

## Faithful Poetics and Christian Knowledge of the World

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This essay continues the thoughts and arguments I began in my previously-posted essay [\*Metaphor, Mystery and Paradox at the Confluence of Science and Faith\*](#), about the importance of acknowledging the creative and subjective aspects of human knowledge in the midst of the debates about the relationship between science and faith. Following on that first paper, I am here inviting the reader into an alternative way of perceiving and interpreting the natural world in relation to Scripture than the strictly logical, perhaps *legalistic* reasoning that currently holds sway in both the academic scientism of the atheist camp and in the camp of those who seek surety in a “simple,” or “plain” reading of the Bible, and even among those who desire to identify proofs of God’s agency in the biological world.

I am proposing that a distinctively Christian way of approaching (or, rather, receiving and glorifying in) the truth is one that revels in the incompleteness of our knowledge and the necessity that we “reason together” through image and song as much as by proposition. There is a critical difference, however, between that and merely asserting that what seem to be contradictions between natural science and the biblical narrative, or between different parts within the Bible, are mysteries either to be taken at face value and let alone as beyond our ken, or to be studied and explained away or denied. We may—indeed *must*—bring our whole toolbox of investigative methods to bear on such things, but a belief that “all Scripture is God-breathed” means that our investigative goal should always be to understand what interesting thing God may be telling us about himself through such instances of irresolution.

Given the centrality of imaginative structures in our scientific discourse as well as our religious life, it should not be hard to embrace the fact that creative practices and creative works can provide a bridge between the two fields of inquiry, helping us towards something like a synthesis, but a synthesis that is shimmering and fluid rather than hard and fast—process and relationship rather than conclusion. Again, not that the truth, itself, is essentially provisional; but our understanding and experience of it must seem so because we are enmeshed in the world we want to understand, partaking of both the material and immaterial, knowing via our imaginations as much as our senses. We should not shy away from the inherently subjective and provisional aspects of our experience or our artifacts, for those are some of the qualities that make them most human, reinforcing our ongoing dependence on each other and the Creator.

This is not, in fact, a new or revolutionary way of thinking about how we ought approach and represent the world: Christian use of imaginative works (even speculative images of the Triune God) has deep roots in the classical Christianity defined by the Nicene Councils that approved the use of icons and rejected iconoclasm.<sup>1</sup>

There is also a new flowering of support for art within many parts of the contemporary Church, as witnessed by the following description of the way art is a particularly *true* response to the order and meaningfulness of creation from journalist and cultural critic Ken Myers. Yet such thinking seems particularly striking in its *absence* from the science/religion debate, perhaps precisely because so many who weigh in on the issues conceive of it as precisely that—a debate to be won or lost.

A Christian framework of meaning—which begins with our belief in a creator who ordered Creation coherently—involves an affirmation of our ability to perceive the meaning within creation; in other words, our framework of meaning, our culture, if you will, our convictions about what is true, claims that creation itself is really meaningful and capable of generating coherent frameworks of meaning.

Culture isn't just *arbitrary* human making, it is making that is more or less in keeping with the making that God did in the original work of creation. Great art—including great music—isn't just about invention, it's about discovery; and often those discoveries involve the recognition of likenesses or resonances within creation. A poet, for example, captures the essence of an experience with a combination of metaphors and rhythms and assonance; a composer evokes grief or triumph or longing with a musical vocabulary that uses sound to create an echo of something that's finally inaudible.<sup>2</sup>

Myers points us to the critical mediating role that artworks seem always to have played in human culture: mediating between material and immaterial forms, and mediating between beings who are likewise both physical and more-than-that, located and *active* in concrete social space. It is this mediating role that I'll turn to now, starting to bring together the various threads laid out in the previous essay and taking Myers' "musical vocabulary" as a jumping off point to re-emphasize the way the weaknesses of individual images helps define the usefulness of creative forms of thought as a whole.

### Resonance and Tension

So far in my discussion of the way imagery helps us to formulate and hold onto abstract ideas I have used largely pictorial terms, as we are now so saturated in visual images that we can hardly imagine that they are not the best kind of representation of the world simply because they seem the most direct and approachable—the most concrete, in fact. But helpful though they are in a general sense, they are also flawed and subtly perpetuate that lie that we may stand outside and apart from the world, exactly as I described as the problem of the Cosmic Elephant in the previous paper. Even speaking of the "big picture," as I have, invites us to visualize (!) ourselves standing back from something of which we are not fully a part. But when Myers speaks of "likenesses" in the auditory field—of "resonances" and harmony—he provides us with a more felicitous model for how all artworks and imaginative structures *embody* for us the connections and distances between ideas, concepts, and things.

Musician and theologian Jeremy Begbie suggests that thinking musically can help us better understand several key features of the way God reveals himself to and through human experience, in addition to helping us better understand and embrace the paradoxical nature and character of the triune God Himself. Unlike the visual field, he says, in which "things. . . occupy discrete, bounded locations—spaces with edges," and in which "the eye tells us that things are either here *or* there; they can not be in the same place at the same time,"<sup>3</sup> our auditory senses can accommodate two or more discrete experiences (musical notes) at the same time—each completely filling our ears and perceptual space, yet neither obscuring the other or negating each other. This distinction between the visual and auditory modes of representing abstract concepts to ourselves and others is an important insight into why we—so accustomed to thinking and describing visually—have trouble articulating, much less embracing, how such things as God's justice and mercy, the humanity and divine natures of Jesus, and the Lord's sovereign creative agency and our (or the world's) complex and dynamic freedom can co-exist with each other.

But again, thinking about paradox in this way is more than just a matter of subjective perception—it has its corollary in the mechanics and relationships of concrete, objective reality. In Begbie's example below, for instance, he doesn't just talk about our ability to hear multiple notes subjectively, but the way such tones and overtones arise out of objective structural features of the material world in which we live

(here, the way vibrations are transmitted sympathetically through air and wood and bronze). Thus, when we are duly attentive to creation and committed to the revelation of Jesus as the co-Creator and redeemer, such illustrations provide us with *true analogies* for spiritual relationships as well as physical ones—or rather, they are true analogies *because* they hover at the intersection of the physical and spiritual, the subjective and objective. Precisely as a way to conceptualize a Christian rather than Enlightenment model of human freedom, for instance, Begbie describes the way strings on a piano vibrate sympathetically with each other even when not struck directly:

The strings are not in competition, nor do they simply allow each other room to vibrate. The lower string enhances, brings to life the upper string, compromising neither the integrity of the upper string nor its own. . . [t]he *more* the lower note sounds, the *more* the upper string sounds in its distinctiveness, the more it vibrates in the way it was created to vibrate. Such is the nature of the freedom God grants: the *more* God is at work in our lives, the freer we shall be, liberated to be the distinctive persons we were created to be. And such is the freedom we can share, by virtue of God's gift of freedom, with *others*. Simultaneously sounding notes, and the music arising from them, can witness to a form of togetherness in which there is an overlap of spaces out of which comes *mutual enrichment and enhancement*, and a form of togetherness that can be sensed first and foremost as a gift, not a consequence of individual choices.<sup>4</sup>

Begbie's account of the way music provides insight into spiritual relationships goes well beyond just this aspect of sympathy and harmony to include a discussion of the flows and rhythms of time—patterns of tension and resolution that give shape to music at multiple scales and which are highly applicable to the interrelation between scientific and scriptural knowledge of Creation. Both biblical and natural history, after all, turn on the interplay between the rhythms of repeated, cyclic events and processes and one-off occurrences and interventions—ruptures of the overall pattern that mark its forward trajectory. But from his musical example we can also draw out specific connections with the ideas that I've been developing so far in this essay: first, that subjective, creative forms of interaction with and representation of reality help us get a richer sense of "objective" truth; second, that we should expect and delight in the ways such representations are surprising and even difficult to pin down in other terms; and, third, that such approaches to understanding the world and its Creator must always be situated in community, which they consequently support and deepen. The next step is to not only recognize but claim the way that the dynamic of harmony and tension we experience most clearly in musical forms —of distinctly *different* tones resonating together—is also at work in linguistic imagery—in poetry and parable.

### Sight through Sound

By conjuring visual images via the tempo and tones of words, poems partake of two of our most fundamental ways of interacting with the physical world: sound and sight. What we hear is translated into pictures in our mind's eye, though sound remains at the heart of the experience and is not superseded by the images we imagine—the very reason poems ought to be read aloud, even to ourselves, to preserve the musical aspects of tension and resolution and rhythm that the words encode. On the other hand, the physical structure and appearance of the poem as written/printed on the page also carries meaning, often in tension with the cadences of the spoken word. Line breaks are sometimes far from arbitrary or over-determined by the style of verse in use. Nevertheless, the visual quality of poetic imagery is a secondary

player to the verbal also in that the words do not translate to only one picture per phrase; the very nature of metaphor and simile in all their forms is a bringing together of different pictures in the same imaginative field—things which do not or can not exist together in “normal” visual space, but can in a musical one whether in relationship of harmony or dissonance. Indeed, this double-meaning dwells in poetic language even at the level of individual words, not just described images, for poetry works by making words do the same thing as the struck string in Begbie’s example of the piano—resonate with multiple related-but-distinctive meanings; and not just meanings as *definitions*, but sometimes worlds of connotation, allusion and reference.

The work of poetry, then, is to polish human language until it reflects the structural orderliness *and* the improvisational freedom and playfulness God gifted to the cosmos. It helps us pay attention to the essentially relational character of both the physical and social worlds—the way things really *are* connected in intricate and meaningful patterns that are both dependable and surprising, and that often become most clear when one thing is compared to another. As poet Richard Wilbur phrased it in a poem on this very aspect of verbal creativity, “odd that a thing is most itself when likened.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, it is especially through surprising and unexpected comparisons that metaphor becomes a kind of renewal—a rebirth of what we mistakenly see as “ordinary”; for the purpose of striking such imaginative chords in verse is often to help us see something new, previously-overlooked or forgotten about what was already right in front of us—to see it more truly by making it less familiar. This must be the central gift of creative work in general, whether poetry, or drama or painting or science. Going further still, in the practice of poetry as well as the artifacts of poem-making we have models for the way we are to receive moments of God’s revelation—the pictures He gives us in nature and scripture, in the past and in the present—and hold them in tension to get a better sense of what is true and real not just about the world but about its Maker. To turn the phrase slightly, it turns out that we are often only able to see what a thing is most truly *like* when it is made ‘odd.’

An exceptionally apropos example of the way poetry works by re-presenting the world (often in strange images), but also *the process of representation itself*, can be found in “Mind,” another piece by Wilbur, whom former Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts Dana Gioia has called “America’s preeminent living Christian poet.”<sup>6</sup> In the lines below, listen (since I know you will be reading aloud) not just for the rhythm and tones of the words as meter and rhyme, but as aural images of the “flitting” motions that the words describe. But more than that, notice the way that that the central, immediate comparison—between the human mind and a bat making its way in the darkness of the cave it inhabits—takes on both philosophical and theological overtones in the last line, with a suggestion that it is in unlooked-for and even unwanted moments of grace and revelation that our self-created mental worlds are re-made:

*Mind in its purest play is like some bat  
That beats about in caverns all alone,  
Contriving by a kind of senseless wit  
Not to conclude against a wall of stone.*

*It has no need to falter or explore;  
Darkly it knows what obstacles are there,  
And so may weave and flitter, dip and soar  
In perfect courses through the blackest air.*

*And has this simile a like perfection?  
The mind is like a bat. Precisely. Save  
That in the very happiest of intellection  
A graceful error may correct the cave.<sup>7</sup>*

Without attempting to give a complete exegesis of the piece (that is, without trying to explain away its elegance as mere mechanics), I will call attention to the way the poet, from the opening simile, describes both the bat-in-its-cave and the human mind at the same time, with the same descriptions, but to subtly different effect on account of our own sense of what kind of thought and sensibility is appropriate for each. He also develops the tone of his speech from somewhat light, to a deadpan irony, to one of surprising hope in 12 lines: in the first stanza, the “some bat,” “contriving” and “senseless wit,” “play,” and the punning use of “conclude,” all contribute to the feeling that he makes his comparison almost as a poetic jest—a joke about making up ridiculous comparisons and puns as much as about the nature of mind. His second stanza, more inside the metaphor than about it, replaces the tone of silliness with one of mysterious surety, which also describes the almost magical echolocation abilities of bats to know their very real surroundings.

But taken as a picture of the way we know the contours of our own mental homes (both individual and collective, since neither bats nor people typically “beat about . . . all alone”), the connotations aren’t quite so positive. Being “darkly” familiar with intellectual or emotional obstacles so as to habitually avoid them is not at all the same as seeing them clearly, and the “perfect courses” Wilbur speaks of may well be perfect in their obliviousness or overconfidence (without need “to falter or explore”) as well as in their dazzling acrobatic agility. Now the “senseless wit” from the third line returns as ironic, changed in retrospect from a highly natural and easy kind of cleverness (without recourse to other senses than hearing) on the part of the bat, to something more akin to “foolishness” when exhibited by men and women, whose “contrivance” also implies a measure of dishonesty, whether with themselves, others, or the Lord.

In the last stanza Wilbur again reminds us that he’s talking about image-making, itself, as a metaphor for the way we know the world while asking for/giving a judgment of the aptness of his attempt. If human contrivances are “perfect” in their willful blindness, he asks, “has this simile a like perfection?” Are this and all other forms of imaginative framing of the world only delusions, flippancies built upon the “real” foundations of the physical, as certain materialists would have it? Wilbur does not leave the reader smacking against that wall of stone, however, but in the last three lines offers a remarkably redemptive twist that is instructive not just in the context of the poem’s bat/mind comparison, but for the whole matter of how we know rightly about the world and the relationships that are at its heart—that is, according to God’s own *values*, rather than according to our grasp on scientific or religious *information*. For in the claims that the human mind really is just like a bat, Wilbur is giving us an image for the role of poetry, of creative imagination in general, to help critique the surety of the other sorts of self-made knowledge upon which we generally rely, and which *for the most part* are entirely serviceable. Indeed, the poem literally turns on a word set apart at the end of the second line to stand for this “exceptional” quality of image and imaginative insight, while directing us to the action accomplished for us when we recognize our inability to do ought but “falter or explore” ourselves: *Save*.

Images, similes, and parables, then, offer “errors” (or even “lies” as Wilbur would have it elsewhere) which can nevertheless lead us to a fuller understanding of ourselves, the world, and our place in the world, despite the fact that at the time such errors are suggested they may seem to lead inexorably to

“conclusions” we expect to be fatal—spiritually, if not physically. Jesus’ own disciples experienced just this kind of radical disconnect between their very reasonable and concrete expectation for his messianic work and the unfolding drama that actually occurred once they entered Jerusalem. His entire ministry had been suffused with both spoken and enacted parables, and the final image—that of Jesus as the Passover Lamb—did lead precisely to death, but also to the “correction” and rebuke of the cave on Easter morning. For what the disciples *knew* to be darkness, God used as a means of redemption. Which point brings us back to why this whole issue of using art (or really, using such methods of art as image, metaphor, and harmony to embrace the contingency of our knowledge, whether achieved via the rational mind or the senses) is central to the practice of the Christian faith as it intersects with our investigation of the material world through science.

### Parabolic Relationships

This call to think differently about the faith/science intersection is not rooted in a Romantic notion of the power of art on its own, as if finding new, beautiful images for ideas that some find confusing or even offensive (such as common descent) will magically eliminate conflict over their truthfulness. Rather, this call comes directly from looking at how Jesus himself chose to discuss and portray the Gospel message that the Kingdom of God really was finally at hand, coming and already fulfilled. In debates between leading religious and secular leaders that are eerily similar in tone to what we hear around the issues of evolution and the Bible today, Jesus time and time again confounded both the learned and the simple by describing the Kingdom in natural and social imagery, nearly always by using pictures that were outrageous and likewise offensive to his hearers as often as they were merely strange, or surprising, or beautiful. More than that, he described the Kingdom using many jarringly incongruous images together, giving his original hearers (and us) only flashes and glimpses while expecting them (and us) to start noticing the subtle relationships and piecing together the larger pattern.

Surely a central reason for his use of parables in this way was that many first-century Jews had grown so accustomed to *being* Jewish—following Torah with one degree of zealotry or another—that they forgot the spiritual reasons behind their practices. Jesus certainly makes this case by so often accusing religious leaders and trained teachers of the Law of following its letter while ignoring its heart, so part of the role of his creative re-statements (such as the parable of the Samaritan) was to *make new* the old responsibilities of God’s people to care for the orphans and widows, to love the stranger as well as the Israelite, etc., by putting the principle in strange and surprising new narrative contexts.

As Eugene Peterson puts it, “A parable is not usually used to tell us something new, but to get us to notice something that has been right there before us for years. Or it is used to get us to take seriously something we have dismissed as unimportant because we have never seen the point of it. Before we know it, we are involved.”<sup>8</sup> In the same way, it may be that some of the “new” scientific stories being told about natural and human physical origins are serving not to contradict all older stories of human identity, but in strange concert with them, to re-focus our attention on those aspects of being human and being the people of God that have the most to do with bringing the kingdom to bear for others, right now. In any case, Jesus’ recombinant image-making practices are echoed not just by artists looking for new ways to tell stories, but are even written into the natural world, itself.

Aside from this very practical and concrete use of parables and images to re-new what was there from the beginning, Jesus also seems to have had a more essential message to convey about the nature of

revelation, the on-rushing Kingdom, and how we know what we do about each of them through the gift of the Bible. Richard Farrar Capon describes it as follows:

[T]he Bible is about the mystery of the kingdom—a mystery that, by definition, is something well hidden and not at all likely to be grasped by plausibility-loving minds. . . The mystery of the kingdom, it seems, is a *radical* mystery: even when you tell people about it in so many words, it remains permanently intractable to all their attempts to make sense of it. . . With Jesus, . . . the device of the parabolic utterance is used not to explain things to people’s satisfaction but to call attention to the unsatisfactoriness of all their previous explanations and understandings.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, the purpose of Jesus’ “art” was to give verbal, visual, and dramatic forms to those complicated and confounding relationships and symmetries and harmonies between Himself (and the Father and Spirit) and the world, ourselves included in the latter. Such creative expressions did and do not make everything clear, but rather resist simple clarity, forcing their hearers to come at the whole complicated, opaque truth from a position of intellectual and spiritual humility. Indeed, the fact that the church (and those outside it) still argue, discuss and wrestle with the stories and images Jesus used is not just evidence of their power in the first century, it continues to be their power now: to keep individuals and communities engaging with each other and the Holy Spirit as they have for two thousand years, opening them always to the way the Lord is renewing minds and hearts. Therefore, following Jesus’ lead means learning to hold in tension ideas and essences that don’t just *seem* to be paradoxical or incompatible, but actually are in the normal course of human thinking and experience—even those mysteries that we as moderns have done everything in our imaginative (or rather, *unimaginative*) power to dispel, explain and normalize.

More than just highlighting the intractability of mystery in the created world by transcribing its ineffable qualities, creative and interpretive practices like spoken parables have a central place in our thinking about the relationship between faith and science because they call scientists and theologians and ordinary believers both to themselves and to each other as human beings. Individually we may be reminded by objective argument that our impressions of the world and others are subjective and prone to errors in perspective and habit, but given the same message in a poetic image of ourselves flitting senselessly through caves of our own devising, in words that *sing* and enter our hearts as well as our ears, we are far less likely to respond with “Well, that’s a very interesting argument,” and more likely to ask, “How is this true of me?” “Where am I merely avoiding the obstacles to my “perfect courses” through darkness, and not being open to new leadings of the Spirit?” While we hold arguments at arm’s length, art enables us to *live into* ideas that are complicated and challenging—that challenge our ways of living, of being, of thinking, of loving.

But beyond this individual level of humility, art should also help us realize that the kind of collaborative and social subjectivity that is at the core of both scientific and spiritual inquiry is not something to be denied but recognized as integral to the pursuits that make us most human. Image and story help not to “explain” truth, but to experience and know it *together* in a profoundly human way that includes both subjective and objective elements and is, therefore, truer to the dual character of what we haltingly call “human nature” and our *imago dei* than an approach that attempts to address only the rational rather than the relational. After all, we do not love the Lord principally by agreeing to creeds, even beautifully correct ones; we love the Lord by walking with His Son through the Holy Spirit, and by caring for

those whom He loves—namely, those whom we are otherwise least likely to love: namely, those whom we are fairly certain hold ideas about the Bible or Nature with which we deeply disagree.

### Rethinking the Biblical/Natural Witness

To summarize the key points of this essay: first we have that subjective perceptions and reasoning are essential to discovery and explanation in all of the most important fields of human knowledge and experience, including scientific inquiry just as much as religious belief. Second, we have that creative and imaginative practices like image-making, musical composition and poetic and parabolic narrative are also essential to the process of making sense of our subjective and objective experiences and insights, because such forms give us true, concrete representations of the otherwise abstract relationships that are at the heart of our physical reality, and because they enable us to engage such concepts in a personal way rather than just an intellectual one. Third (an extension of the last point) such artistic forms push us to engage and negotiate not only with concepts, but with other people, particularly when the abstract forms and relationships being embodied by our pictures, songs and stories are of a nature that defy easy explanation or description by means *other* than art. And fourth, we have that Jesus, himself, modeled the centrality of creative, imaginative processing (rather than legalistic reasoning) in receiving the presence of God in and to the world and each other.

So, with this rich understanding of what pictorial or musical or verbal forms of creative symbolic expression are and what they do for us, let us return briefly to our understanding of the Bible and its relation to the physical world, with the hope that the aims of our discussions about the cultural tensions between faith and science will be changed as much as their tone. For this matter of letting image and metaphor lead us deeper in the paradox of the God-who-is-with-us is not just a lesson for the scientist, whether atheist or believer, but for the student of Scripture, as well. The problem (rather, gift) of the embedded narrowness of our perspectives discussed earlier in the context of the material/social world is no less crucial for our comprehension of the Bible as revelation than it is for history, or the natural sciences—where at least the return of ecological thinking is helping us see the cosmos and earth as connected on many interrelated scales rather than being made up of discrete systems.

As with the natural world, we must always retreat a short distance from our favorite Bible stories or psalms or other parts of Scripture in order to remember the grand sweep of the biblical narrative—and not just so that we can see how all of it “fits together” in the sense being clear and unequivocal, but to remember how beyond us the whole, in its totality, really is. To rehearse our earlier metaphor, the Bible is not an elephant to be grasped by the trunk, or the leg, or the tail and described by its weight or height or texture. We are not given the convenience of standing outside of its narrative and deciding *which* kind of book or story or myth or command or song it is, but are met with an object that is also an ongoing event of which we are each a small but significant part.

To put it another way, the Bible does not just *contain* parables, the Bible is, itself, parabolic. Firstly, it “throws down” different incongruous images, stories, literary types, and characters (including contradictory portrayals of God) next to each other, not least to confound the wisdom of the wise. But going further, scriptural revelation is also part of the ongoing parabolic act of the Lord, being thrown down besides the “object” of the natural world as studied and described by science. Both the scriptural account and naturalistic ones are, essentially, *parables* of creation, rather than *descriptions*, in that they are narratives given by the creator through the agency and mediation of human beings for the purpose of (together) giving us a rich picture of the mystery of God’s working and indwelling of the cosmos.

Indeed, those who focus rightly on the cultural embedding of the Bible’s early books in their Ancient Near East context *and* those who understand it to be the directly-given narrative of human biological as well as spiritual beginnings, miss some of its majesty as revelation when they see these things as contradictory claims rather than as paradoxical invitations to go further with each other and with the Lord. As with Jesus’ speaking of and enacting parables of the kingdom during His earthly ministry, those of us “with ears to hear” are hardly less confused than the rest of the crowd, and are compelled *together* to seek out the Master for the purpose of being with Him as much as to ask Him for a clearer explanation of exactly what He meant.

So what does that mean, then, for how we should go forward in struggling to hear rightly the complex harmonies between science and Scripture? It may, in the end, be as simple as this: we must realize that many of the irreconcilable issues that we want resolved may be the most instructive for us exactly when we leave them in tension (or transcribed as cycles of tension and resolution), not just because this situation of uncertainty is representative of the complexity of God in Himself and in relation to the Creation, but also because it reminds us of the provisional quality of our understanding of all things. Some of this has to do with the ultimate inscrutability of the Lord, but it has perhaps more to do with another central tenet of Christian faith—that we are all sinners, and that our perceptions of ourselves, others, and of God are always subject to the darkness of that glass.

It is not that we cannot see the truth (or the paradox) in interpretations of the world that conflict with our own, it is that we don’t *want* to—because in our passionate debates with each other we are each of us always working to secure or prove our own righteousness, even in the midst of our honest desires to defend and honor God. Our hearts—all of our hearts—are always clouded by pride in our own achievements and faithfulness, even (perhaps particularly) in the midst of contending for the faith *against our fellow believers*. Perhaps artworks and creative interpretations of both natural and spiritual truths may help us forward because they make manifest the contrivance of our sureties, even as they may also offer halting syntheses of such mysteries as our freedom in light of God’s sovereignty, or our forgiveness in light of His justice, or our continuity with all other mortal life in light of bearing His image. Such subjective means as parable, poem and painting are worth considering within these usually technically-focused debates if by their strangeness and beauty they prod us out of our age-worn confidence that we *know* the world as it is and as it has always been, and towards a Savior whose promise continues to be, “Behold! I am making all things new.”

## Notes

1. Historian, curator, and contemporary art critic Daniel Siedell, for instance, has written extensively about the affirmation of icons during the various councils in Nicea, and about the importance for the church today of their thinking about visual representation, in his book *God in the Gallery: A Christian Embrace of Modern Art*. (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2008).
2. Ken Myers, “Jeremy Begbie on the art of “hyper-hearing.” Mars Hill Audio Journal Vol. 94:8: 00:08-01:20.
3. Jeremie Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007, p. 288.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 289.
5. Richard Wilbur, “Lying,” in *New and Collected Poems*. San Diego: HBJ, 1988: p. 9.
6. Dana Gioia. “Richard Wilbur: A Critical Survey of His Career.” (<http://www.danagioia.net/essays/ewilbur.htm>)
7. Wilbur, *ibid.*, p. 240 (originally published 1958).
8. Eugene Peterson, *Tell It Slant*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008: p. 19.
9. Richard Farrar Capon. *Kingdom, Grace Judgment: Paradox, Outrage and Vindication in the Parables of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002: pp. 4-5.