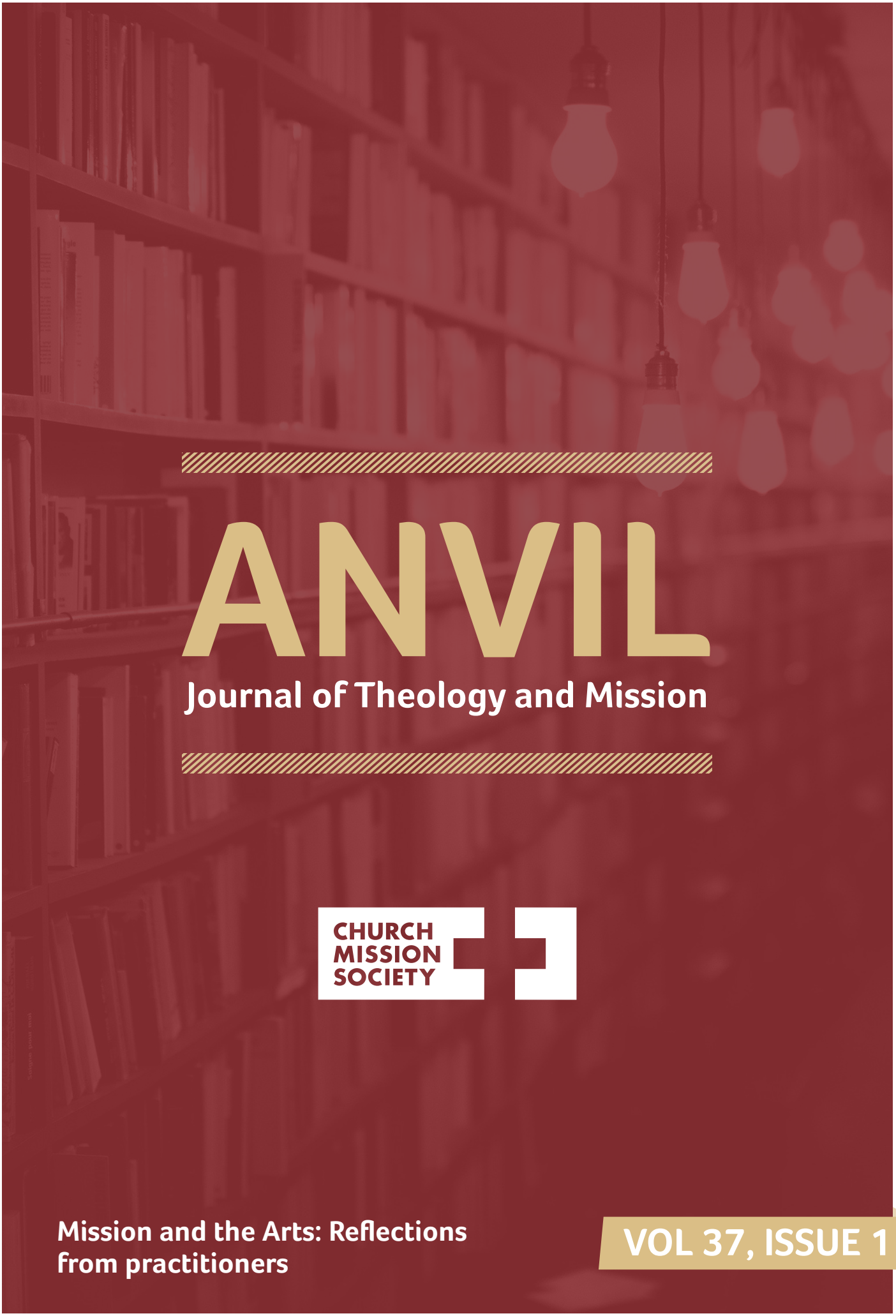


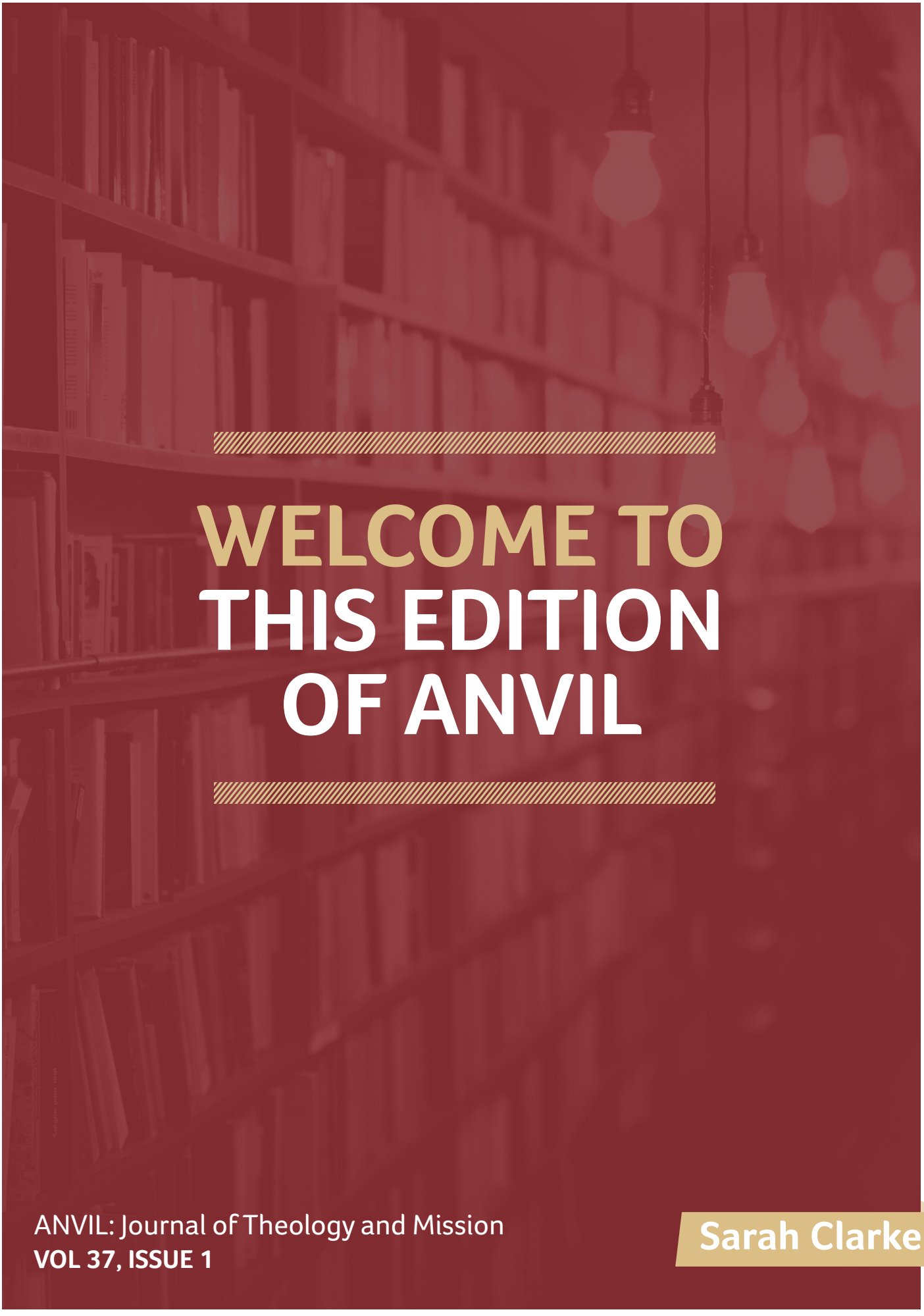
ANVIL

Journal of Theology and Mission

CHURCH MISSION SOCIETY

Mission and the Arts: Reflections from practitioners

VOL 37, ISSUE 1



WELCOME TO THIS EDITION OF ANVIL

ANVIL: Journal of Theology and Mission
VOL 37, ISSUE 1

Sarah Clarke

THE EDITORIAL

FOR ART'S SAKE GOES TO PRINT

I was largely drawn to CMS because of the marriage of the practical and academic. One of our key considerations is how to encourage and cultivate creative thinking and imagination for the sake of mission.

One of the directions this takes me in personally is an exploration of the arts and mission. As an artist myself I was delighted to host our Conversations Day "For Art's Sake" on arts and theology on 3 March 2020. The Conversations Day is a conference designed to create a space for dialogue, a space to share and get involved.

We considered questions such as: What is art? What is a work of art? Does art have to be beautiful? Is it subjective or objective? These are basic questions we have been trying to answer for centuries. But I want us to consider how we largely relate to art in our modern Western societies: we tend to think of art as an elitist activity presented to us by specialist artists. However, the ancient Greeks considered "the artist" as someone who could do a whole range of creative activity, from blacksmithing to painting, from crafting to cooking. Most of us, if asked, do not call ourselves artists and yet under this Greek definition, any time we engage in creating or making something we are artists.

> "...art can be prophetic call in the 'not yet', challenging the status quo, subverting culture. Pioneering a new voice and causing us to consider a new way of seeing the world."

This edition is not seeking to offer a definition of art, but rather to stretch the boundaries that have narrowed our idea of what art making is, and by doing so provide a framework for engaging with the arts and recognising the power of art in mission.

I would like to suggest there are three ways to help us on this journey. Firstly, I would like to suggest we all possess the "creative impulse". Thomas Aquinas said that art was transcendent. Art and beauty come from God, the creative impulse comes from God. As image bearers of a creative God, we all have the ability to create, and perhaps we want to reconsider our idea of what it means to be creative and artistic.

Secondly, art and creativity make paths that can create connections for self and community. By this I mean art has a unique ability to communicate and reach us in ways words cannot. We have so many words at our disposal, but we are often stuck when it comes to expressing phenomena such as deep feelings, awesome experiences, lofty ideas and indeed our experience of, or relationship with, God.

I remember driving through California redwoods – a sea of staggeringly large, breathtaking, "other worldly" trees. My friend and I drove in silence listening to classical music in awe of this phenomenal view. Neither of us were able to express the enormity of our experience, but we both commented after how much the music seemed to give our feelings expression. I feel the same about poetry – it enables me to connect with deep senses, thoughts and feelings that I'm not really able to verbalise, at least not in full.

Jodie Foster's character in the film *Contact*, while encountering a phenomenal view in outer space from the windows of her spaceship, splutters the lines, "No, no words – no words, no, no words to describe it... they should have sent a poet."

Finally, art can be a prophetic call in the "not yet", challenging the status quo, subverting culture. Pioneering a new voice and causing us to consider a new way of seeing the world.

As with the "For Art's Sake" Conversations Day, this edition of *Anvil* is written by artists, practitioners and theologians who continue to explore the ways in which art forms – inhabiting creative mindsets – and learning to embrace art can help us to engage with the world, ourselves and mission.

We have an article from Ian Adams,

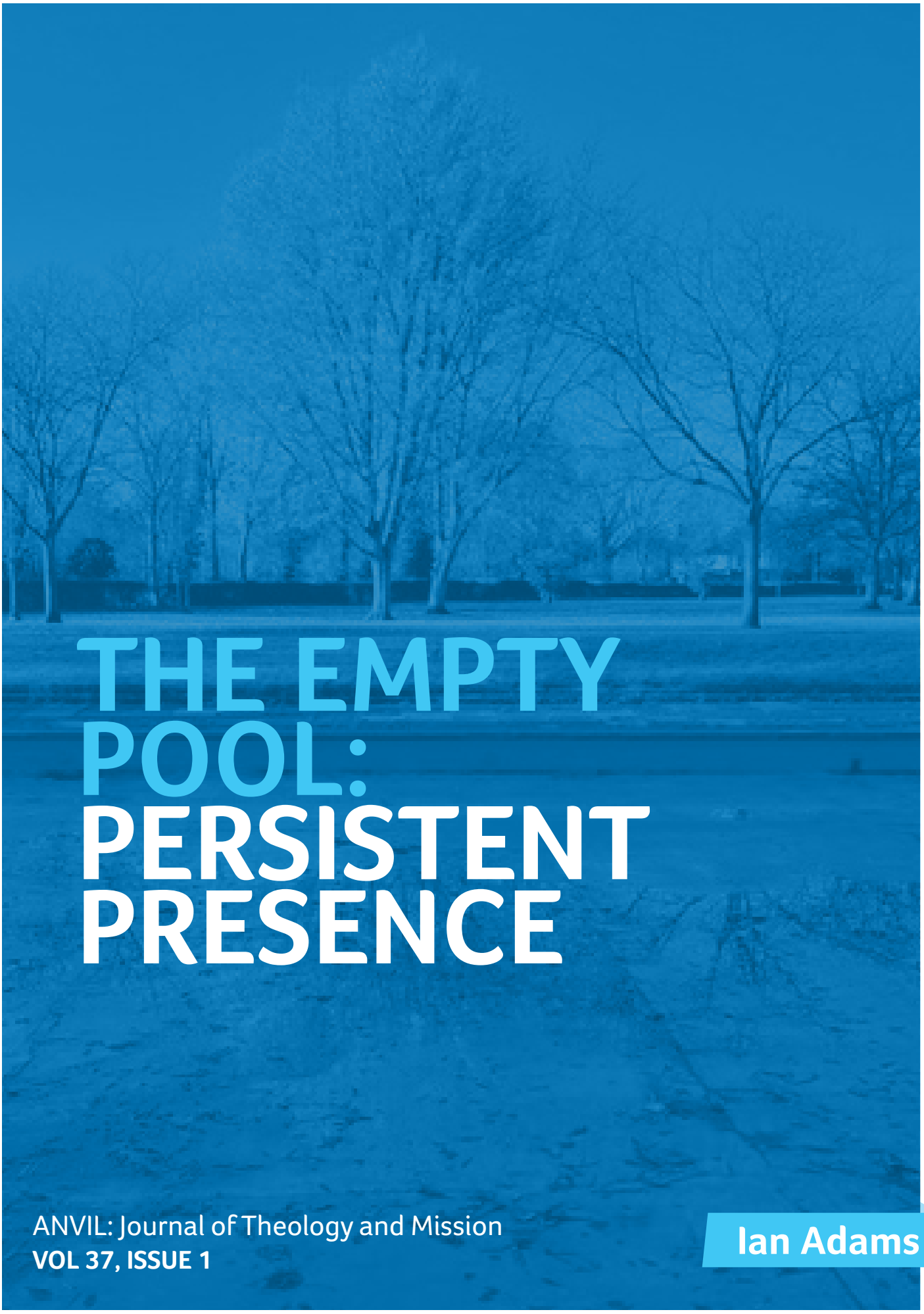
encouraging us to open up our imagination to engage with the world around us as spiritual practice.

Then come Rachel Griffiths and Shannon Hopkins, two practitioners who give us insight into how art forms and creative thinking enable us to connect to community, emotions and self. Griffiths demonstrates how art, in particular drama, can be embraced in a way that enables us to experience strong emotions, such as anger, in a positive way. Both articles demonstrate the importance of art and how we can benefit from it being a central part of our practice.

The articles by David Benjamin Blower, Chris Duffett and Martin Poole in different ways explore the theme of being an artist during the time of COVID-19 and beyond. It's in times of struggle and difficulty that artists emerge in central places and art becomes more widely recognised.

And last but by no means least is a brilliant video by one of our MA students, Katy Partridge. It's an autoethnographic piece, exploring a faith that sees chaos as the start of new creation, entitled "Agony Births Reality."

Sarah Clarke is an artist, craft maker and cellist, and lectures on and leads the CMS pioneer undergraduate programme. She has masters in theology and philosophy from Regent College, Vancouver, and is currently pursuing a PhD in art, theology and community formation.



THE EMPTY POOL: PERSISTENT PRESENCE

ANVIL: Journal of Theology and Mission
VOL 37, ISSUE 1

Ian Adams

It's just a space – concrete painted in a bold blue – and it is slowly fraying.

But what I saw one morning in the empty pool, what I *felt,* as if for the first time, sparked something within me.

A desire first to see, that became a need to remain, and a yearning to return.

For over two years now I have been returning to this paddling pool on Lammas Land – a park near the centre of Cambridge – taking photographs, making prayers, anticipating the day to come or reflecting on the day drawing to a close.

In summer the shallow pool is enjoyed by families with children and grandchildren.

It's a joyful, noisy place.

But my interest is primarily in the pool out of season, emptied of water, the families long gone.
No longer the centre of attention, its quiet, persistent presence draws me in, calling for my quiet, persistent presence.

And so I have returned there throughout the year, in all weathers, in changing light, from dawn to dusk.

Often in a pause on an early morning run
– itself an act of body-prayer –
through which the pool has become
a sanctuary, a sacred space, even a place of encounter, and so perhaps the site of some small transformation in me.

> When [Jesus] had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.[1]

I wash my eyes in this empty pool, so that I may see.

In this article and with these images I want to reflect what might become possible when we prayerfully and creatively engage with a particular place over a prolonged period of time. I will share my experience that such persistent presence can reveal what is true – about ourselves, about our world and even about the nature of God – and open us up to encounter.

I will suggest that such persistent presence, shaped by the making of art, theological reflection and prayer may have a prophetic character, beginning to reveal new possibilities of what may yet be.

And I will reflect on how such persistent presence may enable our participation in the bringing about of those what-might-yet-be possibilities, in God's healing of all things, in mission. In this way art can act as a kind of sacrament, reshaping us and transforming our world.

I will conclude by suggesting that such persistent presence is a way of being that both requires and inspires devotion.

THE EMPTY POOL: PLACES OPEN UP SLOWLY

What might become possible when we engage prayerfully and creatively with a particular place over a prolonged period of time?

My experience is that places open up slowly.
Rather than constantly moving on, we need to root ourselves in a particular place, to tune ourselves into a place, to allow that place to be and to speak.
And we need to keep turning up.

At first glance the pool out of season is unremarkable. Without the splash of its water it can be ignored, or missed altogether.

[1] John 9:6–7 (NRSV).

But as I committed to returning to the pool, it slowly began to reveal its being, its beauty, its truth.

I sense that the truth of *everywhere* is to be found by going deep *somewhere*.
It does not matter too much where that somewhere is.
What matters is that we give ourselves to the place that catches our attention.
And that we engage with that place, allowing its being to shape ours.

And of course the first thing that any engagement with a place does, if we are attentive, is to reveal to us something about us.

My response to the empty pool has revealed much about my fears and losses, and about my hopes, yearnings.

The pool has asked me to engage thoughtfully and lovingly with my own life at this stage.
How will I face empty pool experiences in life?

The pool, of course, is going nowhere.
It has reinforced in me the need for me to be still,
to be attentive, to be prayerful, to be present.

So I return to the ever-changing pool,
noticing new shapes, angles, textures;
the accumulation of leaves, of debris, of discarded things.

I find it revealing my questions;
helping me to reflect on the nature of the struggles I face;
bringing to the fore my sense of wonder and of gratitude;
reshaping my prayers.

But if persistent presence reveals something about me, it reveals much about all that exists.
The pool becomes the world.

> Nineveh is like a pool whose waters run away.[2]

How these times seem like a pool whose waters have run away.
And to be powerless to change the empty pool in its gradual decay is to experience something of the powerlessness we all feel at the challenges we face in this time of COVID-19, populism and environmental crisis.

But within this powerlessness something else begins to emerge.

THE EMPTY POOL: REVELATION OF WHAT MAY YET BE

"Why are you taking photographs of the pool?" said a fellow early-morning runner.
"It's a beautiful place," I said, "even in slow decay."

He seemed unconvinced;
we talked a little more, of the passing of all things,
of the beauty all around us,
of the mountains near his home in the Congo.

And then of the goodness of God,
and of the kingdom of heaven that is all around us.

He ran another circuit around the pool
and as he passed me again, and the pool filled with light, we blessed each other for the day.

I sense the divine presence here; and hints of what may yet be.

It has been interesting to notice how my engagement with the pool seems to have permeated different areas of my life, breaking down barriers between them.
Persistent presence (the being there), the making of art and prayer have merged into one.
And that has been a hopeful experience.

The apparent plight of the pool is just one aspect of the truth.
And I've come to realise that the pool has its own story beyond my personal knowledge of it.

The pool has clearly had seasons of vitality in times past.
It now knows a season of abandonment and neglect.
There are other priorities in the season of COVID-19.
So it is slowly corroding.
And I don't know what future it has.
But, if I can personalise a painted concrete space for a moment, it seems to be happy with that.

In making the Empty Pool photographs I've realised again that all things shall pass.
And it has become clear to me that I need to do more

[2] Nahum 2:8 (NRSV).

work on the letting go of my own agenda.
But I have been reminded too of Mother Julian's words that "all shall be well".

My experience of persistent presence at the pool has been above all a hopeful one.
Despite the cracks in the concrete, the peeling paint, the growing weeds and the accumulating rubbish, the beauty of the pool seems to continue, and even deepen.
The empty pool hints that transformation from form to form will continue.

> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.[3]

Lammas Land has long been a place of joy, a source of restoration and site of celebration.
The empty pool hints that this will continue to be so.

One day this past summer we took our nearly-three-year-old grandson to the pool. Empty of water and empty of children because of COVID-19, he stepped right down into it, and began to splash in the muddy puddles, oblivious to the pool's usual or hoped-for state. Before we knew it, he was skinny-splashing. It was a moment of great joy for him. A moment of all shall be well.
A revelation of what may yet be, a hint perhaps of the healing to come.

THE EMPTY POOL: A KIND OF SACRAMENT

Lammas is the Celtic festival of midsummer and the first harvest festival of the year,
a time of great celebration sometimes celebrated on 6 August – the Feast of Transfiguration.

The pool has become for me a place where transfiguration seems possible,
a glimpse of paradise, here and now.

In the process of making art here through photographs I have found myself in collaboration with the pool, receiving lessons in learning to see, in learning to be.
In some small ways I have been changed.

The Empty Pool project has lent weight to my instinct that art can act as a kind of sacrament, bringing into being what it points to – transformation of individual, of community and of the world.

In spending time with the empty pool I have found my internal landscape being quietly reshaped.
I would go as far as saying that spending time with the pool changes me.
I sense that I may be kinder, more loving and a more creative person through engaging with it.

Taking one of the stones of the place, [Jacob] put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!"[4]

[3] Rev. 22:1–2 (NRSV).
[4] Gen. 28:11–12, 16 (NRSV).

Unexpectedly, the empty pool has become a place of holy encounter, bringing change.
And my hope is that through my images and writing on the Empty Pool, something of that experience may also become a gift to others.

In making this suggestion I am aware of the gap that can seem to exist between such hints of the divine and their possible effect upon us, and the apparent specifics of divine revelation recorded in the texts of the tradition.

Of course, this gap may be the essence of art.
Art seems to be most persuasive when it opens up possibilities, rather than specifying exactly what the artist wants to say or how the work should be received.
In my pictures or poems I don't want to attempt to spell everything out – in any case an impossible task – but rather to invite exploration.
Art is at its best when it hints, when it gives it a glimpse, when it opens up possibilities.

Nevertheless, there is a received quality to the Christian tradition in which I am rooted, and which continues to sustain me. Theologian, academic and musician Jeremy Begbie is sceptical about our ability to "fill in the gaps" with the Christ story after the infinity suggested by artists like Rothko. How does the Christ story, the Triune God story, fit in and shape our understanding of and approach to art? He makes a plea "that when we make claims about the arts affording an awareness of divine transcendence – or meet such claims made by others – we should be prepared to explore, and where appropriate, make explicit and assess, the theology those claims presuppose".[5] Begbie also offers an invitation "to enter far more deeply into the peculiarities of... a "scriptural imagination".[6]

There remains more work for me to do in this area, but my attempts to understand what is happening in my engagement with the pool seem to take on new clarity when they sit within a pattern of prayer, of engagement with the texts of the faith, and of devotion.

THE EMPTY POOL: LOVE AND DEVOTION

I love being at the pool.
I invariably have my camera or camera phone with me when I visit.
And I always arrive with a sense of anticipation.

Art inspires our deep attention, even our devotion.
The more we give ourselves to art
the more it will offer to us.

As we give ourselves, we may discover a burning within us beyond art;
a renewal of our love and devotion for God and for neighbour,
for the earth and for the cosmos.

Richard Rohr has a lovely phrase about the eucharist. But I believe that it may equally apply to great art.
If you can see it here, you'll see it everywhere...

If you can see in bread and wine the life and love of God you'll begin to see the life and love of God everywhere.

If you can glimpse in a piece of art the life and love of God you'll begin to see the life and love of God everywhere.

The task of being present to the empty pool encourages me to be present with love to the pool, to the moment, to others, to God.

It encourages me to love.
It draws me deeper into devotion.
And it reminds me that, in God's grace,

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[5] Jeremy Begbie, *Redeeming Transcendence in the Arts: Bearing Witness to the Triune God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 184.
[6] *Ibid.*, 185.

ARTISTS IN TIMES OF CHALLENGE AND COLLAPSE

David Benjamin Blower

ANVIL: Journal of Theology and Mission
VOL 37, ISSUE 1

There is a slightly awkward tension that is sometimes felt when ecclesiastical institutions employ the talents of artists for one purpose or another. Very occasionally I have found myself reminded of a scene in *The Empire Strikes Back***. The Imperial fleet, in its oversized slowness, finds itself unable to keep up with some rogue rebels, and so they hire a rabble of bounty hunters to try to capture them. The uniformed and decorated Imperial hierarchy are visibly unsettled by the ragtag band of rubber-faced aliens on board their spotless ship. But the bounty hunters can do what the Imperial fleet cannot. Why? Because they are masterless. They're not hampered by the many protocols and hierarchies and rules of regulated Imperial life. Their imaginations can go anywhere.**

This is not a very endearing comparison, and we will explore later why we can't really use artists this way. But first let's explore what *is* compelling in this vision – that the artists can do what the institution cannot do for itself, because they are free of the institution's nomos (law or custom). They are not bound by its rules and norms and its particular settled way of being in the word. While most of us walk, as the media theorist Marshall McLuhan put it, into the future backwards, always looking to the norms of the past, the artists live somewhat unmoored from that law when need be. They are able to feel ahead into the future and speculate about alternative ways of being that might emerge from the chemistry of the present. For this reason, the institution sometimes finds the artist an odd figure, or even a wilful annoyance. Sometimes the institution humours the artist, and on occasion values their strange soundings. But in times of challenge, change and collapse, the artists suddenly become vital for survival.

Marshall McLuhan put it like this:

> In the history of human culture there is no example of a conscious adjustment of the various factors of personal and social life to new extensions except in the puny and peripheral efforts of artists. The artist picks up the message of cultural and technological challenge decades before its transforming impact occurs. He [or she], then, builds models or Noah's arks for facing the change that is at hand. "The war of 1870 need never have been fought had people read my Sentimental Education," said Gustave Flaubert.[1]

And he goes on:

> The percussed victims of the new technology have invariably muttered cliches about the impracticality of artists and their fanciful preferences. But in the past century it has come to be generally acknowledged that, in the words of Wyndham Lewis, "The artist is always engaged in writing a detailed history of the future because he is the only person aware of the nature of the present." Knowledge of this simple fact is now needed for human survival. The ability of the artist to sidestep the bully blow of new technology of any age, and to parry such violence with full awareness, is age-old. Equally age-old is the inability of the percussed victims, who cannot sidestep the new violence, to recognize their need of the artist.[2]

The prophet Jeremiah was an artist. He offered symbols, performances and language to a moment of bewildering challenge. His work was thoughtfully formed to describe what was happening, why it was happening and how his peers might begin to emotionally integrate the situation. Reading the Fall of Jerusalem as history, we easily miss what was extraordinary about Jeremiah's work. In retrospect he appears to be doing and saying the obvious thing. We rather proudly imagine that we would have grasped his meaning immediately. But there is a reason why he was almost alone in his actions: he was giving form to thoughts that were entirely outside people's normative experience and imagination. It is very difficult to contemplate and prepare for an experience we have never had. We are biased against such vision. Jeremiah found his task of making the present comprehensible exhausting and dispiriting, to say the least.

We have said that Jeremiah is an artist because he gives form to what is happening, why it is happening and how to emotionally integrate what is happening. McLuhan describes this difficult task as "trying to predict the present". But McLuhan also says that the artist "builds models or Noah's arks for facing the change that is at hand".[3] That is to say, the artist plots possible routes into the future. Why? Because the unmoored imagination is freer to speculate about forms of life that might survive and outlast the challenges of the present. And so, Jeremiah is able to do the unimaginable thing: he tells the exiles in Babylon to settle down and call it home, and even to pray for its prosperity. This thought has no reference point among Jeremiah's peers except as an act of treason, for which he ends up tossed down a well. Moses does the same artists' work when, after their 400 years as Egypt's slave class, he offers the liberated Hebrews alternative forms and norms and laws. Jesus does the same, as does Paul, in readiness for the collapse of Second Temple Judaism in 70 AD. They offer new

[1] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New. York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 65.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*

possible forms of faithful life for people bereft of the old.

We might observe, here, two different hermeneutical energies. One looks at the forms in the text as traditions to be faithfully preserved and carried on by the faithful. And rightly so, because Jeremiah's future is our past. Another hermeneutic looks not so much at the forms, but at the creative practice of producing them. What kind of listening posture, intuition, spirituality, values and virtues enable us to be creators of faithful new forms in times of challenge and collapse? This is the artist's hermeneutic: one that is unmoored from the nomos of the past.

And so, it is for this unmoored, creative vision that the Imperial fleet hires the masterless bounty hunters: to do what they cannot do. But Plato knew well that you cannot really employ artists as the Empire employs the bounty hunters. You can't rely on them to do your bidding for pay, in the service of preserving your institution as it is. There will be an unease in the room, because we know that the artists can't be trusted with the task of producing work that maintains our institutions. They're too fascinated with what is happening, emerging and changing. They begin picking holes in all the contradictions we've got used to. They may soon be dismantling things before our very eyes.

Thus Plato warns against bringing in the poet to help:

> [W]e shall be right in refusing to admit him into a well-ordered State, because he awakens and nourishes and strengthens the feelings and impairs the reason. As in a city when the evil are permitted to have authority and the good are put out of the way, so in the soul of man, as we maintain, the imitative poet implants an evil constitution, for he indulges the irrational nature which has no discernment of greater and less, but thinks the same thing at one time great and at another small – he is a manufacturer of images and is very far removed from the truth.[4]

This heady Republic would be ruined by those who think with their gut. This orderly hierarchy rooted in rigorous *knowledge* would soon get sloppy among these purveyors of *knowing*. This institution modelled on unchanging universals would be torn apart by those who give such fanciful attention to the ever-changing particular.

Plato rightly saw that artists do not come to us to serve the fixed norms of our institutions and their aims. Their extraordinary gift is their lack of allegiance to our flags and castles and their faithfulness to whatever it is that is really happening. Not to "the truth" as the philosopher king has dictated it, but to *truth* as something that is alive, available to all and presently occurring. Jeremiah could not have done what he did without this awkward posture, this "rebellious spirit" as it is sometimes called. Try asking him to write a rousing song to lift the troops' morale, or to design shiny materials to promote the purposes of the Temple. The aims of the artist and the institution may align, of course. But you can't reliably fit them like a cog into an existing machine.

American theologian Francis Schaeffer had a remarkable sort of respect for artists and gave much of his energies to understanding their work. But he ultimately saw them as conduits of systems. They were, for him, a step of communication, passing on what academic philosophy was saying, in digestible form, to the masses. He wanted to welcome back the artists, to do the same task for the church. He wanted to hire them to further and preserve the institution as it was. Either way, he saw them as people in service of power, whether of this power or that. But the artists' prophetic capacity and their potential to frustrate is as it is because they are not bound to power. In their authenticity, artists are bound only to serve what *is*, as best they can intuit it.

How then can we move from these principles towards a healthier relationship between artists and institutions? If we can begin to relinquish the idea that they ought to serve an institution's assumed structures and aims, we might then be able to make the unlikely move of accepting, or even recognising, them as *part* of the institution itself; they might become part of an institution's ability to think and act beyond itself and its own categories; they might become the institution's ability to imagine beyond its own homely images, and wander from its own well-trodden paths. The institution that can gently hold this tension has entered into a beautiful kind of self-awareness.

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[4] Yael Goldstein, *The Republic, Plato: Spark Notes Literature Guide*, ed. Jesse Hawkes and Lawrence Gaccon Gladney (New York: Spark Publications, 2002), 370 (Book X).

IT'S A NEW DAY: REFLECTIONS FROM A PRACTICAL THEOLOGIAN AND ARTIST IN LOCKDOWN

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Chris Duffett

It was still dark when we set out but we had torches so that we could avoid the cowpats. While the walk up the mountain was familiar to us it was fairly steep, and the beams of our torches paved the way well for us up the twists and turns of the only mountain on Bardsey Island. We wouldn't need the torchlight on our return as our goal was to catch the dawn and simply sit and watch it. To be. There was no agenda despite my role as chaplain on the island for the week, so I had gently reassured my "two-metres-apart" sunrise-seeking companions that we were just going to gaze at the magic rather than have a prayer time or service.

We sat on black plastic bags so that we wouldn't get soggy bottoms. The swishing of the plastic was the only sound in the wind as we patiently waited in the dark. Our eagerness had made us early and we had a long wait until the first glimmers of light appeared on the east, and then shards of Naples yellow and gold intermingled with blue and grey danced its way to us. We sat in awe as the rustle of plastic was joined with a growing chorus of birdsong.

Watching the sun rise when I served as chaplain on the island of Bardsey made a deep impression on me. On the way down one of the sunrise pilgrims asked if I had done any painting on the island as I usually do. I explained that I hadn't as I had struggled to paint anything over the week. Twenty-four hours after this conversation, I had done 11 sunrise paintings. I felt like the sunrise-watching was like the archetypal dodgy kebab. The experience kept repeating on me and I couldn't stop coming back to that place of watching in awe. Paintings flowed and the subsequent weeks after, when in my studio, nothing but abstract scenes of dawns flowed from me as I worshipped and prayed and took time to paint for the sheer joy of painting rather than the hurried finishing of a commission in time for a birthday or Christmas present.

As I painted, I prayed over and over: "It's a new day." It felt like the paint and scenes captured hope for tomorrow. The dawn scenes that flowed, I believe, began to represent the liminality that many of us now find ourselves in. We don't know what lies ahead and we find ourselves in a foreign and alien COVID land feeling like church exiles who are not sure of the way home. The dawn pictures that I couldn't stop painting simply declared a new day that, while it yet can't quite be seen, is inevitable. God brings hope as sure as there is a new day tomorrow; dawn is a promise of a whole new day.

Reflecting on my experience has led me to see once more the vital role art has in revealing big truths in

simple ways. At university I studied art and theology as two separate disciplines, but many years later, as I co-principal The Light College and train pioneers and evangelists all over the UK, art and theology have become intertwined and somewhat inseparable. I teach our students how to apply the big truths of the gospel in creative ways that contextualise the message for a post-Christian culture so that they too may connect with and get what the good news of Jesus is all about. Theology and art I believe isn't a "one or the other" but rather two expressions of the study and experience of God: art illustrating and illuminating deep theological truths and theology bringing form and narrative to prophetic abstract scenes.

Since that time on the mountain, there are three lessons I have learned between this interplay between art and theology that I would like to share with you.

1) ART IS THE CHILD THAT LEADS ME BY MY HAND INTO THE DEPTHS OF THE KINGDOM

When I paint it is playful and innocent, but conversely the deepest theological treatises seem to be written with a stroke of a brush or penned with flowing inks. Jesus tells us, "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."[1] I have yet to meet a child who can't paint. "Do you paint?" I always ask as people gather to watch what I am doing when I paint prayers in public. An overly caricatured response to this question is that children always say, "Yes, and I'm brilliant at it," while adults

[1] Mark 10:15 (NRSV).

always say, "Oh no, no, no, I don't have a creative bone in my body!"

The innate ability of children to create is the childlike faith I exercise when I paint; not sure whether what I do will go well or not, I simply trust and go with the flow. As the late educational psychologist Sir Ken Robinson once put it, if we're not prepared to be wrong, we will never come up with anything original. As I paint, I need to be prepared to make mistakes so that the original creativity and childlike images can flow. Daring to do this brings me into a place of happenstance with God that I can only describe by using the Hebrew word *paga*, which is to encounter him and in so doing make intercession.

One example of painting deep theological truths was the result of three incidents that inspired me as I felt God speak through them. The first was seeing a picture of wild geese on a friend's Facebook page. The second was a "breath prayer" by writer and broadcaster Sheridan Voysey, encouraging people for their well-being to breathe in the gifts of the spirit and breathe out the opposite. Thirdly, while on a prayer walk a flock of wild geese flew over me and as they did I considered the ancient Celtic symbol of the Holy Spirit, the wild goose. To respond theologically and creatively to these three occurrences created a kairos moment for me for which I painted nine wild geese representing the fruit of the Spirit with his nine life-giving characteristics. I made the image into some simple prints and over eight weeks gave away via the internet just shy of a thousand of them to those who wanted to keep one and give two away. This simple image resonated with people in ways that I couldn't have imagined, and God spoke through it and the accompanying prayer to help people through the pandemic as they faced uncertainty, loss and fear.

2) ART IS THE PROPHETIC VOICE THAT HELPS ME SPEAK GENTLY OF WHAT IS TO COME

Months before our first national lockdown I painted large cosmic scenes with hands in them; while being painfully aware of how such an image could be perceived as Christian cheese, I was compelled for weeks to paint scenes of Jesus holding the world. It felt some kind of prophetic "pamphlet", only rather than being shown through pages and words, it was shown by a simple painting with a simple message that despite the pain and uncertainty, Jesus has got this. Despite this virus, he is Lord. Despite loss and damage, he is

Lord. This image has brought reassurance to many as I shared the image on social media platforms and magazines, and offered it as a free print for people to give away and remind others of the simplicity that Jesus holds this world in his hands.

3) ART IS A SIGNPOST TO BOTH THE TRANSCENDENCE AND IMMINENCE OF GOD

When I look at a piece of artwork, it is often easy for me to see the beauty and power of the Creator God. Of course, not all art does this. Not all art brings glory to

God, but it's surprising how much does, even when the artist's intention may not be with that in mind.

With my artwork I long that it speaks of the nearness and earthiness of God with us: God incarnate, made flesh, who loves to rub shoulders with all people and remind them that they are not alone and that they are known and loved. In normal times this kind of painting would be done in places like pubs and cafes, where I find I'm in my element as an evangelist and artist, creating something simple through paint for people to know that they are loved.

Notwithstanding that as I write this article pubs and cafes are closed, how can art show and tell good news to people in a time of social distancing? I was fascinated to read an article by an old friend, church leader Esther Prior, who wrote: "I am passionate about creating 'sacred spaces' outside – I call it 'ministry to those who pass by'. I think there are lots of people who are searching, who even have 'spiritual' thoughts but are nowhere near being ready to engage with Christians or with a Church in any overt way. So we use art to proclaim the gospel without words, hoping to draw out those who might one day want a conversation about it all."[2]

I have taken every opportunity I have had in this strange season to offer simple prints to those who deliver parcels and visit our house, or people I non-literally bump into at two metres apart at the post office. This prompts questions and opens up opportunities to offer gospel words that accompany images of good news.

Lastly, I dare you to do two things:

How could you show some art that would gently introduce people who pass by your home or church building something of the majesty and closeness of God?

How could you create something to give away to someone who needs to know that they are known and loved by God?

I would love to see what you dare to do!

Chris Duffett, from the Light House Project College, is an artist with a desire to bring words, comfort and scenes from God's heart to those he paints for. Chris's fine art seeks to bring the colours and mystery of other realms. Chris studied art with theology at Chester College and has exhibited in Chester and Cambridge and worked as an artist in residence with Chelmsley Wood Baptist Church. His work is often used for publications and magazines. As well as painting and creating he is the founding evangelist of The Light Project, an author, tutor, poet and Baptist minister. You can find out more about the art of Chris Duffett at **www.chrisduffettart.com.** The Light College & Collective, which he co-leads, can be found at **www.lightcollege.ac.uk.**

[2] Esther Prior, "Guest Post: Coming to grips with a COVID Christmas," *IVP Books Blog*, 16 October 2020, https://ivpbooks.com/blog/guest-post-coming-to-grips-with-a-covid-christmas.html.

THE ART OF ANGER

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Rachel Griffiths

"You have to be very aggressive to be a sculptor," Louise Bourgeois once said. "It's the anger that makes me work."[1] The two main areas of life that fuelled her anger were fighting for her place as a woman in a male-dominated twentieth-century art world and the deception she experienced within her family. Bourgeois harnessed her anger, took up her "emotional tool" and deployed it to better realise her craft.

Bourgeois is not alone in channelling her emotions into her craft; indeed, "anger" is not a foreign concept to artists. Neither is it considered a feeling that artists should avoid or fear. Instead, anger is often seen as the wake-up call; the summons to create; the very material from which to make something transformative. And this being the case, artists – especially socially engaged or participatory artists – can point us towards a purposeful working out of our rage.

Augusto Boal (1931–2009), the Brazilian theatre director famous for his revolutionary work with oppressed communities, established forms of theatre in the 1970s and 80s used by participatory theatre makers all over the world. Image Theatre, Forum Theatre, Legislative Theatre all begin with an expression of the world as it is, before leading the community on a creative journey that culminates in a foretaste of the world as it should be. And this is no fairy tale. Boal's work began with simple, spontaneous neighbourhood performances in the street, during which the audience was permitted to stop the action and make suggestions to the actors for what they should do next. We learn that Boal's methodology of Forum Theatre, in which the audience not only interrupts but takes the place of the performer to move the story along, was born from a moment of anger: "... [I]n a now legendary development, a woman in the audience once was so *outraged* the actor could not understand her suggestion that she came onto the stage and showed what she meant."[2]

Forum Theatre as we now understand it was created by a spark of anger catapulting a woman from her role as spectator to that of actor/writer. (This, in turn, gave birth to the term "spect-actor".) "In breaking down barriers between audience and performer... Boal [exemplifies] an ethos based in political and sociological principles calling for a reversal of the dynamics of oppression."[3] The result of this emotion-fuelled intervention resulted in the evolution of a radical theatre practice that has challenged injustices in peoples' lives, communities and the systems that oppress them ever since.

We should also pay attention to the environment that permitted that woman to act – created by Boal, the artist. The "invited space"[4] allowed her to participate as a decision-making citizen in a reimagining of her situation. Socially engaged artists offer not simply an example of how their own anger informs their work, but also a model for creating civic fora where civilians' anger at the injustice they experience can be played out.

Community organising too relies on public spaces where oppressive systems are challenged and new ways of living can be imagined. While community organisers might not consider their work to be art, "Topflight organizers are more like poets, symphony conductors or other creative artists..."[5] In order to enable civilians around them to realise the world as it should be, performance and storytelling are essential components of actions and assemblies. Indeed, humour and satire were key techniques employed by the founding father of community organising in the US, Saul Alinsky, citing ridicule as "man's most potent weapon", in his fourth rule of power tactics.[6] Humour, he said, "... is essential, for through humor much is accepted that would have been rejected if presented seriously."[7]

As well as creativity and humour, community organisers, like participatory artists, consider anger a vital tool to challenging systemic injustices. On addressing the qualities needed for an organiser, community organiser Edward T. Chambers writes, "Organizers need some anger... Anger is your engine, and it resides below the belly button. It gets you going, compels you to challenge things as they are."[8] A community organiser moved to make the world a better place requires agility, artistry and anger in their belly.

[1] Abigail Cain, "How Rage Can Lead to Creative Breakthroughs," *Art Sy*, 19 November 2018, https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-rage-lead-creative-breakthroughs.

[2] Doug Paterson, "A Brief Biography of Augusto Boal," *Pedagogy and the Theatre of the Oppressed*, https://ptoweb.org/aboutpto/a-brief-biography-of-augusto-boal/, my italics.

[3] Robert J. Landy and David T. Montgomery, *Theatre for Change: Education, Social Action and Therapy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[4] Raji Hunjan and Soumountha Keophilavong, *Power and Making Change Happen* (Dunfermline: Carnegie Trust, 2010); as quoted by Chrissie Tiller in "Power Up," *Creative People and Places*, 2018, https://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/sites/default/files/Power_Up_think_piece_Chrissie_Tiller.pdf, 21.

[5] Edward T. Chambers, *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 110.

[6] *Ibid.*, 128. Saul D. Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic* Radicals (New York: Vintage Books, 1971).

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*, 110.

Without these, public life remains as it is and seeking the common good becomes a passive ideal.

When pursuing this notion of the transformational potential of anger, a familiar, ancient scene played out in public comes to mind. "Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of those selling doves."[9] In order for a person to fully participate in the Passover feast, an animal sacrifice had to be offered. Doves, at that time, were at the bottom of the sacrificial food chain so a person sacrificed a dove if they were poor, female or had a skin disease – in other words, unclean. If they had no dove, a dove had to be purchased from inside the Temple court, notably the area of the Temple kept for Gentiles and other outsiders. We recall that a particular currency was necessary to buy the sacrificial animals and money changers that day were charging extortionate rates to those who could least afford to pay. This scene of corruption was being played in God's house.

We are told Jesus pushes over the traders' tables and the sellers' benches. In overturning the furniture, he is symbolically tearing down injustices in the very location that is destined as a place of sanctuary. For *everyone*. People of the wrong race, the wrong gender, with the wrong body from the wrong class. "Is it not written," he cries in the midst of debris, upended tables, squawking and flapping birds, bleating goats, excrement and money covering the Temple floor, "my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?"[10] Then what happens in the aftermath of Jesus' angry performance catches us by surprise: Matthew tells us Jesus did "wonderful things", such as healing the blind and the lame.[11] Instead of feeling alienated or wounded by his visible rage, these excluded people were compelled towards him. Voiceless and without status, they recognised in Jesus' anger a longing for their restoration as civilians worthy to participate in the rituals of their faith and in the kingdom of God. Out of the mess created by Jesus in the Temple that day, a new order was being created.

Speaker and writer Austin Channing Brown writes, "Jesus throws folks out of the building, and in so doing makes space for the marginalised to come in... [H]is anger led to freedom – the freedom of belonging, the freedom of healing, and the freedom of participating as full members in God's house."[12]

If then we are keen to suppress anger, or pretend it isn't there, we are wasting our time. Paul writes to the Ephesians, "In your anger do not sin."[13] Note he says "in" your anger. It is a given that at times, we are going to be angry. This might be an uncomfortable thought if we have subscribed to a theology of "niceness", so pervasive in areas of white western, Christian culture, where anger has been maligned as unseemly. So, to challenge our discomfort, and seize this emotion that has the power to bring down the strong and elevate the weak, we dwell on the story of that Passover day in Jesus' life. And if we still don't like the idea, as in so much of life, let us be guided by art and the artists whose minds gladly understand the gift of anger and whose hands are committed to shaping it for the world that is to come.

Rachel Griffiths is a freelance theatre practitioner with extensive experience of making theatre workshops and projects with diverse communities. Much of her work takes place in London schools, often working with at-risk young people on issues of youth violence, consequences, choices, relationships. She is also a trainer in the corporate sector, using theatre skills to equip business executives in how to have more impact, improve their presentations, and use storytelling in their work.

[9] Matt. 21:12 (NIV).
[10] Mark 11:17 (NIV).
[11] Matt. 21:15 (NIV).
[12] Austin Channing Brown, *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* (London: Virago, 2020).
[13] Eph. 4:26 (NIV).

THE DOORS THAT THE ARTS OPEN

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Shannon Hopkins

Pause for a moment and think: when was the last time you felt wonder or awe? Hold an image of what inspired that feeling in you in your mind. Remember the sensations you experienced.

It is said that "a picture is worth a thousand words and an experience is worth a thousand pictures". There is something about both image and experience that helps us to transcend words and reason and it is why I have been asking questions about the role of creativity and the arts in a post-Christendom society for a long time.

I believe that art is important because it helps us embrace mystery and opens up room for questions and democratising power.

For centuries the church was the patron of the arts and it hosted the parties and the unveilings, it directed the conversations. It told the painter what to paint and then people talked about it, interpreted it. For a number of reasons, which I don't have space to go into here, this connection has been largely lost and the church struggles to know what to do with art and artists at best and is suspicious at worst.

I often find in the church context that people focus on reason and certainty even though we know mystery is at the heart of our spiritual life. I believe that art is a vehicle that holds our questions, challenges and feelings. It opens us up and can ignite a sense of wonder. When that happens, it isn't just a personal endeavour; I have seen it creates new openings between people.

The projects Wabi Sabi, where I worked with others to turn a house into an interactive art installation/experience about love, and Doxology, where my friend Rob Pepper redrew the Jesus narrative and we invited others to respond to what they saw in his work with a focus on opening up a dialogue instead of debate about spirituality, are two of the ways I have explored the arts as an avenue for mission in a secular age. Both are experiences that demonstrated the personal and communal power of the arts.

The arts haven't gone away, they've just largely grown outside the church walls. Eyes and ears to see beauty, to attend to poverty, to seek justice – these strong, recurrent biblical themes are often missing from our public discussions about moral values but they are alive in the communities of artists and cultural creatives around the world.

In the last 20 years the art world has boomed, some would even say exploded. It also has become more accessible to the general public and become a more integrated part of society. Does that matter? I think it does.

Some say art has become religion for the atheists and it shouldn't surprise us why.

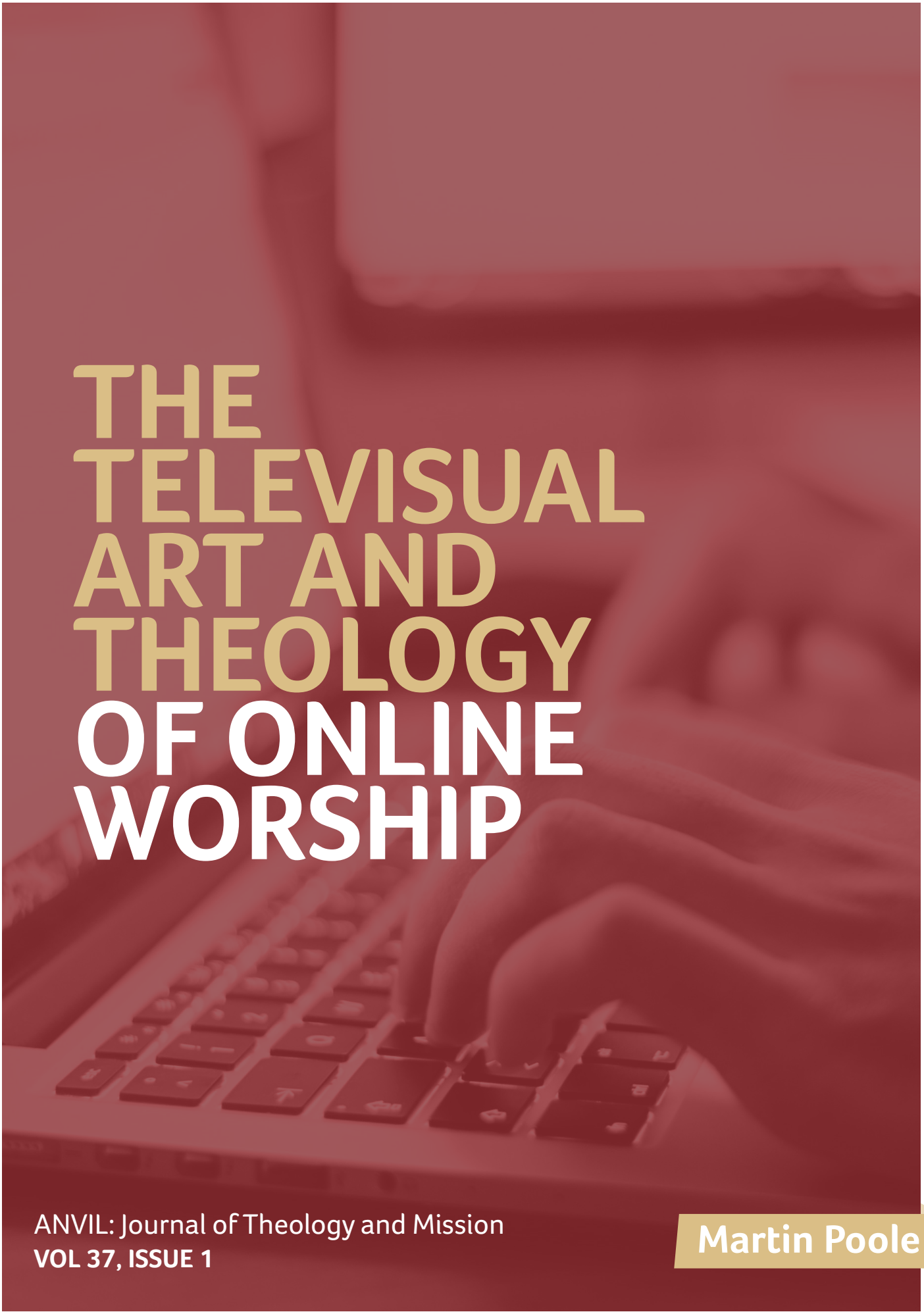
In the introduction to *Speaking of Faith*, Krista Tippett makes the point that spiritual questions don't go away, nor does a sense of wonder and mystery cease, in the absence of a belief in God.[1] Spiritual questions demand answers. As the church has withdrawn from engaging people in spiritual questions, it could be argued that the art world has become a one of the primary platforms for investigating spiritual inquiries. Artists, mystics and poets of our day wrestle in the open public spaces with questions of eternity, faith, hope and justice – trying to make sense of the world and bring meaning to their lives.

The arts are a gift in many ways: they offer an alternative economy, an alternative way of assessing cultural worth; they engage, question and challenge us. Just as we're realising there are other ways to define worth than by wealth, we're discovering there are other forms of intelligence – for example emotional intelligence and creative intelligence. I believe the arts have the capacity to open up a space for a more complete perspective of our world.

The beauty of the arts, and one not to be missed out on, is that it has the wondrous ability to ignite our imagination. If we are going to imagine a different world and bring it into being, the arts might just be our best ally.

Shannon Hopkins is a social entrepreneur, church planter and consultant for ministry in contemporary culture. She is the founder of RootedGood, which works on multiple projects that range from arts and social justice to social enterprise.

1 Krista Tippett, *Speaking of Faith: Why Religion Matters – and How to Talk About It* (London: Penguin, 2008).



THE TELEVISUAL ART AND THEOLOGY OF ONLINE WORSHIP

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Martin Poole

[A]ll things set apart for use in divine worship should be truly worthy, becoming, and beautiful, signs and symbols of the supernatural world.

Sacramentum Caritatis, Pope Benedict XVI, 20071

2020 was a year when online worship was forced upon the church due to the closure of buildings as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Suddenly churches and church people who hardly used a computer, let alone Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and all the other social media flavours, were thrown into an unfamiliar cyberworld of watch parties, streaming, uploading and retweeting. Churches that were barely able to connect to the internet had to scramble to find ways to engage with their congregations and the wider world and to wrestle with what it means to worship online. So let's consider some of the artistic, creative and theological issues that we are presented with when we consider worship online.

I am going to use television as a catch-all title for all forms of screen-mediated worship, a media that has become enormously democratised in recent years thanks to the internet, YouTube, Facebook and so on. Gone are the days when television was the preserve of media professionals with expensive equipment and huge teams of specialists; now anyone can broadcast to the world using just a regular smartphone. Open access to this form of media is a good thing and we have all become used to the varying quality of material online while also being appreciative of the product produced professionally by production companies, broadcasters like the BBC and the new breed of streamers such as Netflix.

I would argue that televisual media is as much an art form as painting, sculpture, music, dance or any other of the more recognised "artistic media" that we are used to calling art, although I will also concede that there is a strong argument for categorising television as a craft. In the same way that anyone can play around with paint or do some sketching with varying degrees of success, television in all its forms can be used as a tool for creative communication by everyone – but that does not necessarily mean that everyone should. Good television takes skill, time and expertise and many of us have been catapulted into this world by the need to stream or post services online with no time to develop any of this. To give you an idea of the production disparity between online worship and "real" television, in the professional TV world a full day of editing with a team of professionals will produce on average three minutes of finished video, and this is not taking into account the time it takes to shoot the video, source music, create graphics and so on. So for a church to produce a 30-minute online worship service every week is little short of a miracle.

Of course, most online worship is the equivalent of a simple talking head – one person reciting liturgy direct to camera with perhaps the added excitement of a few singers performing and one or two other participants doing readings and leading in prayer. This is relatively straightforward to produce and thousands of churches across the country have commendably stepped up to the challenge of the pandemic lockdowns to provide this.

The challenge of this modern technology was recognised over 60 years ago when in 1958 St Clare was nominated as the patron saint of television by Pope Pius XII. He chose her because one Christmas she was too sick to attend church, so the Holy Spirit projected the images and sounds of Mass on the wall of her room in order to allow her to be "present" to the Mass. This "vision from afar" (the literal meaning of the word television) meant that she was the first person to experience online worship and clearly took great comfort from this.

Church worship is mainly centred around liturgy, either formal or informal, which is usually reckoned to mean "the work of the people". This implies a communal activity as this is something that we all do together, although we all know that in many cases worship is often something that is "done to" a congregation, whether that be a very structured catholic Mass or a worship band-orchestrated praise party delivered from a church "stage". Although our aspiration for worship is that it should be an interactive experience to which all can contribute, the reality is often that congregants are passive receivers of whatever the church leaders choose to deliver for them. The most active part that the congregation plays is in turning up, joining in when asked to do so, particularly through singing, and receiving Communion if that is part of the service.

In that sense, then, online worship is not much different in that it is clearly curated by someone (usually an individual) and delivered to the online "congregation" with little or no opportunity for interaction. In this way it replicates many artistic experiences. We don't expect to interact with a painting or sculpture other than to view it, and we watch theatre performances or music events without interrupting the performers; we don't even expect to interact with the other attendees at the event except perhaps with the people who accompanied us.

[1] From Pope Paul VI, "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 4 December 1963; Chapter VII, Sacred Art and Sacred Furnishings, 122; *Vatican Archive*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.

An important aspect of church liturgy is its ritualistic nature. Old Testament scholar Gordon J. Wenham writes about ritual in relation to the Old Testament:

> [N]ot only is the Old Testament ritual law central to theological understanding of scripture; I also want to suggest it is a model of modern communication technique. For a long time Christians have imagined that communication between God and man is essentially verbal, merely a matter of words. God speaks to man through the prophets or through the Bible: man replies in prayer. We view communication with God as a sort of two-way radio. But God does not restrict himself to words, he uses ritual such as sacraments: ritual is more like colour TV than radio. Ideas are made visible.... Educational psychologists tell us that we remember 10% of what we hear, 30% of what we see but 70% of what we do. Modern preachers put most of their effort into teaching by hearing, though 90% of what they say will be forgotten. Moses put his main effort into teaching through ritual, a wise move if he wanted the people to remember such fundamental truths, for ritual is a kind of doing and therefore sticks in the mind much better than words.[2]

Online worship is literally colour television and should better help us to communicate with God as we aim to make ideas about God visible. As Ben Quash, Kings College Professor of Christianity and the Arts, says in the introduction to *The Visual Commentary on Scripture*, we can use "the warrant of the incarnation to affirm that physical sight can be a pathway to spiritual insight". He goes on to say that images are made "to be gazed upon, so that we might glorify God and be filled with wonder and zeal".[3]

As the church has wrestled with the technological challenges of 2020, we have learned an enormous amount about the art and craft involved in creating online worship experiences. Perhaps as we move forward we can pay more attention to the richness of the televisual experience and explore the opportunities for epiphany that this medium provides for a wider audience than are able to attend our churches in person. 2021 could become the year when worship is not either online or face-to-face but becomes a "both/and" experience as we use all our God-given ingenuity and creativity to experience and express the divine in our worship.

As biblical scholar Andrew Byers writes in his book *TheoMedia:*

> [W]e should honor Christ's Incarnation by infiltrating multiple communications realms but with a high valuation of embodied presence, refusing to treat social media as a fitting replacement for face-to-face interaction, but enjoying its capabilities for enabling interaction with those who are not across the table or in our living room.[4]

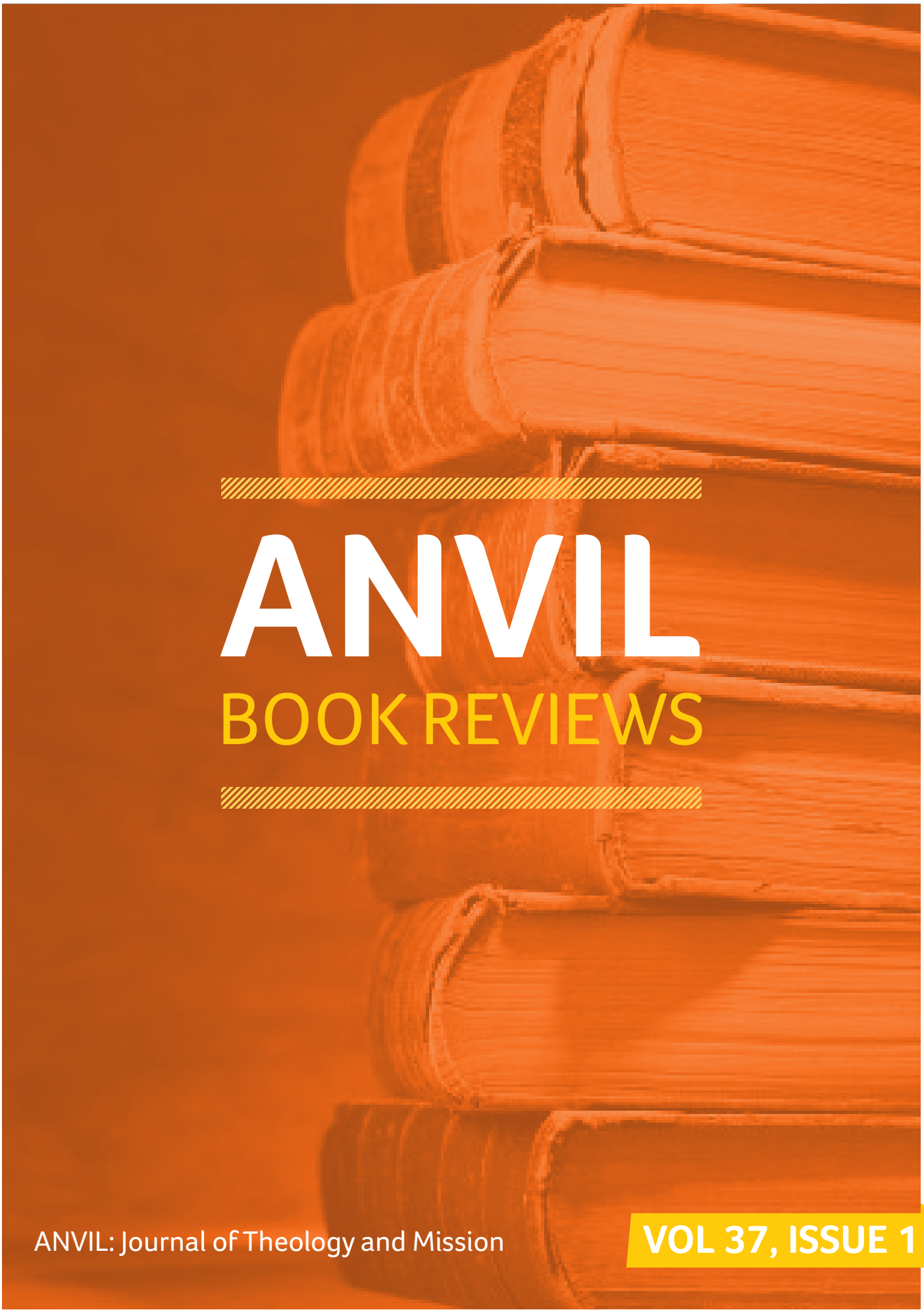
Televisual media can be truly worthy, becoming and beautiful, signs and symbols of the supernatural world when set apart for use in divine worship; we're just not very adept at this in the church and we need to get up to speed because this is the world of the twenty-first century. It is honouring to God and to each other to try to make our interaction with this media the best we can in the same way that Jesus' incarnation inspires us to be the best human beings we can. That doesn't mean every online service should look like a feature film, but whatever our circumstances or resources we can put some thought into the imagery we use, the words we choose and the audio we play, and we can ensure an interesting full field of view with attention paid to the background, the lighting, the flow of the "liturgy/script", and of course no nose hair.

Rev Martin Poole is a Church of England priest, creative worship practitioner, broadcaster, former communications consultant and actor who had a successful career as a communications strategist specialising in branding, marketing and promotion for media with expertise in the UK and international TV market before becoming a full-time parish priest in 2010. Since his training as a priest in the early 1980s and throughout his professional working life he has consistently explored new ways to express Christian faith and has been involved in a variety of fresh expressions of church as an initiator and advocate. He is the founder and leader of Beyond, a fresh expression dedicated to creating innovative arts and spirituality events and conferences.

[2] Gordon J. Wenham, "The Perplexing Pentateuch," *Vox Evangelica* 17 (1987): 19.

[3] Ben Quash, "About the VCS," *The Visual Commentary on Scripture*, November 2018, accessed 22 November 2020, https://thevcs.org/about.

[4] Andrew J. Byers, *TheoMedia: The Media of God and the Digital Age* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 172.


ANVIL
BOOK REVIEWS
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Mark Ireland and Mike Booker, *Making New Disciples: Exploring the Paradoxes of Evangelism* (London: SPCK, 2015)

At the present time new books on evangelism are not exactly notable for their novelty value, meaning that any new entry into this crowded marketplace needs to have something distinctive to contribute; this book certainly does. Having previously collaborated on *Evangelism: Which Way Now?* in 2003, Mark Ireland and Mike Booker take a step back from the front line and view the evangelistic tools most widely used by parishes from a sympathetic but critical perspective.

In his insightful introduction (a brief essay in its own right), Archbishop Justin Welby makes the helpful distinction between books used as *manuals* (to be followed step by step) and those used as *maps* (providing the bigger picture and requiring decisions to be made). This book is very definitely a map; there is no "how to do evangelism" here but rather a carefully thought-out reflection on the options and current fashions in evangelism from the perspective of two highly experienced practitioners. Instead of a joint effort throughout the book, the two authors have (after the introductory first chapter) taken responsibility for separate chapters, and rather than repetition or contradiction, this approach brings freshness and immediacy ("I" generally works better than "we").

The starting point is the example of Jesus and the primacy of prayer. In keeping with much contemporary missional thinking, discipleship, not conversion, is seen as the focus of evangelism. The authors cast a critical eye over the evangelistic and missional tools that are widely used today; MAP, Alpha, Christianity Explored, Pilgrim, fresh expressions and Messy Church are among those discussed. But the authors do not fall into the trap of assuming that all innovation is necessarily good and, following Davison and Milbank, examine the wide evangelistic opportunities open to the traditional parish church. The helpful concept of the "common good" is explained and discussed together with outworkings of this concept such as CAP, Street Pastors and food banks.

The book's strengths are:

- A deep understanding of both the practice of, and research into, evangelism;
- A realistic understanding of the society the church is called to serve in the UK;
- A critical examination of current evangelistic practice, particularly the "off the peg" tools that are widely used;
- A clear belief in the *missio Dei* and in the making of disciples as the most appropriate focus of evangelistic activity.

Here is an ideal book both for students of contemporary approaches to evangelism in the UK and for local Christian leaders who have both a desire to engage in effective evangelism but also an open mind as to the best methods to use.

John Darch, Ellesmere

Anna Ruddick, *Reimagining Mission from Urban Places: Missional Pastoral Care* (London: SCM Press, 2020)

Anna Ruddick was part of the Eden Network, who, motivated by their faith, moved into urban estates to share the gospel. It was a movement of young adults whose energy and motivation grew out of evangelical festivals and para-church organisations. Over several years Anna pursued practical theological research in order to reflect on that movement and mission practice through a blend of ethnographic research, interviews and doing practical theology. Practical theology is paying attention through the research to the lived experience and putting that in conversation with Scripture and resources of theology and other disciplines to discern what God is doing or where God is at work. Through that process she developed a framework for mission she named "missional pastoral care", which is intentional missional living shared by seven elements – being among people who are different, living locally, being available, taking practical action, long-term commitment, consistency and love. The interviews are with members of the teams and those they got to know.

At the core of her work is the exploration of the gap between the rhetoric of mission she went with from the evangelical community that sent the teams with its accompanying expectations of what results might look like, and the reality of what actually happened on the ground. All sorts of good things took place that led to flourishing and genuine transformation, but those that went on mission found that both mission and their evangelicalism were changed in the process.

If you are a practitioner or pioneer in a context like this, this book will be invaluable. The approach makes so much sense. And it's a relief, because there is an honesty about the reality of what mission is like, perhaps summed up in one of the chapter titles: "If it's messy, slow and complicated, you're probably doing something right." Through her interviews and reflections on them, Anna pays attention to how lives change in slow and messy ways. The changes are real, and they blend shifts in perspective and meaning-making alongside or within

an environment that loves and affirms people for who they are over the long term. It's an approach that chimes well with Sam Wells's discussion of being with rather than seeking to fix people. I really liked the way the whole was framed with mission as what God is doing in the world that we join in with.

However, it is not just a book for practitioners. Anna's discussion over two chapters of what good news is – and of evangelicals' tribe and identity and how it could respond to the mission challenges and context we are in – is so good and so important. I fear it may not get the audience it deserves because it's tucked in what looks like a book for practitioners. She writes as an insider to the tribe, which is important to say, so it's written in a tone of careful consideration and appeal to that community. She unpacks the evangelical mission narrative and says that there is a mismatch between that and the realities of mission engagement on the ground. This arises because there is a rejection of context. She then develops an alternative mission narrative, which I found compelling, framed as it is with the discovery that God is present and at work in the world with people in the community who are made in God's image. She then unpacks evangelical identity and where it has come from, and suggests it could evolve in four ways – firstly revisiting epistemology in response to our time and place (rather the time and place from which it arose); secondly relaxing a concern for protecting evangelical identity and aligning with the incoming kingdom of God in the world; thirdly "good news-ness" in mission impulse and passionate piety; and lastly a bigger story, reframing the doctrinal priorities of evangelical theology. There is not space to elaborate on these here but I especially commend that section of the book and hope it gets picked up for wider conversation. There has always been a strain of evangelicalism with which that would all resonate – CMS at its best has been in that flow, in my opinion; there were a couple of points where Anna's writing reminded me of John Taylor's writing, for example.

Lastly, to state the obvious, this is a UK book on mission. This is significant because it chimes with the UK context really well in ways that, say, American books on mission (of which there are many more) simply don't. It is gritty and missiologically brilliant. It's also a very welcome counter voice to the results-driven approach that seems to be dominating, for example, the Church of England's investment in mission through the Church Commissioners' monies. I think Anna is a wonderful practical theologian and this is exactly the sort of thinking that the church needs right now.

Jonny Baker, CMS

Kathleen P. Rushton, *The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor: Hearing Justice in John's Gospel* (London: SCM Press, 2020)

I loved reading this book. It is a superb mix of spiritual and scholarly, accessibly written and challenging. Thank you to David Shervington for commissioning it after hearing Kathleen give a paper on "Jesus and Justice in John's Gospel". I was drawn to the book by its title and it does not disappoint. Kathleen is an independent scholar and a Roman Catholic religious sister from Aotearoa/New Zealand with the order of the Sisters of Mercy. She has a particular interest in integrating Scripture and tradition with cosmology, ecology and science, which led to a research project on the Johannine Prologue as the 2011 Cardinal Hume Visiting Scholar at Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, University of Cambridge. This scholarship is apparent throughout the book.

The book follows the RC lectionary and a five-fold pattern of lectio (reading the text), meditatio (mediation), oratio (prayer), contemplatio (contemplation) and actio (action). I was particularly inspired by the action section as this challenged the reader to act on the text and to make a difference. As a fellow New Zealander, I could imagine as well as appreciate her clear explanation of her context, a white woman in a Pacific nation of bicultural heritage. Her hill-country upbringing on a farm and the earthquakes in Christchurch have influenced her understanding of creation and the evolving universe. It is refreshing to see this spelled out – we all come to and read the Bible from our own contexts, yet so many scholars seem to bypass this or claim some objective bird's-eye view.

She writes this book guided by three strands:

- To hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the marginalised;
- To offer a contribution to spiritual ecumenism about prayer and mission;
- To sustain Christians in the huge task of addressing two of the most urgent issues of our time – the degradation of the planet and the displacement of the poor.

Although this was written before our global pandemic, it is prescient and is a book for our time.

I will share just three insights from it. She introduced me to five "p" codes, which I shall remember when I read the text from now on as a useful hermeneutical lens. They are power, privilege, property, poverty and persecution. She claims that when we consider these,

they "move us from a quest for biblical interpretation that is objective and detached to a quest for an ethics of interpretation to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the marginalized*" (p. xxviii). This lens can alert us to the way the text can undermine power relationships today – for example, male–female, master–slave, rich–poor, patron–client, citizen–alien.

One of my favourite reads of the lockdown(s) has been *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* by Robin Wall Kimmerer, a botany professor and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation.[1] So I was thrilled to see Kathleen encourage us to draw on TEK (Traditional Ecological Knowledge) in her reflection on "rivers of living water" (John 7:39) and what this means with respect to believers' receiving the Holy Spirit and the preciousness and sacredness of the earth. This section concluded with a challenge for us to live in ways that value the gift of water as a symbol of longing for God and to respect this gift from our planet. In a later section on Jesus as the Vine, she draws on Nobel Prize-winner and social, environmental and political activist Wangari Maathai. She was the founder of the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, where women were encouraged to plant trees, enabling them to have access to water and firewood and so restore their dignity and self-confidence.

Finally, I love it when commentaries highlight or have a different take on the women – this is so rare, it is a joy when it happens! She writes that interpreters of the Woman at the Well (whom she calls Photini) are obsessed with speculation about her husbands. Yet they tend to overlook that she was a poor woman carrying water over a large distance for the benefit of others. She was caught in a system that demanded hard labour of women – the lot of so many women and girls today. Also, her suggestion about Mary equating Jesus with the gardener is really intriguing. She suggests that perhaps Mary was not confused. Creation is the garden of God. John begins by reminding us of the garden of Genesis in his prologue and ends with the tomb in the garden. These are powerful themes to reflect on as we remember that God sustains and renews all Creation and is the ultimate gardener.

The book has an extensive bibliography and a helpful list of key words in John. I think this is a great book for both biblical scholars and ordinary readers who want to be reminded of our discipleship to Jesus, to the poor and to the earth. What better time to read this book than during a global pandemic that is forcing us to reconsider the nature of our lifestyle, relationships and the purpose of our faith.

Cathy Ross, CMS

Michael W. Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation: Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018)

What does it mean for the church to be missionary by its very nature? This was clearly a key starting point for Lesslie Newbigin, and, through deep engagement with his writings, Michael Goheen attempts to explore the depth and complexity of this question. The book presents a thorough and deep survey of Newbigin's writings, drawing together his writings across half a century, with many stimulating and fascinating insights to offer. These are the book's great strengths. In light of this it probably is most helpful to those studying Newbigin and missional ecclesiology. It is a reference resource, and as such the titles and headings mean it is easy to navigate.

The book uses themes of Newbigin's writing as its structure, beginning with the centrality of the biblical narrative in chapter 1, and developing an understanding of the good news of the kingdom and arguing for a missionary church in chapter 2. It continues by exploring Newbigin's writings on the church's vocation, its life, its engagement with culture and with western culture in particular in its remaining chapters.

While the comprehensive survey of Newbigin's writings and the way it is laid out for easy reference are its great strengths in one sense, these are also its weaknesses. Each chapter is split into many subsections, each exploring another element of Newbigin's writings, and each of those tend to be split into a further list of components. I found it increasingly off-putting to find every section begin with a phrase such as "Newbigin explores this in three ways...". Almost every element of Newbigin's thought seems to be recounted in X number of components. The result is something that feels like a collection of insights rather than having a clear narrative. Some of these insights were fascinating and made me want to pursue them within Newbigin's writings, and perhaps that was the point, but I couldn't help feeling that Goheen had more to say.

Where it does depart from this pattern in chapter 5 there is a sense of flow and an argument builds, which is very engaging and thought-provoking. I kept asking

[1] Robin Wall Kimmerer, B*raiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013)

myself why the book was written and eventually found my answer on p. 191 – that Newbigin's call to the church is "profoundly relevant" today. I think it would have been a better read if this were the narrative of the book, rather than providing simply a foundation for this conversation. This could have been through a critical engagement with Newbigin that really explored the details and complexities of his work. Or it could have taken a more biographical approach and presented this more clearly in his own story – or perhaps a more creative piece that began to imaginatively explore the ways this challenges the church today. While I know The Gospel and Our Culture Network has been doing this, I feel it could have been drawn more clearly through the book. Goheen does say that his teaching method is about presenting and developing lists that can be the starting point for imaginative engagement, but my experience was that the lists in this book did the opposite.

In sum, it is a fascinating book and a brilliant survey of Newbigin's work, but with a more creative and imaginative engagement it might have drawn a wider readership and been a more engaging read.

James Butler, CMS

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