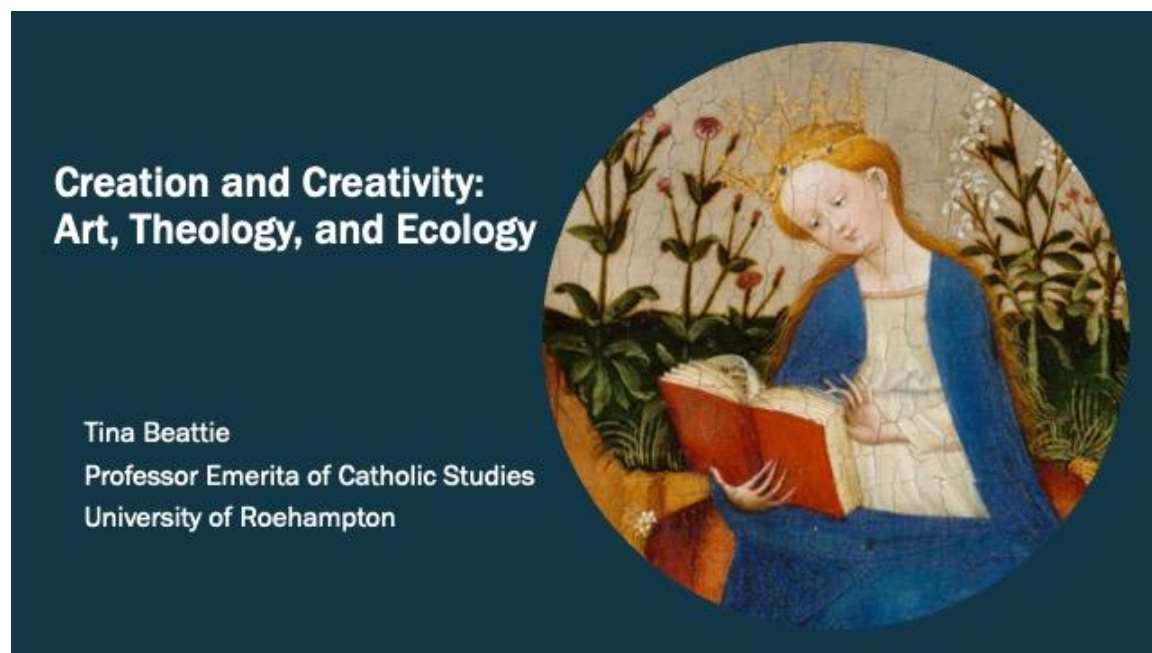


UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
SWANSON LECTURE IN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

CREATION AND CREATIVITY: ART, THEOLOGY, AND ECOLOGY

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Introduction

G.K. Chesterton observed that “the world will never starve for want of wonders, but only for want of wonder”. This evening I reflect on how we might recover that sense of wonder in relation to the natural world and our place within it, which was sacrificed in modernity’s headlong rush towards progress. I say “we”, aware that some of you are no doubt further along this path than I am, but others might share my ongoing struggle to do less and be more, to let go of the modern illusion that being constantly busy and stressed is a virtue, and to learn to recognise that in recreation we are recreated.

I’ve put together a short video of Psalm 8, to help us to get into the mood of the evening. And I apologise here for the lack of inclusive language, but I wanted to retain the poetics of the plainchant.

The plainchant is on the *Cantica Sacra* website at this link:

https://canticasacra.org/?page_id=8029

British comedian Peter Cook offered an incisive and witty comment on the hubris of the modern subject. Alluding to Psalm 8, he observed: “As I looked out into the night sky across all those infinite stars, it made me realize how unimportant they are.”¹

For many of us, the environmental crisis and the growing threat it poses to all species and habitats is changing our understanding of who we are and where we belong in creation. The gradual evolution of western consciousness through and beyond modernity – and through and beyond Christendom – has involved many paradigm shifts. From an

ancient world that seethed and simmered with nature's awesome power, haunted by demons and blessed by angels, modern man (*sic*) migrated to an altogether more rational and orderly landscape of the mind.

In his book *A Secular Age*, Philosopher Charles Taylor contrasts what he calls "the porous self" of medieval enchantment with "the buffered self" of rationalised modernity.² This evening I'm asking how we can go beyond this buffered self, not in terms of a nostalgic New Age romanticism spiced with a sprinkling of medieval magic, but in terms of becoming porous once again to the harmonies of grace within the mystery of creation.

So let me begin by saying a little more about what Pope Francis calls the "tyrannical anthropocentrism" of modernity. (LS #68)³ I'll then reflect on how changing our relationship with nature means changing the ways in which we interpret the world around us. This involves not only joy and freedom but also vulnerability, sorrow and loss as we seek to let go of the old ways, learning to unknow what we think we know, in order to open us to creative beginnings. This entails a journey through and beyond language to the rediscovery of contemplative silence, which for many of us who are conditioned to the incessant activity and distractions of modern life is profoundly challenging. I conclude by asking if reflection on God's Sabbath rest might call us to participate in the delight of being at rest in creation, and knowing that it is very good.

Tyrannical Anthropocentrism

The so-called medieval synthesis saw the whole created order as graced by God. In the worldview of early and medieval Christians, the Book of Nature and the Book of Scripture had the same author, they were mutually revealing of God, and both could be prayerfully studied to understand more about the ways in which God sustains, loves, and redeems creation. An early example of this, going back to the fourth century, would be Basil the Great's *Hexaemeron*, which reflects on the six days of creation in the Book of Genesis through a deep attentiveness to nature.⁴ I'll come back to that later.

The modern man of science and reason positioned himself at the epicentre of the universe, confining Christianity's God to the private faith of the individual, banishing the angels and saints along with the demons and ghosts, and tearing apart what had once been the mutually illuminating relationship between nature and grace, reason and revelation. From that commanding vantage point he surveyed the lesser beings around him – women, children, other races, cultures and religions, animals, nature itself – and ordered them in descending hierarchies that made him lord and master of all. I'm not suggesting that these hierarchies were lacking from the pre-modern world – they weren't, but modernity lent them new powers of conquest and control. This was a Copernican revolution in reverse – the earth might no longer be the centre of the physical universe, but the western man of reason was the rational, gravitational force that held in place all the vast empires he conquered with his armies, technologies, and patriarchies. This constituted the rise of what Pope Francis calls "tyrannical anthropocentrism" – the idea that the human is the centre of the universe, and everything else exists only to serve human needs and be exploited for human gain.

Francis is guiding the Church towards a vision of creation that reclaims a deep sense of interconnection and co-dependence. He writes that

The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. ... The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God. (LS #233)

He interprets this in trinitarian terms, observing that

the Trinity has left its mark on all creation. ... [T]he world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships. Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things, so that throughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven relationships.

This reclamation of a creation-centred theology seen through a trinitarian lens has profound anthropological implications, for we need to rethink what it means to be made in the image of God. The underpinnings for western rationalism are provided by a theology heavily influenced by Greek philosophy. To be made in the image of the God of philosophical theism from ancient Greece to the European Enlightenment is to be endowed with idealized masculine characteristics associated with form – rationality, abstraction, active inseminating power, while the maternal feminine is associated with the darkness of matter – a dangerous and chaotic source of desire and disintegration that must be subdued and controlled by the rational male mind. As feminist philosopher Grace Jantzen observed, according to this view of God, “anyone who can imagine ‘himself’ as an infinitely extended (and disembodied) version of an Oxford professor is an analogue of the divine”.⁵

But the God of the Hebrew scriptures and the God revealed in Jesus Christ is not the God of Greek philosophy. As Francis reminds us, the Trinity is a relational unity. The Book of Proverbs describes wisdom as a creative feminised presence with God before the beginning of time, delighting in creation and ever at play in the world. The creator God revealed in the Bible is more like an artist than an engineer (with apologies to my husband Dave, who was an engineer). In his *Hexamaeron*, Basil of Caesarea calls God “the Supreme Artist”⁶ who makes “a harmonious symphony”⁷ in the work of creation. In her ecological study of the *Hexamaeron*, Kate Rigby refers to this as “the wildly polyphonic choir of creation”.⁸

Before I go on, a caveat. Pope Francis’s call for a new theological anthropology is blighted by the fact that his is still an androcentric theology that fails to ask how incarnate female life might act as a catalyst for change, if women were full and equal contributors to church teaching, theology and practice. This impedes both his anthropology and his ecology, for it projects onto women and nature a romantic vision of stereotypical maternal femininity that is profoundly at odds with the realities of both the wild and powerful forces of nature, and the strengths that women must find to cope with the realities of embodied female life. I’m not unpacking all that this evening, because it merits not just a paper but a book and a great howl of protest.

The last century has seen the dissolution and fragmentation of that imperial western power which which conquered and ruled the world in the name of Christ. Onward Christian soldiers! Two world wars, the independence and liberation movements of the nineteen sixties, the emergence of multiple conflicting narratives of identity, being and belonging, and now the climate crisis and the eruption of new waves of war and violence, hatred and prejudice, exploitation and injustice, have plunged us into the strange and disorientating universe of postmodernity. The wheels are falling off the modern democratic order with its neoliberal economic tyrannies. We face epochal and potentially apocalyptic challenges that call for humankind to unite in hope, resilience and resistance to protect planet earth, our common home, to make it fit for habitation by ourselves and future generations. We are being called to heal all that has been destroyed and harmed in our headlong rush in the name of what we euphemistically call progress. But now,

breathless, disillusioned, and afraid, we are like small creatures caught in the hubristic dazzle of our failed endeavours.

What must we do? What can we do? Our instinct is often to plunge headlong into ever more frenetic activism, tinged with despair and larded with sour-faced judgementalism. I'm more and more convinced that this negativity drains us of the energy and creativity we need to respond effectively to the challenges facing us. What if, instead of doing more, we learned to do less? What if we rediscovered God's Sabbath rest, learned from wisdom what it means to play in the garden of creation, responded to the call to share in that celebratory spirit of creative delight that constitutes the seventh day of creation? These are questions I'm circling around this evening. I ask how we can rediscover a sense of wonder by learning to be silent and at rest, to attend to the wordless expressiveness of nature, and to allow our spirits to awaken anew to all that animates the universe and holds it in being. This is about learning to discover anew what Gerard Manley Hopkins calls "the dearest freshness deep down things" in his poem, *God's Grandeur*.

So after that lengthy preamble, let me begin where creation itself begins – with language. "God said ... and it was so", we read in the unfolding narrative of creation in the Book of Genesis. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," begins the Gospel according to St John.

Rebuilding the House of Language

Martin Heidegger famously described language as "the house of being": "In its home humanity dwells. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home."⁹ This is a reminder that, if the earth is "our common home", then our ways of being in nature are inseparable from our ways of speaking about and interpreting the world around us.

Carlo Rovelli writes bewitching and beautiful books about the mystery of quantum physics. The lyricism of his language invites us to share his sense of wonder about this new science and all that it's revealing to us. Rovelli writes:

Poetry and science are both manifestations of the spirit that creates new ways of thinking the world, in order to understand it better. Great science and great poetry are both visionary, and sometimes may arrive at the same insights. The culture of today that keeps science and poetry so far apart is essentially foolish, to my way of thinking, because it makes us less able to see the complexity and the beauty of the world as revealed by both.¹⁰

British environmentalist Mary Colwell makes a similar appeal for a transformation in language when we talk about ecology and nature. She calls *Laudato Si'* "a poem to the world", and she appeals to environmentalists to "only use words that are used in poems, because actually, love of the earth is all about love – it's all about our emotional response to what's around us, to what we're part of".¹¹

Pope Francis agrees. He's introducing a new theological idiom into the interpretation and expression of church teaching. Avoiding showy intellectualism and doctrinal absolutism, his style is engaging and accessible, graced with a poetic lyricism that situates his theology before the horizon of the divine mystery, without losing its passionate concern for social and environmental justice. In his 2020 post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Querida Amazonia*, he writes that "poets, contemplatives and prophets, help free us from the technocratic and consumerist paradigm that destroys

nature and robs us of a truly dignified existence. ... Poetry helps give voice to a painful sensation shared by many of us today.” (QA, #47 and 48)¹² In a quote that might enrage doctrinal purists, he cites Brazilian poet Vinicius de Moraes: “Only poetry, with its humble voice, will be able to save this world.” (QA #46)¹³

If our language is impoverished, evacuated of its deep resonances and subtleties, then so is our relationship with the world around us. But language is more than words. It’s all the ways in which we communicate and share our perceptions of the meaning of life, including not just words but music, art, dance, and the subtleties of gesture, expression and body language that say far more than we are able to say with words alone, and sometimes far more than we intend. Rabbinic sources refer to the writing of scripture as black fire on white fire, referring to the ashen trail of letters across the blaze of the unnameable mystery that both reveals and conceals itself within words and the world.

I want now to consider two works of art, bearing in mind that I’m exploring the extent to which our language today is impoverished in terms of its symbolic and sacramental meanings – its capacity to make deep and often mysterious connections between the material world we experience through our senses, and the ways in which we interpret and relate to that world.



The Little Garden of Paradise, based on a 15th century painting.

[Stuart Ridley](#)

United Kingdom

Painting

Size: 16 W x 12 H x 0.6 in

£22,977.

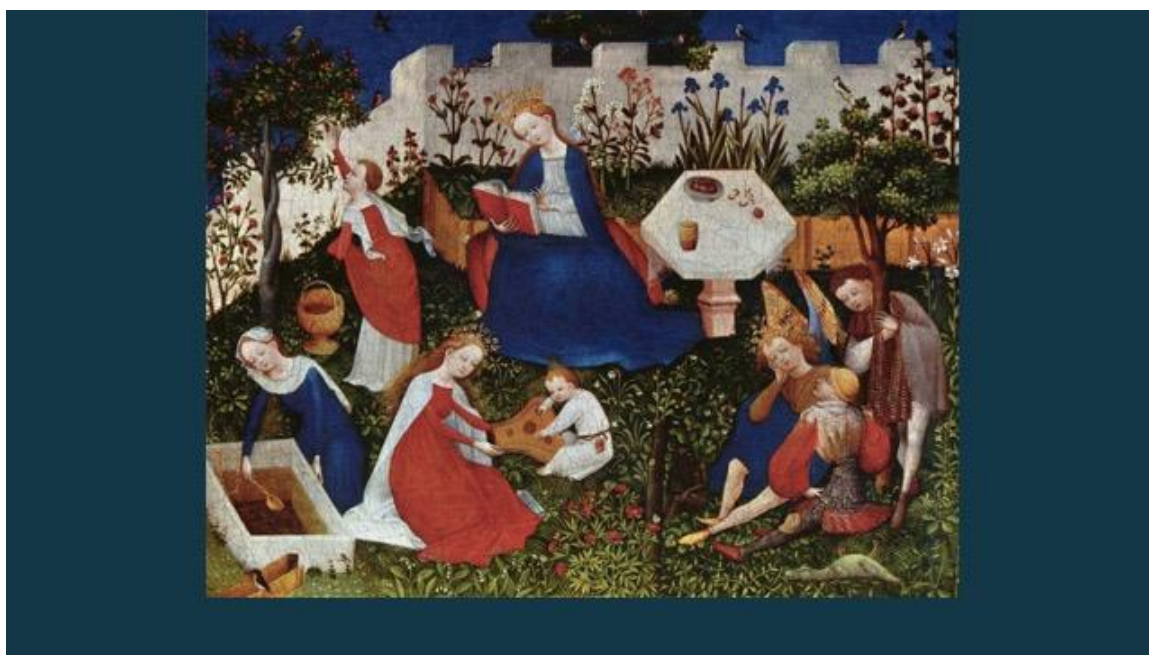
I had a short email exchange with Stuart Ridley:

What inspired you to choose that particular work?

My inspiration for choosing this painting was my interest in the original artist painting style as well as myself been a regular church goer.

Is your interpretation pastiche or parody?

The painting is pastiche. I wanted to freshen and liven up the colours as the original I was copying from was a nicotine stained dusty framed print. I was also keen on making it more contemporary for modern day viewers.



*The Little Garden of Paradise*¹⁴
Upper Rhenish Master (1410)
10.3 inches x 13.1 inches

This painting by an unknown German master is known as *The Garden of Eden* and it's sometimes also referred to as *The Little Garden of Paradise* because of its size.¹⁵

The *hortus conclusus*, “enclosed garden”, was a widespread genre in medieval art. It draws on the close association in medieval devotion between the Virgin Mary and the Beloved in the Song of Songs. Mary is identified with the Bride, and the walled garden is often interpreted as a symbol of virginity – “You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain”. (Song of Songs 4:12) Other interpretations describe Mary’s womb as the garden enclosed, so that one commentator suggests that, in the incarnation, “the answer to man’s Fall and Expulsion is God’s entrance into the Mary- garden.”¹⁶

This particular example of a *hortus conclusus* seamlessly combines symbolism and naturalism to form a condensed and complex visual narrative which takes for granted a high level of symbolic literacy among its viewers. Three gardens are implicitly represented – the enclosed garden of the Song of Songs, the Garden of Eden, and the heavenly Jerusalem which is the Garden of Eden restored and redeemed as the City of God, where the tree of life grows and the river of the water of life flows (Revelation 22). It suggests an artistic imagination steeped in a detailed appreciation of the Christian story, its redemptive significance and its devotional practices, but also revelling in the newly discovered skills of naturalism in art combined with growing interest in natural philosophy – the detailed study of nature.

The painting shows us an idealised garden – a corner of heaven on earth. It has been suggested that this is a rosary rebus, a picture puzzle arising out of the devotional practice of praying the rosary which was developing at the time of the painting.¹⁷

St George and the Archangel Michael relax among the female saints, and an unidentified man stands to one side. The monkey – symbol of Satan – sits subdued at the feet of St Michael, while the slain dragon – evocative of the serpent – lies on the ground beside St Michael. The dead tree stump beside them is sprouting two new shoots, evoking perhaps the Tree of Jesse which was often used to represent the genealogy of Christ and the Virgin, but also calling to mind the transformation of death into life.

We can identify the saints by the legends associated with them. St Dorothy picks fruit from a tree – on her way to be martyred, she was asked to send baskets of fruit and flowers from heaven to earth. The twisted tree – serpentine in shape – may be a reminder of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, now transformed into the tree of life. The saint with the zither being plucked by the infant Christ might be St. Cecilia, who is the patron saint of music and is sometimes depicted playing a lute or a psaltery – though this would be the earliest such representation of St. Cecilia and it is disputed by some art historians.¹⁸ The saint kneeling beside the water trough I would suggest is St. Anne or Anna, mother of the Virgin Mary. The story of Mary's elderly parents, Anna and Joachim, is told in the second century text, the *Protevangelium* or *Gospel of James*. She is the only one with her hair covered, suggesting she is a married woman rather than a virgin. There are many liturgical and devotional references that link Anna and Joachim to the flowering of creation and the restoration of paradise, such as the Orthodox liturgy for the vespers of the birth of the Virgin:

Joachim and Anna
Hold mystic feast and say:
Adam and Eve,
Rejoice with us today.
For to us who long ago,
By breach of the commandment,
Shut ourselves out of Paradise
Most noble fruit is given,
God's daughter Mary:
She opens for us all
The way back in.

Amidst them all sits Mary, crowned to denote that she is Queen of Heaven, but sitting on a cushion rather than a throne to show her humility. She reads from a book: knowledge has been transformed into wisdom, and the woman who knew too much has become the woman who knows God. Beside her, the table is also an altar with Eucharistic associations – the fruit which has been eaten brings wisdom and life, not knowledge and death, and the cup is also the chalice, fruit of the vine becoming the blood of Christ. Mary is known as the New Eve in the Catholic tradition, but she was also traditionally identified with paradise in the early and medieval church, being likened to the virgin earth from whom Christ, the second Adam, was made.¹⁹ St Anselm's [sermon on Mary](#) (Oratio 52) suggests the kind of creation-centred vision of her role in redemption, that is also I think depicted in this painting:

Lady, full and overflowing with grace, all creation receives new life from your abundance. Virgin, blessed above all creatures, through your blessing all creation is blessed, not only creation from its Creator, but the Creator himself has been blessed by creation. ...

God, then, is the Father of the created world and Mary the mother of the re-created world.

God is the Father by whom all things were given life, and Mary the mother through whom all things were given new life.

The artist has used subtle shifts in perspective and style to communicate this sense of a redemptive order that is both immanent and transcendent – revealed in the species and beauty of nature, but fulfilled in a hereafter beyond the finite natural world. Thus the human figures are more stylised than the depictions of nature. They cast no shadows, and we see them horizontally whereas we see the garden from above, as if from a heavenly perspective. The overall impression is a heightening of symbolic meaning, not by the distortion or misrepresentation of nature, but by the careful composition of the whole. This garden encompasses the whole narrative of salvation: it reminds us of the fall in Genesis, it anticipates paradise, it celebrates devotion to the Virgin in whom Christ became incarnate, and it expresses the interiority of the human soul as it seeks rest in God.

There are at least ten species of birds and twenty species of plants accurately depicted in this garden, all with symbolic associations with the story of creation and redemption. The lilies growing near Mary's feet signify the legend that, when she wept at the foot of the cross, small fragrant white flowers sprung up where her tears fell. Today, Lily of the Valley is still sometimes referred to as Our Lady's Tears.. One of the birds represented in the painting is the crossbill, which legend says bent its beak and spattered its breast with blood when it tried to remove the nails from Christ's hands and feet:

THE LEGEND OF THE CROSSBILL by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807 – 1882)

On the cross the dying Saviour
Heavenward lifts his eyelids calm,
Feels, but scarcely feels, a trembling
in his pierced and bleeding palm.

And by all the world forsaken,
Sees he how with zealous care
At the ruthless nail of iron
A little bird is striving there.
Stained with blood and never tiring,
With its beak it doth not cease,
From the cross it would free the Saviour,
Its Creator's son release.

And the Saviour speaks in mildness:
"Blest be thou of all the good
Bear, as token of this moment,
Marks of blood and holy rood!"

And that bird is called the Crossbill,
Covered all with blood so clear,
In the groves of pine it singeth,
Songs, like legends, strange to hear.

Forms of Silence



Edward Robinson
Resurrection XI (1963)

Sculptor Edward Robinson writes that:

All works of visual art may be thought of as “forms of silence”; they have no voice, they use no words, yet they can still ‘speak’ to us. ... Art ... can be an embodiment, an incarnation, of a mystery: a mystery which Christians believe is both concealed and revealed in all aspects of the natural world.²⁰

Let me reflect more on what this contemplative silence means in an ecological context.

In her book, *Writing the Icon of the Heart: In Silence Beholding*, Anglican hermit and theologian Maggie Ross focuses on the significance of what it means “to behold”, as a way of focusing that’s open to the grace of God in all the created wonder of the world. She points out that in Hebrew and Greek versions of the Bible, the imperative form of the world “behold” occurs more than 1300 times. She observes that “After God has blessed the newly created humans, the first word he speaks to them directly is ‘Behold’ (Gen. 1:29).”²¹ By contrast, in the New Revised Standard Version the word ‘behold’ appears only 27 times in the Old Testament and the Apocrypha, and not at all in the New Testament. Translated as “see” or “look”.

Ross writes that

Silence and beholding are our natural state. ... It was in the context of beholding that we were given stewardship of the earth; it is in the context of distraction that we have (mis)managed it. As the pace of contemporary life accelerates and the rising tide of noise degrades the biosphere, the need to recover and, more especially, to teach and practice silence and seeking into the beholding becomes even more critical.²²

This contemplative beholding asks of us the hardest thing of all in our modern culture of busy striving and activity. It asks everything of us by asking nothing of us.

Writing in the early 1950s, German Catholic philosopher Josef Pieper called for a rediscovery of leisure, as a way of opening culture to a sense of wonder and transcendence. He contrasts Kant’s view of philosophy as work with the Greek and medieval view that the acquisition of knowledge “included an element of pure, receptive contemplation, or as Heraclitus says, of ‘listening to the essence of things’.”²³ For Pieper, this calls for a rediscovery of leisure as

a form of silence, of that silence which is the prerequisite of the apprehension of reality: only the silent hear and those who do not remain silent do not hear. Silence, as it is used in this context, does not mean ‘dumbness’ or ‘noiselessness’; it means more nearly that the soul’s power to ‘answer’ to the reality of the world is left undisturbed.²⁴

Leisure is not, he writes, “a Sunday afternoon idyll, but the preserve of freedom, of education and culture, and of that undiminished view of humanity which views the world as a whole”²⁵

The leisure that Pieper describes is not a luxury but a necessity if we are to learn how to live differently. It’s a letting go of much that we deem to be important, our priorities, our aims and objectives, our ambitions, and this is a painful process. It involves learning to listen to what George Eliot calls “that roar which is the other side of silence”.²⁶

The River of Tears

Swiss philosopher Max Picard, writing of the relationship between language, truth and silence in his enigmatic and beautiful book *The World of Silence* ([1948] 1964) writes: “On the river of tears man travels back into silence”.²⁷

A capacity for grief and mourning is inseparable from a capacity for wonder and thanksgiving, and this is particularly true of ecological awareness. So much has been lost that will never be restored. So much that we regard as fundamental to our well-being is

being called into question. A dark shadow hangs over the future, and it's hard not to feel anguish for the world we're bequeathing to future generations. We should not turn away from that anguish, for we cannot truly change if we cannot truly mourn.

Psychoanalyst Sally Weintrobe, in her book *Psychological Roots of the Climate Crisis*, argues that neoliberalism thrives in what she calls a "culture of uncare",²⁸ by way of which sadness is nipped in the bud before it can ripen into the grief that is a necessary catalyst for change. She writes: "Care is under attack here, as to feel grief about the state of our world is to care about it."²⁹ She calls us to recognise that mourning is a necessary and healthy aspect of ecological awareness, as we recognise the extent of destruction and loss that our species has inflicted upon the planet and its many forms of life.

To take such insights seriously, means allowing ourselves to be drawn into helplessness and confusion. We know less than we thought, and we are discovering that the forms of technological knowledge we learned to cherish in modernity, with their illusory promises of progress, have lured us down a path of destruction. Before we can emerge from this time of crisis, we have to learn how to grieve. And I want to suggest that this might require a letting go of the certainties and platitudes that so often seem to be the public discourse of Christians.

For me, this river of tears that leads to heightened awareness is given eloquent expression in the recent writings of Australian musician and writer Nick Cave. Cave's life has been marked by heroin addiction and a rather chaotic history of relationships until he married Susie Bick in 1999. Bick and Cave had twin sons, Arthur and Earl. In 2015, fifteen year old Arthur fell from a cliff and died after experimenting with LSD. This plunged Cave into a crisis from which he is emerging as a profoundly wise and searching voice of Christian wisdom. He suffered a second loss when another of his sons, Jethro, died in 2022, but it was Arthur's death that pulverised and reshaped Cave's world, and opened up new dimensions of seeking and speaking about God.

An avid reader of the Bible, Cave prowls through the twilight zone of the Christian faith, bringing a dark and visceral voice to his yearning for God. His language couldn't be further removed from the banal sentimentality or self-righteous moralising that informs so much modern Christian discourse on the left as well as on the right.

Faith, Hope and Carnage, published in 2022, is a series of interviews that Cave did with journalist Seán O'Hagan.³⁰ He talks about the sense of rupture he felt after Arthur's death, and also of the impact of Covid and lockdown on his inner life. Referring to the change these events precipitated in his music, he says that he began to feel as if he was "hiding behind these neat, manicured narratives because I was afraid of the stuff that was boiling away inside me. I wanted to start writing songs that were truer somehow, that were authentic to my experience."³¹ I think many people who feel alienated from the institutional Church would echo those words. Weary of the moralising platitudes of an exhausted and anachronistic hierarchical institution, don't we often feel stuff boiling away inside us? I know I do. Cave says that his storylines "became more twisted, entangled, mutilated – the form itself became more traumatic."³²

With that in mind, I want to play a short extract from Nick Cave's song, [Running Horses](#), from his 2019 album *Ghosteen*. The album was written after Arthur's death, and the music is haunted by sorrow and yearning. The lyrics suggest this is not just about personal grief, but about a grief that expands to become a lament for all that has been lost in nature and spirit, It echoes much of what I've been saying about the draining away of a deep sense of meaning and mystery in modern life.

Sabbath Rest

Let me conclude now with a brief reflection on what a rediscovery of Sabbath Rest might mean for our culture.

I've referred earlier to Kate Rigby. Her book *Meditations on Creation in an Age of Extinction* is a study of the Hexamaeron of Basil the Great and other writings on the six days of creation. She includes the seventh day – the day of God's Sabbath rest – pointing out that the only reason it tends to be excluded is because of the way the chapters of Genesis are divided up, with the first six days being in Genesis 1, culminating in the creation of the human, and the seventh day being at the beginning of Genesis 2.

Rigby observes that

The culmination of the biblical story is not, in fact, the making of humankind, but God's day of rest and enjoyment of all that had come forth, with the collaboration of sea and land, at the divine summons: the Sabbath day, in which we, too, are invited to join with the creator in celebrating the communion of all creatures – even now, even still, within an Earth for which we are being called ever more urgently to care and repair.³³

She cites Norman Wizbra's interpretation of medieval rabbi Rashi on the seventh day:

What was left unfinished was creation's purpose, which is why on the seventh day God created *menuha*, a term we can translate as the tranquility, serenity, and peace of God. What *menuha* communicates is the happiness and contentment that come from experiencing and knowing that things are as they ought to be, and that they are primordially and constitutively good. What *menuha* teaches is that the point and purpose of creaturely life is for it to be cherished and celebrated.³⁴

This is the kind of tranquility that Pieper associates with leisure, which he says is inseparable from worship:

Culture depends for its very existence on leisure, and leisure, in its turn, is not possible unless it has a durable and consequently living link with the cultus, with divine worship.³⁵

For me, this raises questions about the commodification of time which dissolves any sense of Sabbath rest or difference, crowding every possible space of contemplative rest and silence with the consumption of goods, including activities deemed to offer leisure. Only when Mammon becomes Lord of the Sabbath is it possible to evade the mystery of the being of God that manifests itself when our own way of being as ceaselessly, frenetically doing is arrested and held captive before the tedium of the infinite.

We are perhaps not so different from the targets of Basil's polemic in his Hexamaeron, when he pours scorn on inhabitants of towns with their insatiable pursuit of entertainment through theatres and sports:

And shall we, whom the Lords the Great Worker of marvels, calls to the contemplation of His Own works, tire of looking at them, or be slow to hear the words of the Holy Spirit? Shall we not rather be carried back in mind to the times of old, shall we not view all the order of creation?³⁶

I conclude with Mary Oliver reading her poem, [*The Summer Day*](#).

NOTES:

- 1 Quoted on the Frontispiece of Sally Weintrobe, *Psychological Roots of the Climate Crisis: Neoliberal Exceptionalism and the Culture of Uncare* (New York, London, Oxford, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), p. 29.
- 2 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
- 3 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*: Encyclical letter on Care for Our Common Home, 24 May, 2015: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html, accessed 25 April 2024.
- 4 Saint Basil the Great, *Hexameron: The Six Days*, trans. Phillip Schaff (Neptic Fathers Publication, printed in Great Britain by Amazon). Available online at <https://www.liturgies.net/saints/basil/hexameron.html>, accessed 25 April 2024.
- 5 Grace M. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 28
- 6 Saint Basil the Great, *Hexameron*, Homily III, No. 10, p. 39.
- 7 Saint Basil the Great, *Hexameron*, Homily I, No. 7, p. 9.
- 8 Kate Rigby, *Meditations on Creation in an Era of Extinction* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2023), p. 157.
- 9 Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, trans. Frank A. Capuzzi with J. Glenn Gray (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 217.
- ¹⁰ Carlo Rovelli, *There Are Places in the World Where Rules Are Less Important Than Kindness* (Penguin Books, 2020), p. ?
- 11 Mary Colwell, talk given at Catholic Women Speak Symposium, Pontifical University Antonianum, Rome, 1st October 2018.
- 12 Pope Francis, *Querida Amazonia*: post-synodal apostolic exhortation, 2 February, 2020: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20200202_querida-amazonia.html, accessed 25 April 2024.
- 13 Quoting Vinicius de Moraes, *Para vivir un gran amor*, Buenos Aires, 2013, p. 166.
- 14 For a discussion of this painting, see Constanze Kirchner, *Paradiesgärtlein: Little Garden of Paradise* at <https://www.explore-vc.org/en/objects/paradiesgaertlein-little-garden-of-paradise.html>, accessed 25 April 2024.
- ¹⁵ The painting is in the Frankfurt Städelsches Kunstinstitut. For a detailed analysis of this painting, see Rose-Marie Hagen and Rainer Hagen, *What the Great Paintings Say*, Volume 1 (Köln: Taschen GmbH, 2003), pp. 12-19. In what follows, I query the identification of some of the saints made by Hagen and Hagen.
- ¹⁶ Stanley Stewart, *The Enclosed Garden: The Tradition and the Image in Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, ...), quoted in Winston-Allen, p. 92.
- ¹⁷ See the somewhat dated and not consistently reliable account in Eithne Wilkins, *The Rose-Garden Game* (London, 1969), which refers to this painting. See also Anne Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose: The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, 1997).
- ¹⁸ Cf Richard Luckett, 'St. Cecilia and Music', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, Vol. 99 (1972-1973): pp. 15-30, p. 20.
- ¹⁹ See Tina Beattie, "Mary in Patristic Theology" in Sarah Jane Boss (ed.), *Mary: The Complete Resource* (London: Continuum, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007)
- ²⁰ Edward Robinson, *Forms of Silence* (2007), p. 5.
- 21 Maggie Ross, *Writing the Icon of the Heart: In Silence Beholding* (The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2009), p. 10
- ²² Ross, *Writing the Icon of the Heart*, p. 11.
- ²³ Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, trans. Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), p. 28 [Kindle edition]
- ²⁴ Pieper, *Leisure*, p. 46
- ²⁵ Pieper, *Leisure*, p. 33.
- ²⁶ George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 194.
- ²⁷ Max Picard, *The World of Silence*, (Gateway, 1961), p. 59.
- ²⁸ Weintrobe, *Psychological Roots*, p. 166.
- ²⁹ Weintrobe, *Psychological Roots*, p. 163.
- ³⁰ Nick Cave and Sean O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2022)

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- ³¹ Cave, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, p. ?
- ³² Cave, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, p. ?
- ³³ Rigby, *Meditations on Creation*, p. xxxiv.
- ³⁴ Rigby, *Meditations on Creation*, p. 177.
- ³⁵ Pieper, *Leisure*, p. 15.
- ³⁶ Saint Basil the Great, *Hexaemeron*, Homily III, No. 10, p. 41.