change from plastic highlighters.

The ballpoint pen replaced the fountain pen in the mid-twentieth century, but I have yet to find one that reaches the quality of a good fountain pen, and there is a big difference between a good ballpoint pen and cheap disposable pens. As our societies seek to remain connected with the world, we are amidst something of a return to analogue and a revival of classic stationery. Alas, no sooner does the fountain pen make a return, than our consumer culture mass produces it. Near where I live, one can buy one today for £2.

So, what sort of tools do we find best for our work? I love Clairefontaine products, made in France. Even their relatively cheap, stapled notebooks easily open flush to the desk and are a delight to write on. The difference is tangible.

*Craig Bartholomew is the director of the KLC.*



## ISTINE RODSETH SWART

At age nine I had to change schools, quickly discovering that my old one was unusual,<sup>1</sup> at least for teaching Marion Richardson handwriting. Suddenly expected to handle a dipping pen and write in cursive style, my first attempts were deplorable. My teacher, short of stature but ferocious, declaimed: “What have we here? A BLOT!” The comment seemed unrelated to the splotch in my workbook – the shy, timid new girl with the impossible name was now a blot.

Fortunately, my deep-seated love for pen and paper carried me through the feared dipping pen to the beloved fountain pen with its slight, satisfying resistance on well-made paper. In addition, my mother was a teacher and demonstrated that teachers are fallibly human, thus helping me to accept that I was not a blot on creation. It took a while though, and profoundly affected my treatment of pupils and students when I taught. Alas, my rocky road to penmanship inhibited the development of beautiful handwriting, but did not diminish my admiration for a skilled hand, or the breathtaking art of calligraphy.

Most teachers love stationery. As HOD, I was heartened to see how the almost ceremonial handing out of departmental stationery supplies helped combat beginning-of-the-year blues. Careful budgeting ensured that every teacher received at least one favoured item and each one’s order was checked with almost childlike joy, augmented by discovering new suppliers who could consistently provide *violet* whiteboard markers: apparently, mysteriously, an essential requirement for our mathematics teachers.

I lament the demise of letter writing: recognizing senders by handwriting; excitedly examining foreign stamps; deciphering closely written, space-maximizing script of “airmail letters”; experiencing the thrill of handling beautiful, thick, creamy paper, sometimes precious

1. The school I left was located in Isipingo Beach, unusual for being the only South African town from which whites were evicted under the apartheid regime’s group areas act.

handmade paper; the joy of receiving thoughtfully purchased or painstakingly hand-crafted cards.

Modern stationery and modes of communication have not only robbed us of quality, but also motor skills and thoughtful social interaction. Computers allow us to cut, paste and delete to near-perfection, but at the cost of developing skills of planning and structuring before writing; pausing and thinking while writing, accepting imperfections and imbuing communication with character.

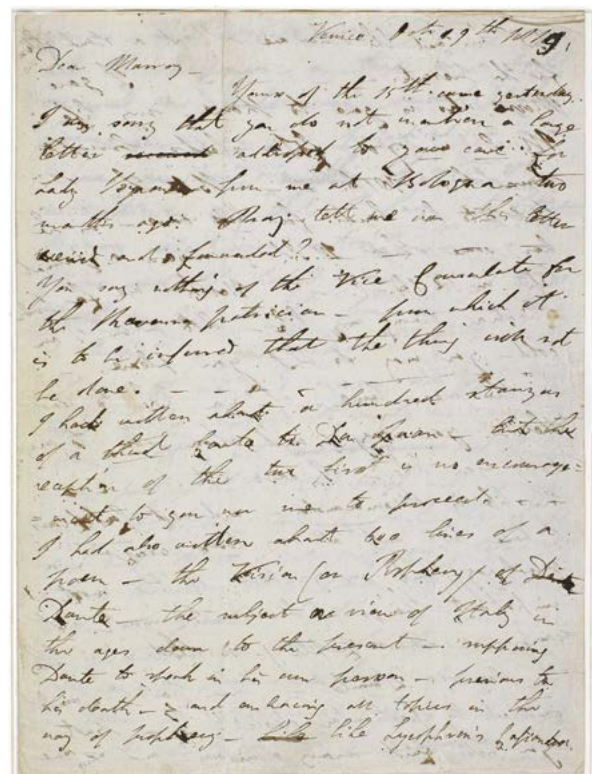
Our love of books, paper and the ingenious implements with which we make marks on them, remind us that we enjoy creation not only through the works of God’s hands, but also through what is crafted by the hands of his creatures.

*Istine Rodseth Swart is an administrator of the KLC.*

## RESOURCES

Although surprisingly little has been written about this ubiquitous dimension of our lives, here are some sources:

- Henry Gostony, *The Incredible Ball Point Pen: A Comprehensive History and Price Guide*.
- Charlotte Rivers, *Inspirational I Love Stationery Techniques, Materials, and Practitioners*.
- James Ward, *Adventures in Stationery: A Journey Through your Pencil Case*.

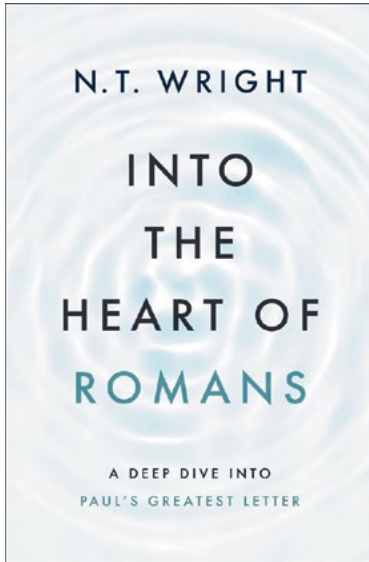


Letter from Lord Byron to his publisher

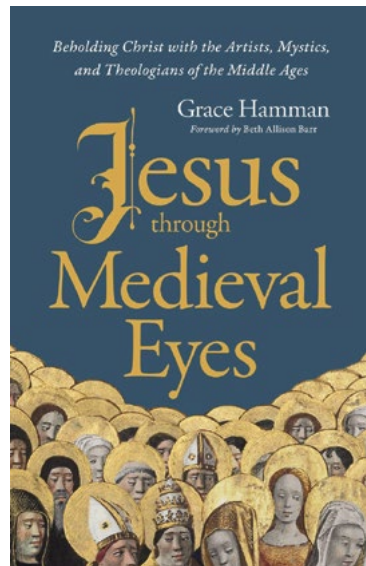


# NEW RELEASES

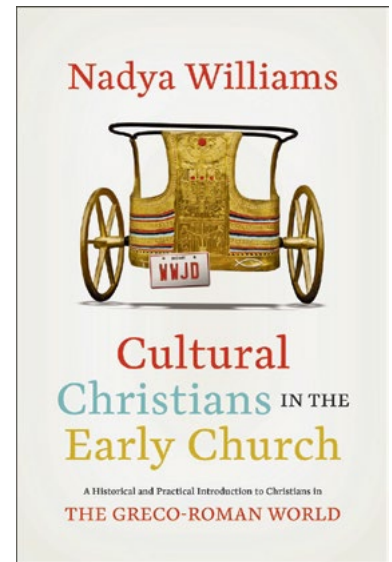
FROM ZONDERVAN ACADEMIC & ZONDERVAN REFLECTIVE



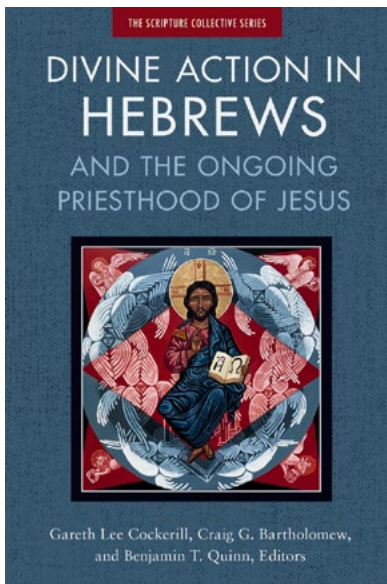
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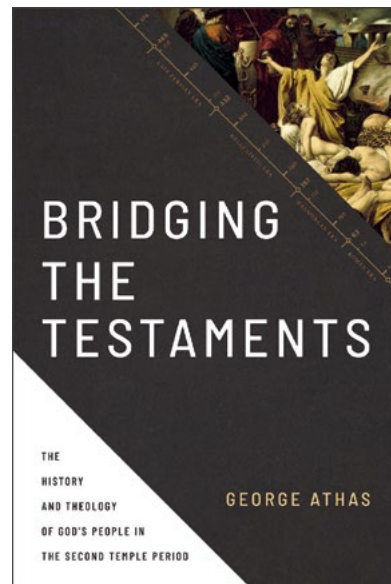
Grace Hamman  
Hardcover, 208 pages  
ISBN 9780310145837



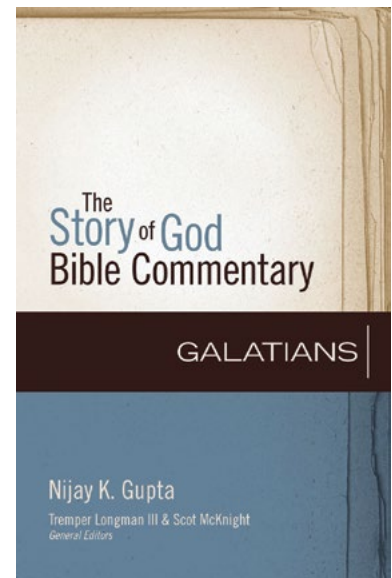
Nadya Williams  
Softcover, 256 pages  
ISBN 9780310147817



Gareth Lee Cockerill, Craig G. Bartholomew, and Benjamin T. Quinn, editors  
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