

critique

A Ransom Fellowship Publication 2016 Issue 2



CRITIQUE



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Except where noted, all articles are by Denis Haack.

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COVER IMAGE

Piss Christ by Andres Serrano, 1987, photo; reproduced here courtesy of the artist.

God's Compliment



The conversation occurred in a class on art and faith. The leader had begun by reviewing some of the various forms of art found in the scriptures and, though that was not a new exercise for me, the extent of the list was a nice reminder of the significance of human creativity to God.

Speaking of the scriptures and creation, the leader mentioned that, "Truth is not always communicated in the most obvious way." By that he meant most obvious way to us. We moderns prefer truth limited to unambiguous, sharply defined, logical statements like we find in software manuals for dummies. Instead, God speaks to us not just in propositions but also in art and beauty.

"It's an insult," someone commented, "when people over-explain things to us." To always put things in the simplest form is fine for little children, but it gets tedious and pedantic when we do it for the mature. So when God reveals himself in art in creation and in scripture, it is God's compliment to us. He gives us true truth, but in a form that requires reflection and creativity to comprehend and receive.

God condescends to us because we

are finite. Limited beings cannot hope to understand the full glory of God; even perfect finite creatures do not have the capacity to comprehend the infinity that is God. So, God condescends to us in gracious love so we can come face to face with his truth and presence and not be destroyed. And then in a further act of gracious love, in his condescension he does not treat us as infants who must always be spoon-fed pureed food. He condescends to us but never speaks down to us.

It is a divine compliment when God, who created us in his image, reveals himself to us in a way that takes that image in us seriously. Compliments need to be accepted graciously. Rather than fret over finding texts of scripture that prove allusive, we can receive them with gratitude while acknowledging how much we do not comprehend. Rather than hurry past the beauty in creation and biblical story and metaphor, we can do what is necessary in our busy world to stop and wait patiently, and wait some more until we come to know him better. ■

CORRECTION

Hi Denis,

Critique 2015:6 is a fine read, as always!

One sentence to look at more carefully. Maybe I am missing something, but on p.11 third paragraph:

No, because there is not one square inch of created reality over which Christ proclaims, "This is mine" -- and that bookstore is included under his sovereignty.

I think there is a word missing in that sentence. :)

Take care!

Rick Mattson

InterVarsity Staff

Dear Rick:

Good eye. Indeed, there are a couple words missing. It should read: *No, because there is not one square inch of created reality over which Christ does not proclaim, "This is mine"—and that bookstore is included under his sovereignty. Thanks.*

Seeing Beyond the Traces

One of the things I love about winter in Minnesota is how tracks are left to tell a story in newly fallen snow.

In urban settings this can be limited to the tracks of humans and their dogs, these quickly obliterated on sidewalks by crowds of footsteps or when the snow is cleared. The stories told are also limited—of unknown destinations, exercise, busyness, and the various types of shoes and boots preferred by the passers by. In such settings one must work at seeing more delicate traces, of bird tracks along the top of a garden wall, or the prints of a rat disappearing behind a dumpster, or that of a chipmunk who came upon the remnants of an apple left by an office worker under a bench in a city park. Limited traces with limited stories, though it can be surprising how much we can come to see if we are willing to slow down, look, and then look some more.

I am blessed—that's the correct word—to live near a major urban area (Minneapolis/St. Paul) but on the edge of a large (46 acres) park with steep ravines falling down to a wandering river, heavily wooded except for a small picnic area and softball field. My office looks down into one of those ravines, and from my desk I can see no human habitation unless I crane my neck off to the side. Red fox and coyote, wild turkey and deer, owls, hawks and bald eagles, raccoons and woodchucks, chipmunks, red and gray squirrels, field mice and voles all live in these woods, along with a myriad birds drawn to the feeders we keep stocked on our deck. The possibilities for tracks in snow are almost limitless. It's the first thing I check each morning after snow has fallen. And as we patiently watch, slowly the stories behind the tracks come into view so that we learn of hidden dens, foraging

patterns, what is preying on what, and how different species adapt to changing weather and the activity of humans.

One of the earliest tracks to appear in our yard each winter is not actually a track, as in footprints, but just a faint trace that something has traveled beneath the surface of the snow. A diminutive, long, wandering line of slightly raised snow begins in the weeds at the edge of the woods and snakes across the lawn to a flowerbed along the foundation of our house. It's a large bed edged with bricks, full of perennials and so, full of seeds and vegetation that voles and field mice find attractive. Their tunnels never break the surface as they engineer a series of roadways under the snow between their burrows and sources of food or plant fiber for their nests during the months when nothing is growing. It's a trace of life beyond what I can see directly but is not less real or significant for being hidden. God's creatures, I never see them but the tunnels inform me they are my neighbors.

Wild turkeys walk out of the woods to search for seeds under our bird feeders. The red polls, chickadees, goldfinches, and woodpeckers are messy eaters. They pick through what's offered, flicking away whatever does not interest them, and fling little flurries of seed into the air when they fly away. If the snow is wet rather than powdery, the turkey tracks will be clear and sharp in the snow, a steady line disturbed by sidesteps to investigate something just off their path. Sometimes it is a little flock, their tracks working back and forth across each other, slowly picking their way across part of our lawn and then back into the safety of the woods.

Sometimes the tracks I see suggest a more sinister story. In the spring

raccoons make their way onto our deck. One night my wife left her wine glass out by mistake. The next morning there was dirt in the bottom of the glass, and Cabernet Sauvignon footprints scattered across the deck. The raccoons are the reason we must bring the bird feeders in each evening. We will need to move these masked visitors away from our property if we are to raise chickens in the backyard.

The tracks I see in the snow always suggest a story, a meaning that I cannot see but that nevertheless is part of the reality in which I live. Ordinary things are a signal of something else, a sign of whatever it is they signify. Reading involves this experience. The word "you" is nothing more than marks of black ink on a page—or glowing pixels if you are reading this on a computer screen—but it signifies something real that is beyond itself. Ordinary things, in other words, point beyond themselves.

Sometimes the track itself is so hidden as to be, for all practical purposes, invisible. Two blocks from our home on the edge of the woods is a pond. Little rivulets feed into it, flowing more strongly after a rain or in the spring when the snow melts. Canadian geese, little flocks of ducks, and coots live there during the summer and visit occasionally in winter when there are open stretches of water. Except for a few migrating species, the ducks are primarily mallards. Each year I see little flocks of ducklings following their mother in a neat line, peeping as she leads them out onto the pond. What remains hidden from me is the nest. I know it must be nearby since the ducklings are much too small to have walked far and they cannot yet fly. The ducklings tell me that the nest is close by, but I have never spotted one. Mallard

nests remain cunningly hidden—and the story behind that is amazing. British naturalist John Lister-Kaye explains ways the mallard has adapted to thrive in a world of fierce and numerous predators—six remarkable defense adaptations that no other species of bird can match.

...defense adaptation number one is the camouflaged plumage of the duck and her ability to freeze. I have stepped on a nesting mallard before she flew up. Number two is the wide diversity of habitats in which she can nest: woods, marshes, fields, scrub and thickets, in gardens, up against walls, in old hollow logs, in drifts of leaves... The list goes on and on. Many species are tied to one particular habitat. Not so the mallard, and she will learn by harsh experience which nesting sites are successful and which to avoid. Adaptation number three is her cunning laying technique. She can lay only one egg per day, so she lays it in her carefully prepared nest and covers it with down. Then she heads back to the water and safety. She doesn't return to the nest until she's ready to drop another egg, thereby keeping her presence at the nest to an absolute minimum. She keeps this up for as long as three weeks, sometimes laying as many as fifteen eggs. During that time her giveaway presence at the nest has been absolutely minimal, a few hours only, every time carefully covering the clutch with down from her own breast, then with grass and leaves. But that's not the end of it. Adaptation number four is another cunning ploy. For the safety of her chicks it is vital that they all hatch together, within a matter of an hour or two, so that she can lead them to water together (we have all witnessed the endearing sight of a mother leading them across a main road). So, once the



clutch is complete, she covers it up, then abandons it to allow all the eggs to cool to exactly the same temperature. This ensures that none of them starts to develop until she brings them back up to 37.5 ° Celsius. She can leave them for as long as three weeks before returning to begin incubation. This secret hoard of concealed eggs, if undiscovered, must mean there is no trace of duck scent emanating from the eggs, or anywhere near the nest. She sneaks back in, settles, bares her brood patches and begins the long twenty-eight-day incubation. If she has to leave the nest she covers it over again and is away for the shortest time she can to keep herself fed and watered. Adaptation number five is her ability, apparently unfazed by losing an entire clutch of eggs first time round, to find another site and, within a few weeks, build a new nest and lay another clutch. The same thing could happen several times, but mallard ducks don't give up. Despite being hit over and over again by predators, eventually she will raise a duckling or two to replace herself. But the trump card she has, adaptation number six, is not just her laudable and obstinate refusal to give up (it breaks my heart to see a clutch of twelve ducklings successfully hatched and, within a few hours, down to eight, then to five, and finally one if it's lucky), it is her longevity.

In captivity mallard have survived in breeding condition for twenty years. In the hazardous wild it is likely to be much less, but assuming an average lifespan of only eight years, during that time a duck can produce hundreds of ducklings. Even though only one or two may survive each year, if she herself survives, by the time she succumbs she may well have replaced herself and her mate many times over.

Other species can't do that. [167–68]

I've never gone trooping through the marsh and woods at the edge of the pond, and don't intend to do so—the ducks have enough creatures searching for their nests without me trying to catch a glimpse. Still, the little lines of ducklings swimming behind their mothers remain a sign to me of a hidden nest, a reality unseen but nevertheless real.

And then there are the goldfinches. I do not know why they have particularly caught my attention and captured my heart, but they have. One of our feeders is dedicated to them, filled with Niger seed—mistakenly thought to be thistle, the fruit or achene of *Guizotia abyssinica*. I love their calls, their winter and summer plumage (unlike most birds they molt twice each year), their squabbling at the feeder, and I have long seen them as a sign of the divine, a golden signal of transcendence.

*Atoms dead could never thus
Stir the human heart of us
Unless the beauty that we see
The veil of endless beauty be,
Filled full of spirits that have trod
Far hence along the heavenly sod
And seen the bright footprints of God.*

[From "Song" by C. S. Lewis]

The idea that signs exist in nature to point to ultimate reality is an ancient conviction. It arises, I would argue, from our experience of life. All around us are things and events that point beyond themselves to something else. We see tracks in new fallen snow and know where the toddler has wandered. Averted eyes are, in one case, a sign of love, and in another tell us a lie has just been told. Tears can be a sign of pain and grief or joy and happiness, and our

ability to discern which one is essential for mature and lasting relationships. Meaning and significance quickly leach from ordinary reality if nothing serves as a sign for something greater.

This is not a new idea even if it happens to be new to us, or something we have not considered with care. In his poem, C. S. Lewis is saying the same thing that the Hebrew poet affirmed so long ago. "The heavens declare the glory of God," David wrote, "and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (Psalms 19:1). The biblical flood narrative, one of the oldest stories in scripture, echoes in the myths of numerous people groups around the world and concludes with a divinely identified sign. "I have set my rainbow in the clouds," God says, "and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth" (Genesis 9:13). Centuries later, during a time of uncertainty because armies threatened to invade, the seer Ezekiel was commanded to perform what we would call street theater today. Ezekiel thus became at God's command a "sign" to the people of God that ruinous exile awaited them (Ezekiel 12:11). When angelic beings broke into the view of the shepherds to announce the birth of the long promised Messiah, they were not simply asked to believe. "And this will be a sign for you," the shepherds were told, "you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:12). I would have thought that seeing joyous angels was sign enough, but apparently not. The shepherds were to look for very ordinary things and know that, in seeing them, they were seeing the fulfillment of promises made by prophets over many centuries. They went into Bethlehem, we are told, saw, and believed (2:20).

The fact that signs exist, of course,

does not mean they will be seen as signals. We may be so distracted and busy that we fail to spot the little tracks in the new fallen snow. Would the story be different if the shepherds had cell phones? Even before he performed his street drama, God warned Ezekiel that he was acting before an unresponsive audience. “Son of man,” God said, “you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house” (Ezekiel 12:2). They watched the performance but failed to see or comprehend the sign.

When I point to the lovely goldfinches at my birdfeeder as brief glimpses of glory, as little signals of transcendence, there are voices in our world that would find my witness to be unconvincing and incomprehensible. The voices influenced by the long and venerable tradition of eastern thought adopt a monism that defines ultimate reality as spiritual, and so tend to see physical phenomena as illusion. Enlightenment severs me from the imprisoning physical so I can be free to merge into the impersonal oneness of all things. Here things are less signs of the transcendent but rather distractions from the spiritual. On the other hand, the voices influenced by modern naturalism adopt a monism that sees all reality limited to only the physical. Assuming there is nothing beyond the narrow limits of space/time in the here/now, all of reality simply is in an impersonal cosmos. Here things cannot, by definition, be signs, and the very notion of signs is nothing more than random firings in my synapses that bear no meaning.

The monism of both east and west represent too large a leap of faith for me. That the goldfinches are insignificant

illusions or meaningless objects strikes me as totally insufficient as a reasonable explanation of reality. As a Christian I believe in both physical and spiritual reality, the seen and the unseen, and so the long tradition of finding signals of transcendence in some physical things—like my lovely goldfinches—requires no stretch of the imagination and no mental gymnastics in my metaphysics.

On the other hand, I realize that no amount of argument will make someone else see goldfinches as signs, as signals of transcendence. If someone is blind to it, it makes no sense to say they are wrong. At least it makes no sense in terms of helping them to see with greater clarity. It is true, as St. Paul argues in his letter to the church in Rome, that there is an active refusal of the truth involved in unbelief.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (ESV, Romans 1:18–21)

Or consider Eugene Peterson’s translation of this text:

But God’s angry displeasure erupts as acts of human mistrust and wrongdoing and lying accumulate, as people try to put a shroud over truth. But the basic reality of God is plain enough. Open

your eyes and there it is! By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can’t see: eternal power, for instance, and the mystery of his divine being. So nobody has a good excuse. What happened was this: People knew God perfectly well, but when they didn’t treat him like God, refusing to worship him, they trivialized themselves into silliness and confusion so that there was neither sense nor direction left in their lives (THE MESSAGE, Romans 1:18–21).

This is a true analysis of the process of unbelief, but imagining that we can reason someone into seeing something as a signal of transcendence does not follow. Unbelief produces blindness, and no blind person has ever been made to see by argument.

In fact, unbelievers can even witness miraculous signs and remain unmoved. St. John tells us that, when Jesus changed water into wine at a celebration in Cana, it was “the first of his signs” as he “manifested his glory” (John 2:11). Even his religious enemies noted the signs he performed. “So the chief priests and the Pharisees,” John records, “gathered the Council and said, ‘What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him.’” (11:47–48). Even Herod, a ruler in the service of Rome was eager to interview Jesus “hoping to see some sign done by him” (Luke 23:8).

And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. He answered them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’

You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." So he left them and departed (Matthew 16:1–4).

Jesus was not being difficult. Rather, the Jewish leaders had all they needed to know to believe in Jesus but they refused. They acknowledged Jesus "performs many signs," but since he did not meet their messianic expectations and called them to repentance they were unmoved. Yet even here Jesus extended grace, offering them "the sign of Jonah." Just as the ancient prophet had descended into the watery depths of death and lived, so Jesus would die and three days later rise from the dead. And yet it continues—though the historical evidence for the resurrection is really very compelling so many hear of it yet do not believe.

Apart from the signs Jesus' contemporaries witnessed or heard about the greatest sign before them was Jesus himself. In the opening section of his Gospel, St. John identifies him as the very word of God. This means that as those Jewish leaders stood before Jesus they were in the presence of that word. When they listened to him speak they experienced the word. And when they looked at him as he turned and walked away they equally experienced the word. He is the word, the ultimate signal of transcendence, the final sign but they were unable to see.

All creation is called into existence by God so all creation reflects his glory, which means that signals of transcendence can be found across all of life and reality. Some are touched or moved by things in nature, a flower or goldfinch

or nebula. Others find traces of glory in human creativity, in art, humor, play, science, technology, and the myriad crafts that bring utility and beauty into the common tasks of daily existence. And then there are the deep yearnings that are so rooted in the heart and imagination that they are indistinguishable from our humanity—the yearning for a father, for a home, and for love that will not leave with the morning light. The inexhaustible desire for justice, the insistent search for meaning, the hopefulness that is born with the birth of a child—all of which are present even when warfare, famine, plague, drought, and flood ravage the countryside.

I have no data for this, no research to back this claim, but my experience tells me that the Millennial generation is more open to signals of transcendence than their Boomer parents. I think this is true for those both inside and outside the church. It's not so much that Boomers are more committed to naturalism than their children but that we have settled for too little, content to be distracted and diverted with busyness and things. Millennials grew up in our homes but are not impressed and are unwilling to live as if everything is limited to the here and now. They are haunted by myths and experiences that whisper there might in fact be something more.

Certain authors capture the reality of signals and signs with particular clarity. Read Wendell Berry's poetry, for example, and you will see what I mean. Or read the prose of Annie Dillard. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974) is a meditation on Dillard's observations along a small creek over the course of the year. Little creatures, frogs, and moths both fascinate and point beyond themselves. "Nothing is going to

happen in this book," she writes in *Holy the Firm* (1977). "There is only a little violence here and there in the language, at the corner where eternity clips time" (p. 24). Dillard cannot look out without seeing things as signs, traces of the supernatural in the ordinary things of life and nature.

Would that I could see as clearly as Berry and Dillard do. Reflecting on all this reminds me to be grateful for all the ways there are traces of God that appear around me in this broken world. It reminds me to order my life so that I do not miss the signals of transcendence that are in my path. It reminds me to develop the wise disciplines of observation and waiting that permit my view of reality to have greater clarity. And it reminds me to listen carefully and ask questions when my non-Christian friends mention something that suggests they have spotted a sign and wonder what it means. ■

Sources:

This essay was prompted by my reading Echoes of a Voice (Cascade Book, 2014) by James Sire and Fool's Talk (InterVarsity Press, 2015) by Os Guinness. Consider these two books to be the footnote for everything I have written here.

Gods of the Morning: A Bird's-Eye View of a Changing World by John Lister-Kaye (New York, NY: Pegasus Books; 2015)

Spirits In Bondage: A Cycle Of Lyrics, XXVI: "Song" by Clive Hamilton [C.S. Lewis] (Heinemann 1919, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1984, Public Domain) available online Gutenberg Project (www.gutenberg.org/files/2003/2003-h/2003-h.htm). Though I was previously aware of this poem, I was reminded of it by Sire in Echoes.



Serrano's *Piss Christ* Reconsidered

by Edward Knippers

I first became aware of Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* in a conversation with Howard Fox, then curator of contemporary art at the L.A. County Museum. I was inquiring to see if Fox might consider curating an exhibition of Christian art on the west coast. As it turned out, he was to show the *Piss Christ* in Los Angeles and, using it as an example, wanted to know how broadly I might define Christian art.

To consider a crucifix, even a plastic one, submerged and photographed in the artist's urine as Christian art was a stretch for me. It proved to be an even greater problem for the believing Christian community in North America as the *Piss Christ* was paired with Robert Mapplethorpe's *X Portfolio*, a truly pornographic series of photographs, to become the centerpiece of the controversy over the American public funding for the arts. For many, the *Piss Christ* became a symbol for the secular assault and hatred against the Christian faith.

The pain of that assault was made even more acute for the Christian, as it was clear that the culture wars were not being engaged on a level playing field. Would the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), a government agency, equally fund a piece of art that held up a feminist icon for ridicule? Or a piece that clearly was a pro-life statement? Or a piece that was a non-ironic Christian image based on the tradition of a thousand years of art in the West? Most likely not. And yet it seemed that any conceivable perversion or blasphemy was up for a positive evaluation for funding with public monies at the NEA.

It was an especially difficult time for a serious Christian artist. On the one hand, the art culture seemed to praise the shock value of an artist's work as a measure of its merit. On the other hand,

the art world was being attacked by Christians who had rarely seen art as having importance. In the midst of this, was it possible to see Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* with any clarity at all?

The image in and of itself is quite beautiful as we see a crucifix almost nostalgically glowing in a golden mist of timelessness. It is the title that offends. In our social context to deliberately pee on a person or thing is a degrading act used to show extreme disrespect. When the golden mist of nostalgia is transposed in the mind to yellow offal, it is a profound jolt to the emotions. For us, urine is a nasty human necessity that should be thought about as little as possible.

It doesn't help to intellectualize it, seeing the yellow liquid as an agent for whitening as did the ancient Romans, or as having medicinal properties as did Mahatma Gandhi. It doesn't help to know that Serrano's artistic vocabulary often incorporates bodily fluids or that he was reared as a Roman Catholic and still declares himself to be a Christian. Nor does it help to know that in this piece he may have been attacking the reducing of one of Christianity's most precious and seminal moments to a plastic trinket. To try to hold something as dirty as piss and an object of holiness positively together in the mind is a bridge too far for most of us to cross. Emotionally, Christ has been pissed upon.

Yet, at the time of the Christian year when I'm writing, Lent, we are to contemplate the fact that God in Christ has degraded himself by coming from the heights of heaven to the lowest cesspools of his fallen creation. During these 40 days, we are told to consider what Flannery O'Connor has called 'the sweat and stink of the cross.' Now, think

again about the *Piss Christ*. In the light of Lent, is not this 'disgraceful' art object somehow transformed from blasphemy into a statement of truth, even divine truth? I think that it is. I cannot help but see it as an instructive object that strips away our comfortable romantic clutter that leads to chocolate Easter eggs, and releases the incarnation so that we can once again wrestle with the hard reality of what Christ has done for us. I think that Serrano's piece powerfully holds before us the fact that our Lord has entered into all of our filthiness in order to reach us with his love.

No matter what Serrano's intent or what this piece has become through the crucible of the culture wars, at this distance in time, from all of the shouting and wounded feelings of hard fought battles, the *Piss Christ* has become for me an elegant statement of the Christian truth that should be at the heart of our contemplation during the Lenten season: the fact that our dear Lord and Savior has come, and is here, to powerfully redeem the likes of us with his love. Andres Serrano has given us a truly remarkable and appropriate image for our penitential journey. May our Lord add his increase to our understanding of the truth of this image, so that we might have a deeper walk with him. ■

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Andres Serrano (b. 1950, New York) is an American photographer who studied art, notably photography, at the Brooklyn Museum in 1967–69 and later acknowledged that in the 1970s he was a drug dealer and addict in New York City. He returned to photography in the early 1980s, presenting large-scale color images concentrating on dramatic and provocative figural compositions. The intensity of these images evoked for the artist the images of Christ's Passion that he had

observed growing up in a Hispanic, Roman Catholic home. An interest in bodily fluids—blood, urine, milk, semen—sometimes in isolation (*Milk, Blood*, 1986), sometimes combined with cruciform shapes or reproductions of statuary (*Blood Cross*, 1985), led the artist to create his infamous *Piss Christ*. This image was exhibited at the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art (SECCA) in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, in 1988 as part of that institution's Awards in the Visual Arts series, funded in part by the American National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Many viewers found the image profane and irreverent and further objected to the support of the NEA, which itself was funded by taxpayers. The public debate engendered by this and other provocative artworks caused the U.S. Congress to restrict grants to individual visual artists and to cut the NEA's funding by two-fifths. (Encyclopedia Britannica)



Edward Knippers is a painter and printmaker living in Arlington, Virginia. His work has been included in over 150 exhibitions, including at the Virginia Museum, Richmond; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Cheekwood, Nashville, Tennessee; and the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art (SECCA). Knippers' art is included in numerous public and private collections including the Billy Graham Museum, Wheaton, Illinois; the University of Oklahoma Museum, Norman; the Vatican Museum of Contemporary Religious Art, Rome; and the Grunewald Print Collection at the Armand Hammer Museum in Los Angeles. *Violent Grace*, a retrospective, a monograph on his paintings, was recently published by Fresco Fine Art Books, Albuquerque, New Mexico (reviewed in *Critique* 2015:5). To learn more, visit www.edwardknippers.com; e-mail to ecknippers@aol.com.



A Storybook Bible for Grownups



I've plagiarized the title for this review—it's the subtitle of a new book from Square Halo Books—*Revealed: A Storybook Bible for Grownups*. I have more to say about it, but here is my conclusion: if you don't order a copy, you are missing out on a delightful and beautiful book that will deepen and enrich you, spiritually and imaginatively, while providing a lovely opportunity to strike a blow against the deadly hurriedness of modern life.

The format of *Revealed* is simple and effective, adding to the attractiveness of the large-size (9 x 10 inches) volume. Each two-page spread follows the same layout. The left page includes two pieces of text, a passage of scripture and a brief explanation of or reflection on the artwork that appears as a full-page illustration on the right page. Thus, *Revealed* can be profitably read from beginning to end (the texts follow the biblical narrative), or opened to any two-page spread that can be enjoyed as an individual meditation. Either way, the reader will have all they need to reflect on a scriptural text and a piece of serious art that is based on it.

The art in *Revealed* includes woodcuts, linocuts, etchings, engravings, lithographs, drypoint, monoprints, and an occasional collage. All these formats are designed to work well in black and white, so the lack of color in *Revealed*, rather than being detrimental, allows greater appreciation of these often underappreciated art forms. Some of the artwork was made specifically for the book and most were created recently (by contemporary artists such as Edwards Knippers and Ned Bustard), while a few were created in previous centuries (by artists including Rembrandt, Albrecht Durer, and William Blake). Drawing on the work of a number of

artists allows us to be exposed to a rich variety of styles and thus deepen our appreciation of diverse approaches that span the fifteenth to the twenty-first centuries. Some are delicate with fine lines, intricate detail, and realistic; while others are bold, stark, minimal, and expressionistic. All are worthy of unhurried reflection.

Revealed does not include all of scripture, just 122 carefully chosen passages from Genesis to Revelation. In making his choice of biblical texts, Bustard followed clearly defined criteria: he chose passages we normally tend to skim over or skip entirely because they make us uncomfortable. If you've read the Bible, you'll have noticed them: stories of mayhem, cruelty, violence, abuse, rape, murder, incest, betrayal, stupidity, implausible miracles, and drunkenness. "Scripture does not flinch when confronted with evil or beauty," Bustard writes.

Every sphere of life is addressed by God's Word, including the unrepresentable parts. God is God over mountains and valleys, joys and sorrows, beautiful births and violent deaths, the marriage bed and the dark alley. If we don't depict the "naughty bits," the great Story of the Bible becomes bland and weak. It loses not only its power but also its veracity, forced to abide in a half life of half truths.

Christ came to save the lost...not the misplaced. A book that does not address the deep depravities and gut-wrenching sorrows of the human condition is no good to any of us, believer or unbeliever alike.

Bustard is making a strong claim here. He is claiming, implicitly, that we should not be surprised that scripture includes passages that make

us uncomfortable. Rather, this is precisely what we should expect if it is God's revelation of himself to a fallen humanity. And Bustard is claiming, explicitly, that we ignore the discomfiting passages at our peril. Doing so weakens the biblical witness for unbelievers and cuts us off from texts that, according to St. Paul, are meant for our growth (see 2 Timothy 3:16). Bustard does not simply take the scriptures seriously; he takes all the scriptures seriously, and challenges all of us who name the Name of Christ to do the same.

In a brief review of *Revealed* for the journal *First Things*, novelist J. Mark Bertrand says this about it:

I recommend it for the artists, skeptics, and moralists in your life—the artists because they'll enjoy it, the skeptics and moralists because they'll benefit from the challenge. Revealed takes a warts-and-all approach to the Bible, illuminating the difficult passages we sometimes want to forget, shaking the moralist's idea of Scripture as a safe inspirational guidebook and in the same breath contradicting the skeptic's belief that Bible cannot comprehend the truth about the world in all its messiness.

Thomas Jefferson is famous for producing his own version of the Bible, from which he snipped out all the passages that he found incredible. Is it possible that we have inadvertently followed Jefferson's example, not by physically cutting out texts but by quietly ignoring them?

A piece of art based on a passage of scripture is, in essence, an interpretation of the passage. Seen in this light, the artwork performs a similar function in *Revealed* as a meditation on the text in a devotional or an exposition in a commentary, while adding the element

of art and beauty. Hopefully, in each case, the interpretation serves both to give insight into the scripture and to prompt further reflection, study, and meditation. It both informs and invites, deepening our engagement with the text. Good visual art can act as a portal, an imaginative way into a story, so that we come to indwell it, perhaps in surprising ways, rather than merely assess it logically from the outside.

There is another reason to commend *Revealed*, a reason that is simultaneously biblical and countercultural. It is a book designed not simply to be read through and placed on a shelf, but a book to be lingered over and savored during times of unhurried meditation. We need such books in our hurried and busy world. *Revealed* may be a discomfiting book, but it is also a restful one. Like all that is truly valuable in life, scripture and art require us to slow down, to look and observe and then observe some more, and to wait quietly. These are disciplines of the wise, and almost the entire fabric of life in advanced modernity militates against them.

The Christian artist need not produce works based on texts of scripture, because Christ is Lord of all. Still, when Christian artists do produce such works, it can be a rich gift to the church and to the world. As an artist, Bustard has curated the art in *Revealed* with a keen eye, so that it fits within both the high standards of historic biblical orthodoxy and of good art.

We recommend *Revealed* to you. ■

Book recommended: *Revealed: A Storybook Bible for Grown-ups* by Ned Bustard (Baltimore, MD: Square Halo Books; 2015) 259 pages + artist bios.

On the next few pages, view sample pages from *Revealed*.

Available from Hearts and Minds Books, www.heartsandmindsbooks.com

For more information: www.SquareHaloBooks.com

RESOURCE

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Genesis 2:15-21

THE CREATION OF EVE

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

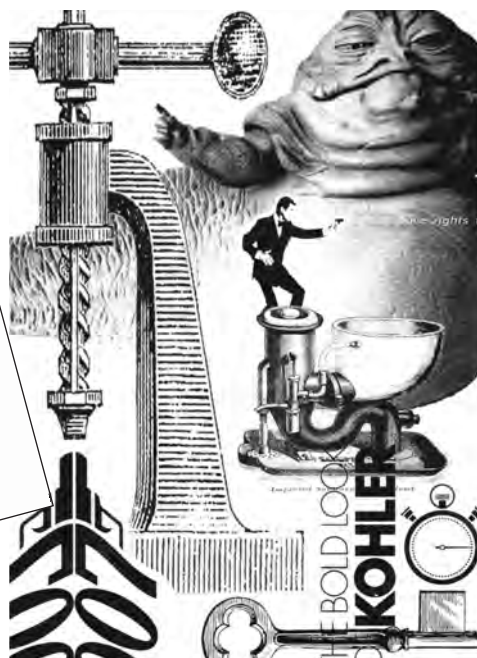
Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

Birth of Eve

ANONYMOUS | WOODCUT

This print is from the Cologne Bible. There were two Bibles printed at Cologne between 1478 and 1480. The illustrations in these Bibles served as patterns for many illustrations in later German, Italian, French, Dutch, and English Bibles. In this woodcut God is surrounded by the heavenly hosts as he breathes life into all of Creation—including unicorns and mermaids! In the center of the print God is shown helping Eve to stand, taking her from the rib of Adam. The woman was made to be a helper to the man in carrying out the calling of working in and caring for the Earth. "Helper" in the original Hebrew is the word *ezer*—a strong word used twenty-one times in the Old Testament; twice in the Creation account, three times as a military term, and sixteen times in reference to God himself.





Credits for the four works to the right, clockwise from upper left:

Ryan Stander: Ehud, lithograph; Judges 3:15-25

Diego Jourdan Pereira: Woman at the Well, woodcut; John 4:13-26

Steve Prince: Exodus: Bread from Heaven; Exodus 16:13-17, 31-35

Tanja Butler: Kisses, linocut; Song of Songs 1:2; 6:2-3; 7:6-9



Revelation 21:1-10
NEW JERUSALEM

Then I saw a new heaven and a new
the first earth had passed away, and the
the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down
prepared as a bride adorned for her husband
from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling
He will dwell with them, and they will be his
will be with them as their God. He will wipe
eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall
crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things
And he who was seated on the throne said
things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for
worthy and true." And he said to me, "It is done,
the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the
the spring of the water of life without payment,
will have this heritage, and I will be his God and
as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable,
sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars
in the lake that burns with sulfur, which is the
who had the seal of the living God."
saying, "Come. I will carry me away
the holy city Jerusalem, the glory of God
glory of God."

Creation

right writes, "The symbol for the verses here and with this complement about the good new heavens and it is remade: the twelve apostles of it. The ships of the Bridegroom."



earth, for the first heaven and
sea was no more. And I saw
out of heaven from God,
and. And I heard a loud voice
ing place of God is with man.
his people, and God himself
e away every tear from their
all there be mourning, nor
ings have passed away."
Behold, I am making all
r these words are trust
e! I am the Alpha and
hirsty I will give from
The one who conquers
he will be my son. But
is for murderers, the
h, their portion will be
s the second death."
even bowls full of
I will show you
ay in the Spirit to
rusalem coming

CUT
The last scene in the Bible is the new heaven and the new earth.
It is the marriage of Christ and his church. It's not just one
there which say this or that. It's an entire narrative which
mentarily so that a male-plus-female marriage is a signpost
ness of the original creation and God's intention for the
new earth." In this piece the woodcut from the beginning
four winds are now the four winged beasts, the beginning
four elders (represented by the symbols for the heavenly
es), and the Garden is now a City with the Tree of Life
(Tarshish from Isaiah 60 have arrived, and the Bride
m in joyful anticipation of the great Wedding Feast.



**Credits for the six works
on the opposite page, clockwise
from upper left:**

Chris Koelle: The Prodigal Son, etching;
Luke 15:11-24

Ryan Stander: We Got Spirit, Yes We
Do..., lithograph; Acts 2:29-39

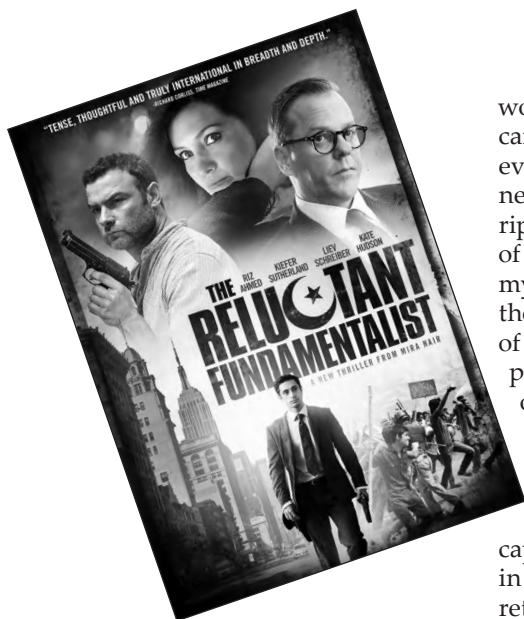
Tanja Butler: Bitter Herbs, linocut;
Matthew 26:17-30

Margaret Bustard: The Angel, linocut,
collage; Daniel 6:16-24

Steve Halla: None Remaining/The Edge
of the Sword, woodcut; Joshua 10:34-42

Henri Van Starten: Kruisweg, linocut;
Hebrews 9:12-22

When Views Collide



In our globalized and pluralistic world, opposing views of life and reality can collide, resulting in distrust, and even, sadly, violence. How I see my neighbor is not insignificant, and has ripple effects that flow out in all sorts of ways, for blessing and for curse. And my view of them is shaped in part by their view of things or my perception of their view, which is of course always partial and incomplete even in the best of circumstances.

Whether we are aware of it or not, our view of things flows out of fundamental ideas and values that we accept as right and obvious. A capitalist on Wall Street assumes that, in business, the bottom line is a good return for the shareholders, regardless of how many workers need to be fired in the process. A CIA operative assumes that rescuing a kidnapped agent is so obviously necessary that threatening the innocent family of an informant is a necessary if unfortunate part of the cost of conducting espionage in a dangerous world. A terrorist assumes that since the oppressors of his people cannot be repulsed by military force, only acts of random violence will drive them away.

Things get complicated—and potentially dangerous—when people must make life changing choices based not merely on their own fundamental convictions but also on what they perceive as another person's view of things. We watch our neighbors, conclude what their views must be, and then act, forgetting or ignoring that what we have seen of them may be only a part of their story. In little ways, all of us indwell this reality in our neighborhoods, our workplace, and in the public square. We dislike people for their political views even though we've never talked with them about it, or we think

our Eastern Orthodox workmate must not be a true believer because he or she venerates icons. The list could go on...

In the world of terrorism and espionage, however, the results can be fatal for individuals, for families, for communities, and potentially for entire nations. This is the story explored by *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

I use the word *explored* intentionally—*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* doesn't simply tell this story, it explores it. The film is designed to allow us to watch a story unfold, but from the point of view of several characters. Director Mira Nair constructs her film in a way that does not allow us to sit back passively and allow the story to simply be told. Instead, she uses several creative cinematic techniques to keep us wondering: partial scenes for which we are given more detail later in flashbacks, multiple subplots unpacked simultaneously, and allowing the film to display differing—even opposing—perspectives of the same thing by different characters. Nair draws us into the story, plays with our imagination, and requires us to commit ourselves, producing a spy thriller that is both satisfying and unsettling.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is satisfying because it is a story that engages us, and because it provides a deeper glimpse of the human condition that lies behind the headlines in the news. It is unsettling because it forces us to face our own frailty in how we view our neighbor, and it reminds us that reality is never neat and tidy, but messy and broken.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist may not be remembered as one of the great films of all time, but those who take the time to fulfill its demand to be discussed will be better for it. ■

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

1. What was your initial or immediate reaction to the film? Why do you think you reacted that way?
2. Consider *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a work of cinematic art. In what ways were the techniques of film-making (such as casting, direction, lighting, script, music, sets, action, cinematography, editing, etc.) used to get the film's message(s) across, or to make the message plausible or compelling? In what ways were they ineffective or misused?
3. The opening scene of the film intercuts images of a violent kidnapping with an extended musical performance. How would you describe the music? How was tension built towards the moment of the kidnapping? How effective was this to begin the story told in the film?
4. With whom did you identify in the film? Why? With whom were we meant to identify? How do you know? Discuss each main character in the film and their significance to the story.
5. What did you find most attractive about this film? Why? What was least attractive to you? Why?
6. Who might dislike and perhaps even be angered by *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*? What would you say to them?
7. As objectively as possible, state the message of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. With what do you agree? Why? With what do you disagree? Why?
8. Americans in post 9/11 are depicted as fearful, suspicious, and at times bigoted towards foreigners living in the U.S. To what extent do you believe this is true? Was Nair's depiction fair? Why or why not? To what extent have Christians shared this fear, suspicion, and bigotry? What feelings and behaviors should Christians demonstrate in an age of terrorism?
9. Some critics disliked *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* because of what they called its "ambiguous" ending. How would you respond to this criticism?
10. Though few of us may intersect with the world of espionage, high finance, and terrorism directly, all of us hold views of our neighbors that are shaped in part by our perception of their view of things. People's views of politics and candidates, religion, parenting and schooling, sexual mores, food and eating, and so much more all may help shape our view of them. And of course how we view people effects, consciously and unconsciously, how we treat them. Given this reality, what can we take away from *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*?
11. One's personal and national history naturally helps shape our view of the world. "Four thousand years ago," Changez says to Bobby Lincoln, "we, the people of the Indus River basin, had cities that were laid out on grids and boasted underground sewers, while the ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians." How might this effect the views of life, history, and the world held by Pakistanis? How does an American feel upon hearing this from a Pakistani?
12. When the Hebrew prophet Samuel was sent by God to anoint David king of Israel, God told him that "the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). This text says not merely that God's view of people is very different from ours, but that his view of them is more deeply probing into the deepest recesses of their being. Since, as his people, we desire as much as possible to see as he sees, what might we do to develop a more lovingly probing view of other people? ■



Film Credits: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Director: Mira Nair

Writers: Javed Akhtar (eulogy in Urdu), Ami Boghani (screen story), Mohsin Hamid (novel & screen story), William Wheeler (screenplay)

Producers: Ami Boghani, Hani Farsi, Lydia Dean Pilcher and others

Cinematography: Declan Quinn

Starring:

Riz Ahmed (Changez)

Liev Schreiber (Bobby Lincoln)

Kate Hudson (Erica)

Kiefer Sutherland (Jim Cross)

Om Puri (Abu)

USA, 2013, 130 minutes

Rated R (language, some violence and brief sexuality)