

CITYtheology

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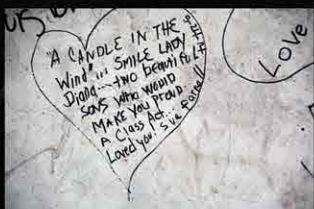
“Charles Wesley’s reference to how creation shines rings true for me as a photographer and theologian... Nature photographers are prone to chase the light, as they scan their surroundings for what might make for a great photo. The knowledge of Christ is also a kind of light...The light brings wisdom and insight into the issues that matter most.”

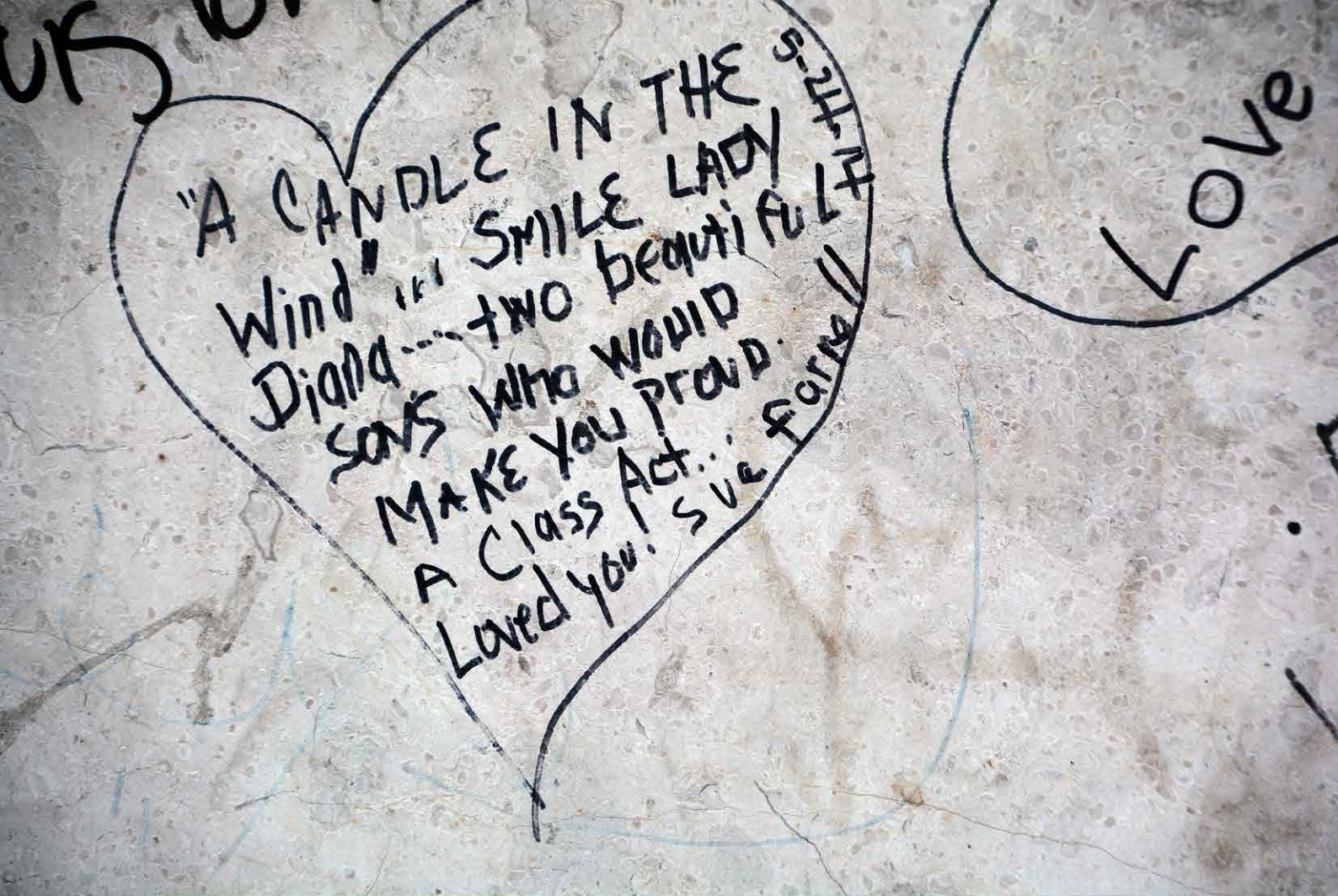
Thomas Jay Oord
on being a
photographer
theologian.

Remembering the Dead: Changing public and private practices

Reverend Tom Lusty reflects on Linda Woodhead’s Hook Lecture

Has the Reformation led to positive diversity? George Bailey examines the case
Testament talks Feminism & racial politics
Artist Shaeron Caton Rose asks how are we making our mark on the city?





Remembering the Dead: Changing public and private practices

Revd Tom Lusty, Vicar of St Chad's Far Headingley reflects on this year's Hook Lecture

If anyone is on the pulse of where we are at in terms of levels of religiosity as a nation it is Professor Linda Woodhead, who made the journey across the Pennines for this year's Hook Lecture to scrutinise recent changes in the nation's funeral arrangements and then make broader comments from her findings about "a fascinating period of change, innovation and recovery of the past".

In the recently published book *That was the Church that was* that she co-authored with Andrew Brown, there is a description of the rapid recent decline in attendance in the Church of England – it has fallen by half in the last four decades. So, I was braced for

a lecture as bleak as Atul Gawande's *Being Mortal*. In that book, Gawande describes the process of death from a medical and scientific perspective which makes for difficult reading. It seemed likely that a sociology of religion look at death might be just as bleak. But no, the main theme was not entirely about religion and belief being pushed to the margins, instead "something more interesting and complicated than that".

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Linda Woodhead described the growing spirituality and ritual surrounding death in our present culture. Angels are everywhere, and grave goods, and lucky

heather “and more dream catchers than you can imagine”. The language of blessing is back, “another word that makes perfect sense for a non-religious person”.

In the lecture, Linda Woodhead showed that some of these growing expressions of belief and ritual were shown most clearly first by national responses to significant public grief. These include responses to the death of Diana when there were a lot of ‘firsts’ at her funeral; flowers were thrown on the hearse; popular music played at the service; and in Earl Spencer’s address he spoke to the deceased as if she was present. These actions happen quite regularly now.

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Also important to note was the impact of the tragedy of Alder Hey which highlighted that the bodies of people really matter. Hillsborough was another significant occasion for the nation and after this, religious leaders held a memorial service in a football ground. This was a marker on the journey towards deregulation of memorials and remembrance, a freeing up of where they can take place and who is appropriate to lead.

We were encouraged to see in the way a sociologist of religion sees, for instance as part of her obsession with wandering around Churchyards and cemeteries she came across the following notice by Lancaster City Council: *In order to keep the Garden of Rest neat and tidy staff have been instructed to remove grave goods from time to time (e.g. plant pots, angels, solar lights, etc). We would appreciate your help in maintaining the standard.* She observed, when it comes to remembrance of the dead, people “do not want to be told what is allowed and what is not allowed.”

The lecture articulated “the religion of no religion” which is more frequently expressed around death, funerals and bereavement. This has some core sacred values which were described as: loving kindness to all but without the establishment holding it all together, and epicureanism believing “that life is for living, and coffee shops and nice beds”. Belief in an afterlife remains high (70% of UK population, and rising), although we have become metaphysically more modest as a nation,

with a greater appreciation we don’t have the answers to life and death at our fingertips. This is at the same time as also displaying a confidence that we have positive, healthy ways to express grief and to remember the dead.

The quality of the talk was reflected in the number and variety of questions raised. For instance, do modern practices help or hinder the grief recovery process ... and how do we measure recovery? I enjoyed one reflection on the difference between World Cup fans and real football fans - “they haven’t suffered out there in the rain like we have”. This was an analogy contrasting long term God fans with those who have suddenly become ‘religious’: do religious folk resent the newcomers playing with our deeply valued stuff?

It was a special moment when Professor Woodhead was asked what she would like for her own funeral. She answered honestly, “I don’t know”, seemingly bewildered herself by the variety of options. Then commented that having been to the National Funeral Exhibition recently, she would quite like a shroud “being the cheapest and most ecological option ... and you can see the shape of the body”. She had clearly thought about it.

It got me thinking about my praxis and attempts to be pastorally responsive as a healthcare chaplain over a decade. I enjoyed the conversations the lecture stimulated afterwards. One vicar shared his annual practice of burying Jesus at 6pm on Good Friday (using a life size image of a Piero della Francesca Jesus at his baptism). A wonderful way of re-engaging with bereaved folk and prompting thoughts of Easter. Which is how I personally felt about the whole experience of attending the Hook Lecture this year.





Luther and Bunting

Reverend George Bailey discusses the 500th anniversary of the reformation and the benefits of diversity.

How many Christian churches are there in Leeds? I confess that I do not have any clear answer myself, but I am confident that there are more than many of us think. I have been a Methodist minister in Leeds for ten years, and whilst I know of some churches which have closed, I know of far more that have begun in that time. Is this a problem or an opportunity? Is diversity and multiplication in the Christian family a good thing or is it to be resisted?

I think all the new congregations I knew are Protestant churches, by which I mean those which can trace their roots, one way or another, back to the Reformation of the 16th century. It is in this branch of the Christian family that the multiplication of separate denominations is by far the most prolific – estimates, and fierce debates, abound in internet blogs and scholarly articles as to the actual number of Protestant denominations globally, but I think most would agree that the number is growing. On 31st October 2017 we have marked the 500th anniversary of the Reformation with which all this began – I hope that, like me, you have been able to learn something new about Martin Luther – I was blessed to receive a commemorative Martin Luther Playmobil figure (yes, really) – an important addition to my desk!

The Reformation is a turn in the history of the Church about which many of us feel somewhat ambiguous. It has been accused of being the root cause of many problems, not just in the Church, but for the whole of our culture and society. Amongst the charges levelled are the individualization of faith, the relativization of the Church's doctrine, and the opening of the door to division and schism, scepticism and secularization. So the story goes; giving people the Scriptures to read as autonomous individuals, needing only a personal relationship with Christ to receive salvation, set loose a

multiplicity of interpreters with a multiplicity of interpretations, and began the slippery slope upon which several centuries later the Church has fragmented and declined towards the edges of a fragmenting society.

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In honour of the big anniversary I have enjoyed reading *Biblical Authority After Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity*, (2016) by Kevin J. Vanhoozer. He is a US systematic theologian from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School whose previous work has included reflections on the dramatic and performative nature of scriptural interpretation and doctrinal formulation. He sets out in this book to challenge the negative narratives and instead, from the theological foundations of the Reformation, to build a positive, authentically Protestant theology of the Church and how the Church reads scripture – what he calls “mere Protestant Christianity.” The theological foundations of the Reformation are summed up by the Latin shorthand of the “five solas”: *sola gratia* (grace alone), *sola fide* (faith alone), *sola scriptura* (scripture alone), *solus Christus* (Christ alone) and *solus Deo gloria* (glory to God alone).

In a complex and nuanced work of theology, Vanhoozer has engaging comments to make on

the history and the contemporary reception of these five principles, especially in relation to how the diverse Protestant Churches interpret scripture together. The images he employs are evocative, and might help us find a positive understanding of the many Protestant churches in Leeds.

He draws the image of how the many Protestant churches are like houses on the street, “Evangel Way,” and “mere Protestant Christianity” is like a “block party” (or as we might say in Leeds, a “street party”) where the neighbours come out to play together. The neighbourhood benefits from this kind of unity, which can only function as it does as long as there is diversity. If everyone lived together in the same house then a street party would be a very different proposal (he envisages the Roman Catholic Church living all in one high rise block on an intersecting street). “Mere Protestant Christianity provides the space and parameters for plural unity: on my Father’s street there are many mansions” (2016: 33). The Protestant churches share much in common and join together as a community. They also support one another in the way that a “neighbourhood watch scheme” might keep an eye on the street; encouraging and appreciating, but also offering concerned advice if there are problems with any household’s security or behaviour.

This idea of each house watching over the others is similar to Vanhoozer’s answer to the challenge of seeking Protestant consensus on scriptural interpretation. He does not contrast unity to diversity but, instead, sees the benefits of diversity. The view from each house is only partial and limited; to have an appreciation of the whole street all must work together. Similarly, each view of Scripture is partial; the Protestant understanding of the Holy Spirit communicating God’s Word through Scripture means each church must listen to others in order to hear more clearly. “Sola scriptura is not a recipe for sectarianism, much less an excuse for schism, but rather a call to listen for the Holy Spirit speaking in the history of Scripture’s interpretation in the church” (2016: 145).

This gives a taste of the core ideas Vanhoozer uses to construct a positive reading of Protestant plurality. Following this book, a project has been formed with other various kinds of Protestant US theologians who have together drafted a statement of Protestant Christian faith in this vein: a “Reforming Catholic Confession” which is being signed up to by a growing number of Protestant churches and church leaders. I am left with a number of questions – particularly, how does this relate to my friends in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox branches (or is it roots?) of Christian faith? Vanhoozer keeps his

project on the Protestant street, whereas I have always been interested in wider discussions of unity – I think there is room for these Protestant ideas to be helpful. Also concerning, just within the Protestant family, there is a wide variety of understanding of church governance, such that the image of single houses on a street is too simple. Vanhoozer bases his doctrine of church authority on the local church, but does not so thoroughly address the Protestant streams which distribute more authority to larger church institutions. The image is less simple when one set of mutually committed local churches tries to have a street party with another much larger (or smaller) set of churches, also mutually committed, but in a different way. Perhaps my experience of being minister for four united ecumenical congregations in Leeds is informing this – such street parties are good but take a lot of organising!

He draws the image of how the many Protestant churches are like houses on the street...like a “block party”...where the neighbours come out to play together. He does not contrast unity to diversity but, instead, sees the benefits of diversity.

These notes of concern do not prevent me feeling optimistic. Vanhoozer’s recovery of the Reformation solas is heartening as it gives doctrinal depth to my instinct that the way ahead for the many churches in Leeds is to listen to each other – and through this attention to each other, to have a fuller understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in the whole Church. Our plurality and diversity as churches, that so often seems to threaten our unity, can become for us a divine gift as long as we have faith not in ourselves, but in God’s grace alone.

Reverend Doctor George Bailey is a minister in the Leeds North and East Circuit of the Methodist Church and half time Lecturer at Cliff College, Derbyshire.



Black Men Walking



Andy Brooks, also known as **Testament**, a Hip Hop artist, theatre maker and writer reflects on his creative journey.

My first theatre piece was called Blake Remixed, which was about the relationship between William Blake, Hip Hop and myself. All my favourite MCs tap into themes that Blake tapped into; spirituality, social justice and the urban environment. His work is full of Christian theology and language so that is what immediately drew me to him when I was a teenager and was trying to find my identity.

I don't refer to myself as a Christian artist, I don't think a Christian who is a plumber or a teacher would refer to themselves as a Christian plumber or teacher, they'd just be a plumber or a teacher.

Producing and performing this was a critical part of my development as a Christian who works in the arts. I don't refer to myself as a Christian artist, I don't think a Christian who is a plumber or a teacher would refer to themselves as a Christian plumber or teacher, they'd just be a plumber or a teacher. But faith does inform what I do. So if I write a song about the city it will come from a place where I see God in the city. I'm called Testament, so scripture informs a lot of my stuff and you'll often find scripture popping up in my work. I am someone who wants to be in my subculture of Hip Hop, being a Christian there and trying to worship God there through my actions.

My most recent play is called Woke, which is a term

from black slang and youth culture going back to the fifties and sixties, which has come back into use and is slang for being awake politically.

The play is about fatherhood, feminism and hip hop, and it picks up from when I had my first daughter, and that moment when, as a man, even though I would call myself a feminist and an egalitarian, I looked at this little life in my hands and said "What have I actually done about gender equality?" My music was full of stuff about the system, capitalism, inequality and race, but nothing about gender equality.

Right now I feel like, in terms of feminism, I'm half asleep and shouldn't be operating heavy machinery, but I'm trying. In the show I come on as if I'm Che Guevara at the beginning, but by the end I realise I'm definitely not. My daughter, in the show, tells me that being woke "is a lifelong process and Daddy, you've clearly rushed to quick answers." But the only way I can get up and do the show is by acknowledging that I don't have the answers but I can tell my story.

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I'm working on a piece now called Black Men Walking. It's about racial politics; particularly about being black and British. It's inspired by a black men's walking group in Sheffield that go on walks one Saturday a month.

There are a lot of middle aged men who feel a little bit like outsiders in Northern cities. If you've got Church you can turn up for the service and hang around for coffee, and cake if it's a really good church, then you start to develop community. But, apart from work, where else do men in particular find that kind of supportive community? If you're also from an ethnic minority and you're dealing with racism and discrimination, there can be an even greater sense of isolation than that experienced by others. The statistic for ethnic minorities running into mental health problems is a lot higher because of that greater sense of isolation.

So, a group of black middle aged men in Sheffield set up their walking group so that they could build a community that supports positive mental health. It is the opportunity to meet other people who understand some of the things they have to put up with, but it is also a political act of reclaiming the land. There is a prevalent assumption in Britain that black men don't walk in the countryside. Most of these men were born in Britain and consider themselves British, and so they want to challenge that assumption that black men don't belong in the countryside.

In the play, you have these guys on a walk who are very black, very Yorkshire claiming their identity as black Yorkshiremen. We accompany them on a dangerous walk that they know they shouldn't be doing. But, they have good reason for going on this walk. This walk is necessary as each is facing a personal crisis that they need to work through with the rest of the group.

In Black Men Walking, I use the metaphor of the cloud of witnesses from Hebrews, so that these guys have their own cloud of witnesses who inspire them as black Yorkshire men. They include people like

Pablo Fanque, an English equestrian performer in the nineteenth century and the first black circus proprietor,

John Moore a black business man from York who had the key to the Freedom of York in Tudor times,

John Blanke the trumpet player and royal attendant to Catherine of Aragon whose name is on the Westminster Scroll in 1511,

Septimus Severus the black emperor of Rome who ruled from Yorkshire in the early third century.

And these people can inspire all of us. If you're British, that black emperor who was of Libyan heritage, is part of all of us; he's part of my white dad and part of my little girl because we're British. He's part of our heritage just as much as slavers from Harrogate who we're not so proud of. Even though I'm a person of colour that's part of me too.

As I prepared for writing this play, there were several books that I found helpful. Staying Power by Peter Fryer which is about Black presence in Britain going back to the Roman times, and Forgotten Histories: Black and British by David Olusoga which has an accompanying DVD series on the BBC. This means that even if you can't be bothered with reading, you can learn from watching the DVDs. It is really entertaining and he's very honest about his life and his experiences growing up as a black person in Britain.

You can find Testament on twitter at www.twitter.com/homecut and on facebook at www.facebook.com/testamenthomecut.

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Creative Co-Creating Combining theology and photography

By Thomas Jay Oord



A theologian. With a camera. Exploring nature. In the city.

Those four elements introduce intriguing possibilities and enlightening experiences. I know, because I am that theologian-photographer.

Making Photographs

I say I “make” photographs. Good photography often results when a photographer works from a vision and uses a camera to portray an intriguing subject. Good photography is art.

I don’t “take” photographs. “Take” sounds like I just happened to click the shutter at an opportune time. Good photographs are rarely the product of happenstance; they reflect a vision, photographic skills, and intentional experience.

How I think God acts in the world also influences the vision that I, as theologian-photographer, bring to my visual art. In my opinion, God is an invisible, omnipresent Spirit whose presence cannot be directly captured by a camera’s digital pixels.

It’s impossible to photograph that which cannot be seen. But my theology can still inspire my photography.

Varied Co-Creating

I think God is a creative cause in every moment. But I also think creation plays a co-creative role in making the world what it is.

I spend most of my time photographing wild places

in rural areas or reserves. I live in Idaho, one of the largest and least populated states in the US. I don’t have to drive far to be alone with nature.

But I also enjoy looking for nature in urban areas. My creative co-creating can happen anywhere. And that means I think theologically about wilderness and cityscapes. And I ponder how creatures cooperate with their Creator.

Chicago

A few years ago, I was commissioned to spend a year as theologian-artist in residence and visiting science and religion scholar. The commissioner was the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, and I collaborated with Lea Schweitz and her project on enhancing the city.

Walking the streets, paths, and out-of-the-way places of Chicago raised new questions and prompted new ideas. For instance, I began to think about creating differently. We all know that birds create nests. And other creatures create. Among all creatures, humans possess highly advanced creative capacities. As I see it, God inspires and empowers all creatures in their creating.

But I began to think in new ways about co-creating with God. How well do creatures – both human and nonhuman – cooperate with God’s working for a better world? In particular, are humans cooperating well or poorly with God in their urban co-creating?

Chicago animals are more or less successful at adapting to human creativity. I found plants retaking neglected city lots. In some cases, this symbiotic relationship seems to be working. But I wonder, Is human creating helping or hindering God’s diverse creatures?

As I see it, both unplanned and planned elements can express beauty. Both types of creatures – highly intelligent agents and nonintelligent organisms -- respond to their Creator.

Through Both Creations Shine

A few years ago, I collected some of my favorite photos in a book. I chose “Through Both Creations Shine” as my book’s title.

This phrase comes from a hymn written by 17th century theologian and songwriter, Charles Wesley. Here are the opening lyrics:

**Author of every work divine / Who dost through
both Creations shine
The God of nature and of grace.
Thy glorious steps in all we see / And wisdom
attribute to Thee
And power and majesty and praise.**

The natural universe is one "creation" in this hymn. Wesley acknowledges in praise the work of God evident in the created order.

If we have eyes to see, we can perceive the gloriously graced “steps” of our Creator. My book’s title, “Through Both Creations Shine” refers in part to my photographs of the natural world. God does wonderfully creative things!

New Creation

The second reference to creation in the hymn is to the new creation God also makes possible. Wesley has in mind a phrase from the Apostle Paul about humans becoming “new creatures” (2 Cor. 5:17). The old is gone, because God transforms us into new creations.

This reference to new creation reminds me that photographs are not bare representations of the external world “out there.” Photography is also, as photographer Galen Rowell puts it, an “inner

game.” Photographs represent what is “in” the photographer’s vision.

My photographs portray a particular vision, perspective, or view. They describe in part how I see creation. As a “new creation” in Christ, my perspective has been partly shaped by my vocation as a Christian theologian.

The ongoing process of God creating me anew influences how I make nature photos.

Following the Light

Charles Wesley’s reference to how creation “shines” rings true for me as a photographer and theologian.

Light is central to photography. And as photographer, I often see the world in terms of the kind of light around me. Nature photographers are prone to “chase” the light, as they scan their surroundings for what might make for a great photo.

The knowledge of Christ is also a kind of light. “I am the light of the world,” Jesus says in John’s Gospel. The light brings wisdom and insight into the issues that matter most. Enlightened ones have realized how to live and love well.

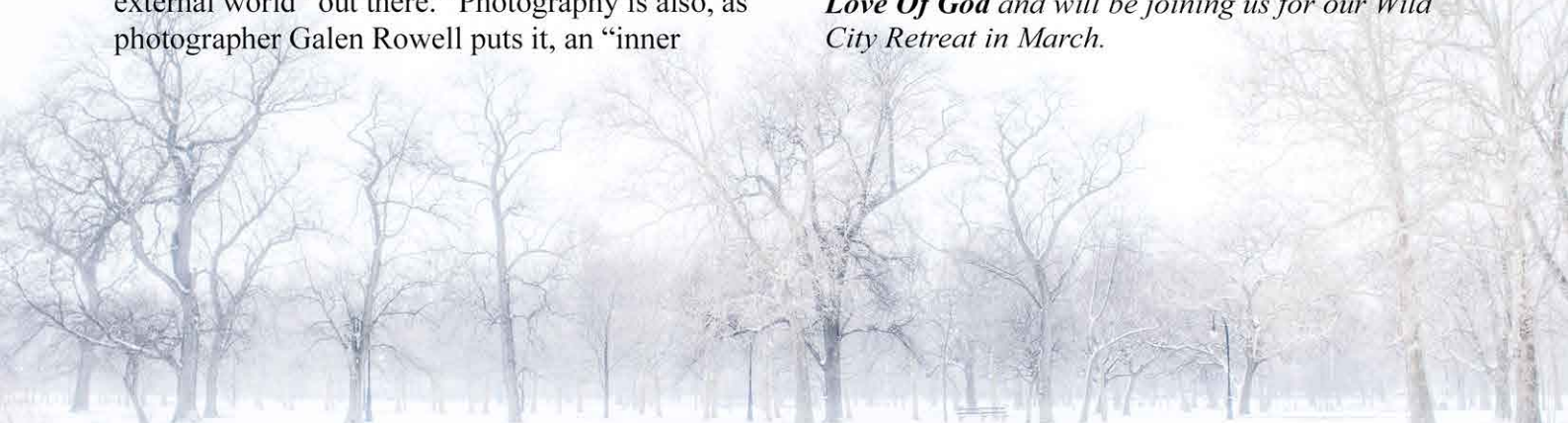
In Process

As I look over my life as a theologian and my photography as an artist, I see change. I don’t believe everything I once believed. I think my beliefs today are better. My theology is in process.

And my photography has changed. I think I make better photos than I once did. My photography is in process.

My perspectives on making photos, on God as Creator, and on co-creating have expanded.

*Thomas Jay Oord is author of **The Uncontrolling Love Of God** and will be joining us for our **Wild City Retreat in March.***



Who have you invited for Christmas Dinner this year?

By Lawrence Cockrill

During World War II, when German and Italian Prisoners of War arrived in England, they would be interviewed by a translator whose job it was to decide how political or radicalised they were. The prisoners were then given a patch; white patches for those who had no loyalty to the Nazi cause, grey for those who showed no strong feelings either way, and black for those who were strong believers in Nazism. Those who were sent to Leeds were in the first two categories. The biggest camp was on Butcher Hill in Horsforth, another was next to the canal in Calverley.

The stated purpose of these camps was not to punish enemy soldiers, but to rehabilitate and re-educate them, with the hope that once the war was over they could return home and be part of rebuilding their war torn homelands. The prisoners also bolstered the local workforce that had been reduced due to working age men going to war. Some locals saw them as free labour that would undercut the livelihoods of English workers, and so the reception was often one of hostility and mistrust.

Every Sunday morning, POWs would march from Butcher Hill to either St Mary's Catholic Church, Horsforth or St James' Church, Woodside. They shared in parish worship and were an active part of church life. At St Mary's, the Butcher Hill prisoners formed their own choir that would sing as another prisoner played the harmonium. According to John Stuart, a child at the church at the time, "The story went that he had been the organist at Cologne Cathedral before the war, I don't know if it is true, but boy he could make that little harmonium hum".

At Christmas, families each invited a prisoner into their homes for Christmas dinner. Through such acts of grace and kindness many made friends for life with people they had formerly thought of only as the enemy. Remembering the way people crossed barriers of mistrust and inherited prejudice for the sake of the gospel, encourages us to think how we can keep finding ways to show hospitality to the stranger among us.

You can find more information about the Butcher Hill Prisoner of War camp at www.projectinspire.co.uk.



How are we making our mark on the city?

By **Shaeron Caton Rose**. Installation artist and retreat facilitator

In Burley Park, Leeds City Council installed a signpost with a nice drawing showing a map of the park and what can be found there. Layer on layer of graffiti has almost eradicated the map, however, so that rather than being an information board, it has become a sign of the human desire to make one's mark.

Throughout history, you can see evidence of the human desire to make a mark and thereby create something somewhere of significance. The triskele is an example of this, an ancient symbol that dates back to the Stone Age. The oldest surviving triskele is in Malta and was created around 6500 BCE although it is known to us in the UK through its use in Celtic traditions. It has been differently drawn in different times and places, but the common link is three branches emanating from a central point. It has been seen as a symbol of for the cycle of life with multiple meanings including mind, body and spirit as well as creation, destruction and preservation.

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While mark making has led to some of the greatest and most inspiring cultural artefacts on earth; it has also led to conflict, materialism and the consumption of the earth's resources. So, mark making from local graffiti in a park to oil paintings



displayed in Leeds City Art Gallery highlight our shared responsibility for how we affect our neighbourhoods, our communities and our earth.



Mark making was at the heart of the reflections from our urban retreat at Left Bank, a deconsecrated and beautiful church building on Cardigan Road, near Burley Park. We met and reflected surrounded by terraced houses, a scrapyards, petrol station, local shops and cafes, a busy road and community.

We met at the turning of the seasons when people in Leeds celebrate the festivals of Harvest, All Souls and All Saints, Samhain and Halloween. In different ways, we thought of these festivals as exploring light and dark in creation, They were a reminder of the delicate balance we live in as part of the natural world.

The triskele was a focus for us as we considered the theme of remembrance. We thought about 're-mem-bering', that is, the act of putting together our shared memories. Thoughts and ideas that were common to us were the need to relinquish control of our lives and allow a pattern to emerge, even when it is not the one we planned ourselves. Moreover, to recognise that the process of being broken, and times of transition, can actually be creative opportunities. We also thought of those people and the gifts of the natural world which become invisible to us and to others when they are considered unimportant. We remembered the need to attend to our sacred moments, our sacred lives and our sacred earth.

Surely this is vital now, in a year of surprising and even unsettling changes which are leading us all into an uncertain future. We do not know how our

communities, our environment and our city will be affected by the current political landscape for sure and there is a concern for the increasing numbers of those made 'invisible' by our prevailing consumerist culture. The easiest thing to do in such circumstances would be to 'drink, eat, be merry for tomorrow we die'. But as people of faith we are called to consider the deeper themes: the promise of spring after winter, the return of sunshine after darkness, seeds that lie buried for centuries which, given the right conditions will rise to life.

As people of faith we are called to consider the deeper themes: the promise of spring after winter, the return of sunshine after darkness, seeds that lie buried for centuries which, given the right conditions will rise to life.

The challenge we felt is to not just wait for those seeds to find their way to the light, but to engage actively in their hope-making. As Richard Rohr puts it, we are called to both contemplation and action not to one or the other. So, when we pay attention to our situation, its difficulties and our hope for it, we need

to be intentionally paying attention and acting, 're-membering' our lives and this place'.

What marks are we going to make on our earth? Will we cover up its beauty with our disinterest and selfishness or will we become part of its glorious pattern?

Our next Urban Retreat will be 28th January at Meanwood Valley Urban Farm and will explore Candlemas.



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