

# 2026 THEME COMMENTARIES

## What is Truth?

**“I was afraid, because I was naked: and I hid myself”  
– Genesis 3:10**

### COMENTARIES:

- 1&2 Dr Angela McCarthy** – Mandorla Chair & Theologian
- 3 Dr Tania Watson** – Mandorla Treasurer & Executive Minister, Riverview Church
- 4 Assoc Prof Glenn Morrison** – Associate Professor, Notre Dame University
- 5 Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB DD** – Archbishop of Perth
- 6 Tara Conrad** – Therapist, Pastor and Theologian
- 7 Rev Dr Ian Tozer** – Moderator, Uniting Church of Western Australia
- 8 Dr Brian Harris** – Theologian & Author
- 9 Dr Steve McCready** – Senior Minister, Riverview Church
- 10 Dr Lawrence Pang** – Associate Dean Learning and Teaching, Notre Dame University

### COMMENTATOR BIOGRAPHIES

### MANDORLA VISION & MISSION STATEMENT



**THE  
MANDORLA**  

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**ART AWARD**

## COMMENTARY 1: Dr Angela McCarthy

The theme for the 2026 Mandorla Art Award is: What is Truth?" Genesis 3:10b "I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." (NRSV)

Have you ever had a dream where you are naked and in a public space? A fairly common dream that speaks of anxiety! The theme for the next Mandorla Art Award is taken from the sacred mythology of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. Does this sacred myth speak to us of an anxiety about the truth?

Christians and many others believe that God is truth. How is this being expressed in the ancient texts? I can imagine the elders and the wise ones in ancient times coming back time and again to the question of truth. In our original state, creatures of a supreme being of some kind, everything was perfection but somehow, we lost the state of perfection where there was nothing other than truth. The ancient stories try to unravel how we came to know the difference between right and wrong, the difference between truth and lies. The ancient story teller uses the wonderful narrative of the crafty serpent as the tempter. It is a powerful story. Coming to understand the choice between good and evil means that there are also difficult things that happen in life because of our disobedience in our original state.

The difficult things that we try to understand but have no real answer for are why do women suffer in childbirth? Why do women happily go through it again and again? (3:16) Why is it so hard to make a living off the land? (3:17-19) Why do bad things happen to good people? Why are most people very afraid of snakes above all other creatures? (3:15).

Our current world is plagued by this question of truth. One can put almost anything on the world wide web and be believed. Horrendous mistruths plague us and have caused great distress and even death to those conflicted by what they see and read. Algorithms used by companies can lead us down rabbit holes that inflame us. It is easy to add things to videos to make them more gruesome and less true. It used to be that the truism, a photograph never lies, is no longer relevant. We can use all sorts of digital tools to manipulate an image. Sometimes we like to do that, sometimes it is treacherous. The sources that we would usually trust to be truthful turn out to be not so trustworthy. Where do we go to seek the truth?

Thousands of years after the story above was written, Jesus, the Christ, walked upon this earth and revealed a new level of truth that comes from God. One of his disciples, St Paul, who was the first to write material about Jesus, says that love rejoices in the truth (1 Corinthians 13:6). He also says that love 'bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things' (1 Corinthians 13:7).

It is love then that can lead us to the truth. Nakedness is not shameful with those we love; we don't have to hide. Pain is inevitable in child birth but we will do it because of love, and more than once. Working for a living on the land or in other ways can be difficult but we will do it because of those we love. Wild creatures deepen our fears at times but love helps us to overcome the fear and respectfully live together on earth.

We have world leaders who cannot be believed. We have different versions of the truth that confound us. We have people who pretend to love but instead control and abuse. It is difficult. The original story has God ending the pronouncement with 'you are dust and to dust you shall return' (3:19). Another truism, the only sure things in this world are death and taxes! As we die, we are remembered for loving or not. Is that the truth?



Bernard Appassamy, *The Twelve Napkins*, 2024, linen and cotton, 15 x 80 x 35 cm, Winner of the Highly Commended Catholic Archdiocese Prize

## COMMENTARY 2: Dr Angela McCarthy

### Can art lead us to the truth?

Pablo Picasso stated in 1923 that *"We all know that art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth."* When an artist gives us a visual image of a jug of water, we know that it is not a jug of water but gives us an idea about what a jug of water looks like. It can be merely a hint about a jug through an abstraction or it could be a super realist version or many things in between. Either way, it points to a truth. Picasso was interested in the truth and the way in which his art could point to truth that is confronting at times or simply strangely beautiful at other times.

At present our world is fraught with danger. At the time of writing this commentary we have just seen Israel and Iran launch weapons of war at each other costing further lives in the Middle East. Truth seems to be a commodity among world leaders that is entirely dependent on whim. Misinformation about health, wealth and many other critical human issues are so widespread that it is difficult to find a way to the truth. We see truth redefined, twisted, or dismissed outright in political rhetoric. The article by Massimo Faggioli, [Trump's war against truth, and against faith](#) offers a sobering view of how truth and faith can be co-opted for power. It warns that when truth is abandoned, faith itself is at risk, reduced to a tool rather than a sacred journey.

For the Mandorla Art Award 2026 we are asking artists to express for us "What is Truth?" We have anchored it in a scriptural quote from the first book of the bible: *"I was afraid, because I was naked: and I hid myself."* Genesis 3:10, taken from the New Revised Standard Version translation. This ancient writing speaks of a god who seeks out the one who is hiding, who wishes to be revealed to that person and find the truth through the relationship. However, the behaviour that provoked the break in the relationship causes a profound separation that is only healed through one man, Jesus of Nazareth, many centuries later. We see the pain of separation all around us and so often caused by a lack of trust in a relationship born of a lack of truth.

Sr Clare Condon is a Good Samaritan sister who has contributed greatly to social justice in Australia. In her piece [Is there a place on earth for honest, respectful dialogue?](#) she refers to the need for respectful relationships and courageous listening. To be open to hearing the truth is as important as being able to speak the truth. As we have heard many times, truth telling is a profound but difficult way to reconciliation.

So, what is truth?

Dr Angela McCarthy and Mandy Van Der Schyff



Opening night for the 2024 Mandorla Art Award, at Holmes à Court Gallery, Kate Anderson Photography



### COMMENTARY 3: Dr Tania Watson

Mandorla 2026 Theme:

*“What is truth? I was naked and afraid and so I hid.”*

The creation narrative describes God shaping and forming people from the elements of earth, infused with the character and nature of Godself. Life is given through the very breath of God. To the first people, God gives the authority to name things in the world. This power of naming is a reflection of their very image-of-God-ness.

It is remarkable then, to reflect on the question that God poses to Adam in Genesis 3. In response to “Where are you?” Adam’s reply demonstrates his God-given capacity to name things, in this case, his own condition. Adam names his awareness of a new and disorienting identity: I am naked, I am afraid. He also names his behavioural response: I hid.

This now is Adam’s truth: “I am not who I was. I am not who I was created to be.”

The power to name is now applied to a reality of dehumanizing experiences that Adam was not created to bear. In yielding to the temptation to redefine God’s good design for the human person, dis-order penetrated and poisoned the truth of the goodness of humanity.

From this point on, Adam, Eve and every person, except one, will struggle to truthfully express and name the human experience as good.

Who is this one exception?

In John Chapter 8 there is a set of robust discussions about truth. Right in the middle of noisy debate, Jesus says:

*... you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (verse 32).*

Jesus names himself. He is The Truth. Truth is a person. Truth is a person who can set people free from nakedness, fear and hiding. Truth is a person who reverses the act of un-creation. Truth restores the human person and gives to everyone the way to name a restored identity: “Follow me ... you will be free.”

Thus, the Christian response to the question that God asks of every human heart: “Where are you?”

“I was naked. I was afraid. When I came out of hiding, I found Jesus. I’m following Jesus. He is always with me. Now I am free.”



Opening night for the 2024 Mandorla Art Award, at Holmes à Court Gallery, Kate Anderson Photography. Artwork: *Infinity*, Petrina Hicks

## COMMENTARY 4: Assoc Prof Glenn Morrison

### Reflection on the 2026 Mandorla Art Award Theme

#### “What is Truth?” Reference: Genesis 3:10b “I was naked and I hid myself” (NRSV)

The Bible is a form of the inner truth of what makes us human. We are therefore placed in relationship with God. The second Creation story in Genesis (2:4b-3:24) tells the story of Adam. God creates. We learn that God is good at being a Creator. Not only is God full of Edenic imagination and vision of how to create the earth from a barren state (Gen 2:5). We see that God is daring and stirring about planting a garden in Eden (Gen 2:8). God's skills are wonderful and strange. God had created Adam out of the earth (“the dust of the ground” (Gen 2:6)), breathed life in the man, and then put him in the garden as a witness to the divine creative hand.

Adam is created as an image of God (Gen 1:26). He is given firsthand experience of the beauty of creation. He encounters what is “pleasant” especially the trees that produce fruit, but also something unique, strange, and tempting, namely food for the soul. God had created a soul in Adam, a “likeness” (Gen 1:26) to be responsible for everything and everyone. Such responsibility needs nurture and nourishment. God was there to nurture Adam with Creation, and there among the trees were soulful food from the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. However, God forbade the man to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17) on pain of death. Here Adam encounters a certain rule and revelation. The rule is more a mystery about God's intentions. The revelation stands as God's intention for him to invite the possibility of rebellion, a test of faithfulness.

God as Creator knows the inner truth of Adam. Such truth can only be revealed in fragments, in relationship, and in crisis. So, God creates another, a woman, to generate new life. Adam feels a certain truth about the woman, that they are made of the same substance, the same creative force of God who seems to like gardens, trees, and hard work. The man (Hebrew: ha adam), later, names the woman, “Eve”, “because she was the mother of all who live” (Gen 3:20). Adam not only must learn how God creates, but how things also grow, what is pleasant to the eye to see, and what is good to eat, or not, from the trees. Now the man must learn also about Eve. However, for the time being, they are in an ancient childhood; they remain “naked” and unashamed (Gen 2:25). They are living in a paradise of dreams and wonder. They do not realise that in their nakedness, they are part of the truth of God's being as beauty.

We soon learn that God creates animals and other creatures in Eden. God created the serpent, the craftiest of any “wild animals” (Gen 3:1). The serpent becomes a magnifying glass, as it were, for human potential and identity to rebel and grow or fall into self-interest. The serpent represents a hidden truth about God too. There are now three “crafty” parties: God, the man and the woman, and the serpent. God has placed the man and woman into temptation. God has created too a serpent to tempt them. And the serpent is intent to open their eyes to truth, to their condition of nakedness deepened by a wound of shame. The plan for rebellion has begun, and the drama unfolds with shock and revelation, with the comedy and tragedy of the inner truth of what makes us human.

The serpent begins talking with the woman. The talking serpent knows about the craft of persuasion. It entices the woman to eat of the fruit of tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The fruit does not cause death for it gives life like the other tree. The senses will be deepened. Eyes will be opened that divinity is possible for both the woman and man. They can be like God “knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5). So, the woman and the man partake of the fruit only to discover the “wisdom” that they are naked. They have been deceived. They can never be God. The serpent knows only how to destroy faith and make people into gods and devils. The shell of childhood has cracked, and the man and woman hide from God in shame. God searches for the pair, and calls to the man, “Where are you?” (Gen 3:9). A simple question has been spoken in truth. Adam and Eve both do not know where they are anymore.

But God gives them a chance for redemption. Adam and Eve will have to choose either fear or love. This is the hidden truth that the serpent has revealed about God in the drama of temptation. Now, the man and the woman have chosen fear. And they do a good job at this! They have eaten the forbidden fruit, and they hide from God in the beautiful garden. But they do not know they have become the artwork of God, to mature and grow. Hiding, they do not understand God's plans, only



fear. They have lost their innocence, their eyes have been opened, and now they witness to the shame of rebelling against God. They have learnt to be crafty, to hide from God. Now, God, too is a little crafty to invite hope for redemption, for the inner truth of their humanity to find purpose. God tells Adam and Eve that they must leave the garden. They must labour for what they have stolen, and to learn to love what is truly wise and righteous through being like God, and hence neither like a pagan god nor a devil. Together, they are called to be creative in the world, to grow trees bearing the fruit of wisdom and eternal life.

From nakedness and shame, the man and woman have discovered a fragment of painful truth. They have encountered the prohibition against total knowledge and power. They cannot just live for themselves. They must work and be creative. They have also learnt to rebel at a cost. They can now transform and renew their spirit of rebellion to the world by making a stance against the horror of evil, against the insanity of people and world bent on power and destruction. Departing Eden, Adam and Eve must begin by sharing the fruit of their labours and make possible the redemption of truth for future generations. Here, they have left for us an ancient vintage and truth maturing since the days of Creation. We find this in the words of the new Adam (Rom 5:17), in the testimony of Jesus the Christ about how to inherit the earth (Matt 5:5) and Father's kingdom (Matt 25:35). In the parable of the Judgment of Nations, Jesus proclaims, "for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me" (Matt 25:35-36). Jesus speaks of the inner, gentle, and bold truth of what makes us human.

Let these words be pronounced in the artist, in the form of beauty unveiling a fragment of truth, the invisible little goodness touching the soul of life.



Glenn Morrison speaking at the Artists' Forum in 2025, at Holmes à Court Gallery

## COMMENTARY 5: Tara Conradt

### What is Truth?

*"I was afraid, because I was naked and I hid myself."* (Genesis 3:10)

Our modern world is plagued by uncertainty; the notion of truth seems to move ever beyond our grasp. Yet there remains a deeply human instinct to pursue truth. Philosophers have long argued that alongside this pursuit is an innate search for the transcendent, a desire for God.

From the very beginning of Scripture, ancient wisdom reveals another equally evident drive: our counter-intuitive tendency to conceal. In the Genesis narrative, Adam represents all of us, fumbling a confession that echoes throughout historical accounts, political halls, and dining room tables: *"I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."* (Genesis 3:10). We curate and control, cover, and create virtual illusions to the point that we no longer know where reality begins or ends.

*"What is truth?"* Pilate asks as he looks right at Jesus. How close we can come and still miss it! Earlier, Jesus had explained his need to use parables so that some might truly see, yet lamented that mostly they, we, still don't. Pilate's question drifts unresolved through the centuries, carried on tides of fragmented narratives and shifting interpretations. Truth today feels fleeting, splintered by motives and manipulation. Perhaps this is because we remain as frightened as our first ancestor, unable to see the forest through the fig leaves.

What is true has been obscured; perhaps it always has been. And yet, we are designed to reveal truth. Flawed beings, but made in the image of a Creator. Within this tension lies a profound invitation: truth and creativity are intertwined.

Artists and poets through the ages have intuitively grasped the power of creativity to communicate something more real than any limited medium like words can express. Beauty, somehow, is the clearest form of truth. Truth and beauty, along with goodness, are what philosophers call 'transcendentals'. Beauty can tell us what is true precisely because it is eternal.

Neuroscience reveals that aesthetic experiences profoundly influence our brain's sense of safety, calming fear responses and allowing deeper engagement. Story and imagery quietly disarms cynicism and bypasses intellectual defences, speaking directly to the deeper parts of our being. Beauty whispers truths too subtle or profound for words, guiding us from places of fear and hiding into spaces of vulnerability and honest presence.

Our brains instinctively respond to balance and proportion, colour and form. There was a time when a picture hung correctly, or a wall built straight was described as 'true'. Text aligned squarely on a page is 'justified', and righteousness is symbolised as scales that are fair and balanced. All that is good and right in the world is the most beautiful thing to behold. Noticing beauty in everyday life is itself an act of hopeful resistance in the midst of despair and disillusionment. It is seeing what is real, what is right, what is true because it reflects the divine order of things. The ultimate truth is the revelation that God is good and that God's word to the world is Good News.

Goodness possesses the capacity to draw humanity out from hiding, welcoming us into radical honesty. Humanity at its best becomes a conduit for God's creative expression, revealing unseen realities.

So what is truth?

It's a *"love your neighbour," "walk with God in the cool of the evening," "everyone has enough,"* and *"no one left out"* kind of truth.

It's the beauty of healthy families, gratitude, friendship, and forgiveness that cuts through.

It's evident in generous communities, like the one I encountered as a wayward teen.

It's real in the peacemaking and hell-shaking courage of my heroes in faith.

It's found in creative endeavours that speak hope and homes that hold space for the broken-hearted.

It's good news to the poor, justice and equity, freedom for the oppressed, and provision for the widows and orphans kind of real.

What might we discover if we find the courage to encounter ourselves, our neighbours, and the Divine without hiding or disguise? Perhaps truth resides precisely here: in the brave beauty of standing before mystery, before otherness, and even before our own sinful ugliness. Resisting the urge to hide allows divinity and humanity to meet face to face. And perhaps we can do better than Pilate sometimes.



## COMMENTARY 6: Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB DD

ARCHBISHOP OF PERTH



“What is Truth?” Genesis 3:10b

“I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” (NRSV)

The nakedness described in this passage comes from Adam’s understanding and realization of disobeying God, of sin. Adam’s fear expresses his separation from God and an understanding of the psychological consequences of this. Sin and guilt lead to fear and separation from God – to a breakdown of the loving relationship between a father and one of his children.

Despite his fear, Adam admits that he has disobeyed God. This takes courage even if it is laced with fear. It is the first step towards reconciliation and healing, to restoring a relationship with God. It is also important to note that in acknowledging his disobedience, Adam seeks to shift the blame to Eve. This too, is part of Adam’s sin.

The truth of Adam’s situation is that good and evil now exist in the world. Ultimately, truth, goodness and love emerge from our proximity to a loving God, from relationship with a compassionate and loving God. In a God who searches for us, who reaches out for us. God desires to embrace us and calls us individually “by name”.

There is joyful consolation in our intimate closeness with God, in our vulnerability and honesty, in a God who calls us to him unconditionally, regardless of our limitations.

This is the truth that drives the human person – a call to an intimate relationship with God.

*+ Timothy Costelloe SDB*

Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB DD  
Archbishop of Perth





## COMMENTARY 7: Rev Dr Ian Tozer

### Reflection on the 2026 Mandorla Art Award Theme

“What is truth?” In John’s Gospel, Pilate poses the question at a significant moment: during the back-and-forth trials Jesus faced before his crucifixion (John 18.)

Pilate and Jesus miscommunicate. In John’s Gospel, Jesus often speaks at cross-purposes with dialogue partners because what he says is beyond their insight or understanding.

Pilate and Jesus talk about kingship and power. This is relevant to Pilate because of his responsibility to maintain Roman Imperial Order during the festival of Passover (which celebrates the Jewish nation being freed from slavery in Egypt and beginning a journey which led them to the God-given Promised Land [Palestine]).

It was an inherently risky time of year – it reminded Jews of God’s purpose for them. The potential for conflict was high: civil order could easily be disrupted because of tensions between the Roman occupiers and the Jewish occupied.

Judean religious authorities, whose status depended on their willingness to compromise with the Romans, were suspicious of all who could jeopardize their position. No wonder Jesus was on trial. Pilate seeks ways out of sentencing Jesus to death and probably saw himself as having no other choice. He had to keep the peace and when the crowd asked that he free Barabbas instead of Jesus, he did so.

Pilate misses the crucial point when Jesus does not respond out loud to Pilate’s question, “What is truth?”

Immediately before the question, Jesus said his purpose was to testify to the truth. Earlier John had reported Jesus saying, “I am the Truth...” (John 14:6). John’s Gospel begins with the affirmation that God’s “... Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” (John 1: 14).

What is truth? For John, Jesus embodies truth. Thus, John presents Jesus himself as the answer to Pilate’s question.



Opening night for the 2024 Mandorla Art Award, at Holmes à Court Gallery, Kate Anderson Photography

## COMMENTARY 8: Dr Brian Harris

### To be naked and unafraid...

#### What is Truth?" Genesis 3:10b "I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." (NRSV)

It's such a strange rationale. Adam is providing a justification for why he is hiding from God. I am naked, so I am hiding from you. He had always been naked. That's how God made him. And he had met with God many times before. Looking at his naked creation God had declared that it was both *Imago Dei* and very good. It's hard to imagine a greater compliment.

So why is Adam hiding? Clearly it is not because God finds something abhorrent in Adam's naked body. No, the issue is not with God, it is with Adam, and Adam's new perception of himself. Just a short while before both he and Eve had delighted in their bodies and in each other. Gen 2:25 tells us that "The man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame."

Ah, to be naked and to feel no shame. That is indeed paradise.

What changed?

It was a silly thing, but the consequences were devastating. There was that niggling little suggestion that God was not as generous as they thought. It's a mischievous question put by the serpent, as much a statement as a question: "Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?" It's an outrageous exaggeration, and Eve is quick in her correction. No, not any tree. Only one tree was off limits to them - for it would lead to death. The prohibition was protective, not restrictive.

The serpent notches up the attack, and flatly contradicts God. In essence, the serpent claims that God is a petty despot, afraid that the extra knowledge the fruit from the tree would confer would see the creation equal to the Creator. According to the serpent, if they ate from the tree, they would "be like God."

Of course they would... but not because they had eaten from the tree. They were already like God. They had been made in God's own image. They already had what was promised. To say it again, they were already made in God's image. They were already like God. True, being like God is not the same as being equal to God, but it's a pretty lofty status.

So why did they eat the forbidden fruit?

Is it part of our humanity that we second guess ourselves? "Am I really like God?" "Have I really been made in God's image?" "Am I missing out on something?"

It turns out they do gain some new knowledge after eating from that tree. The knowledge of shame, and separation and awkwardness. It's a journey away from love and care and relationship to hiding and blame and excuses. "The woman you put here.. She gave me some fruit." There you go God. It was your fault, and it was her fault. Nothing to do with me really.

Really, then why are you hiding Adam? If it wasn't your fault and you have all your excuses ready, why are you afraid, and why ashamed of your nakedness?

What is God thinking in the midst of this? Is God perplexed, or angry, or bemused? None of those really. But God is asking the probing questions. "Where are you?" "Who told you you were naked?"

What is truth?

There are so many truths in these opening chapters of the Bible. They are chapters that speak of our original goodness. They are chapters that note our tender ego's. They are chapters that warn that it is easy to make someone feel naked and ashamed. They are chapters that warn that relationships can be damaged.

Later chapters tell how what was lost can be reclaimed. They speak of a God shaped love born naked at Christmas, and dying naked on the Cross of Calvary. They speak of resurrection and hope. They remind us of the original truth... you are naked, and beautiful, and Gods...

## COMMENTARY 9: Dr Steve McCready

### What is Truth?" Genesis 3:10b "I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." (NRSV)

The first artists on the canvas of God's creation are Adam and Eve. A man and woman gifted to use their hands to create in partnership with one another and with their creator. Not everything is obvious in this story of beginnings. Lots of the details are left out, probably because story telling is its own beautiful artform. Everyone loves a good story, especially one where we can attach our own images to the words that we read and hear. One thing that the author of Genesis does make clear is that Adam and Eve were good at practicing friendship. They were uniquely designed for it. Adam was made to be a friend of God, one who walks in the temple garden with the King of Creation. The Bible's text tells us that despite his intimate friendship with God, Adam was aware that he was alone in his humanity, while simultaneously God recognised that it wasn't good. The answer to that 'wasn't goodness' of Adam's relational experience was the creation of a human friend. In the garden, the most apparent and obvious social construct was friendship.

When the Creation narrative becomes the Fall narrative, the most evident impact of Adam and Eve's rebellion was a fractured friendship. Sin broke everything relational, and now the world's typical social construct is broken friendships. Theologian Drew Hunter's insight here is so simple and yet so profound and truthful, "Sin is anti-social, it always ruins relationships." Think about it, friendship with God was ruined, fellowship with each other was fractured, and relationship with the created order became fragmented. This is how sin works in our world. Firstly, it separates. Secondly, it forms our nature as selfish, and finally, it brings death into the world, and death is the end of every friendship. For us, this means that our nature is oriented away from true friendship. While we were made for it, we desire it; our sinful nature makes the pursuit of it so very hard. We are designed to be known, we want to be known, and yet like Adam and Eve, we find ourselves hiding behind a tree. We are experts at hiding. We are even experts at hiding in the open. To answer the question, what is truth? Adam's experience of imperfect humanity was fear (I was afraid, Genesis 3:10b) and vulnerability (I was naked, Genesis 3:10b), and Adam's response was to hide.

There are many truths in this truth, some beautiful and some broken. The beauty is in the knowing that friendship with God was our original design and has been made possible again by the redeeming work of Jesus. There is more beauty in knowing that friendship with others is truly possible, beyond our daily experience of fractured friendship. There is beauty in knowing that fear, vulnerability and our deep desire to hide is a very normal human experience. And there is beauty in knowing that Jesus invites us, like Zacchaeus in Luke's Gospel to climb out of the tree, to come out of hiding, to come out of isolation and to reconnect with the redeeming love of God, and the redeemed community of God. But brokenness remains, at least for a little while longer, while we wait for Jesus to return. This brokenness leads to pain, hurt, and grief, all experienced because of relationships. What is truth? Relationships can be hard. We all know the fear, the vulnerability and the risk of becoming truly known. What is truth? That all of us are truly known, and fully loved by the God who is not hiding from us.

As the Apostle Paul explained to a group of intellectual artists on a hill in Athens: From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' Acts 17:26-28

What is truth? There is nowhere left to hide.



New Norcia Benedictine Community



## COMMENTARY 10: Dr Lawrence Pang

### **"I was afraid because I was naked and I hid" (Genesis 3:10)**

The Old Testament contains many narratives for reflection and meditation. They can be spiritually rewarding for the life of faith. The story of the first human couple's disobedience in Genesis 3 has had the greatest impact on Western art and literature. The narrative continues to provoke imagination and reflection because it resists any attempt to definitively narrow it down to a single reading of the truth it seeks to convey. There appears to be no consensus about whether God had lied to the woman when God warned her about the punishment of death should they eat from the forbidden tree (2:16-17; 3:2). On the question of whether the serpent lied to the woman regarding the divine warning, commentators have argued either way. The narrative tells us that both man and woman did not die after they had eaten from that tree (3:24). In fact, Adam lived to a ripe old age of nine hundred and thirty years (5:5). From a hermeneutical standpoint, we still ask about the truth that Genesis 3 seeks to offer Christian living today. This commentary reflects further on the aim of the narrative in Genesis 3.

The artful composition of Genesis 3 is evident in the way the narrative sets out corresponding ideas in concentric circles with its core encapsulating the key aspect of the narrative. The outer circle contains the serpent's claim that introduces the tension in the narrative. Its claim is that the woman will not die from eating from the forbidden fruit. Instead, her eyes will be opened and she will be like God knowing good and evil (3:4-5). The corresponding idea in this outer circle is God's remark at the end of the narrative that the man, and presumably the woman too, has become like God knowing good and evil (3:22). The inner concentric circle contains the effect of having consumed from the forbidden tree – "the eyes of both were opened", "they knew they were naked" and "they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves" (3:7). Within this inner circle is God's corresponding action – "God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them" to cover their nakedness (3:21). At the core of the concentric circles is the confession of the man – "I was afraid, because I was naked and I hid myself" (3:10). It is a response to the divine interrogation – "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten the from the tree of which I had commanded you not to eat?" (3:11). Two critical insights must be highlighted. Firstly, the man and woman do not see a need to cover their physical nakedness prior to the consumption of the fruit. They were not afraid that their nakedness were obvious to each other. Neither were they uncomfortable about their nakedness before God. Why do they feel a need to hide their nakedness after eating from the forbidden tree? Perhaps, their senses were heightened after the consumption. They are now aware of their nakedness and considered it necessary to cover their nakedness. The puzzling question is why they felt it necessary to hide from God when they did not hide from each other if nakedness is the real issue behind the man's confession "I was afraid". They had made clothes out of fig leaves to cover themselves. Is that not sufficient? Why hide among the trees of the garden (3:8)? What were they truly afraid of? The answer lies in God's rhetorical question "Have you eaten the from the tree of which I had commanded you not to eat?" (3:11). It seems the real reason for hiding from God is not because he was ashamed of his nakedness. Instead, he hid because he knows he had disobeyed God's instruction. It seems he now knows the difference between good and evil. To disobey God is to be evil in contrast to being good. Prior to the disobedience, he did not know the meaning of evil. Now that he had disobeyed God's instruction, he understands the meaning of evil. He was afraid because he had committed an act that is contrary to God's expectation.

Humans know when they commit an act that is not good. It manifests itself in a sense of uneasiness and fear. The tendency would be to hide the feeling in different ways in the hope that outwardly we do not betray the wrong we had done. The narrative in Genesis 3 compels us to ask further questions arising from the central idea at the core of the narrative – What would have been the outcome of the narrative if the man had confessed his wrongdoing instead of shifting the blame to the woman for having given him the fruit to eat? Would God have punished the woman if she had confessed to having disobeyed God's instruction instead of accusing the serpent of having caused her to eat from the forbidden tree? Are these the 'what if' questions that the author of Genesis wants readers to ponder over. Does the author want readers to step back into the garden of Eden to reflect on these questions to consider our actions in life?

## COMMENTATOR BIOGRAPHIES

**Dr Angela McCarthy** is an adjunct senior lecturer in theology at The University of Notre Dame Australia, Fremantle campus. Her first degree from Sydney University included work in Biblical Studies and Fine Arts. After time spent rearing a family, Angela resumed secondary teaching and further studies in theology and education in 1993 at Notre Dame and was awarded her PhD in 2007. Since then, she has completed a further Research Masters in Theology in the field of Scripture, art and theology. Angela has published in the areas of liturgy, icons, art and theology, liturgical music, educational practice and theological aesthetics. She is the associate editor of the Australian Journal of Liturgy, a member of the Australian Academy of Liturgy, Chairperson of the Mandorla Art Award.

**Dr Tania Watson** is Executive Minister at Riverview Church. She is an experienced executive leader in churches, organisations and boards. Tania is an active advocate for the arts and artists and has been the Treasurer for Mandorla Art Award since 2022. From 2009-2019, Tania was the Executive Minister for Churches of Christ in WA. In 2018, Tania completed a DMin from Nyack Seminary in NY, USA. Her research work considered the relationship between trust, authority and leadership in the context of Australian culture.

**Assoc Prof Glenn Morrison** lectures in systematic and pastoral theology at the University of Notre Dame Australia, Fremantle. He completed his PhD in Systematic Theology and Continental Thought at Australian Catholic University, Melbourne where he has also held a lecturing position. His research interests include Theology and Phenomenology, the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, Interfaith Relations, Ecclesiology, Spirituality, Pastoral Theology and Catholic Universities. He is also the author of *A Theology of Alterity: Levinas, von Balthasar and Trinitarian Praxis* (Duchesne University Press, 2013).

**Tara Conradt** is a therapist, pastor and theologian, and accidental activist. With two decades of local church ministry experience and theological training, Tara is passionate about the intersections of theology, spiritual formation, community development, and social change strategy. She is the Clinical Lead at Alta-1 College.

**Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB DD** was appointed the ninth Bishop and sixth Archbishop of Perth, by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012. He was previously the Titular Bishop of Clonard and Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne and was ordained to the priesthood in 1986. In 1998, he attended the Synod for Oceania in Rome as the theological adviser of the then Archbishop of Perth. He has completed a Licentiate in Sacred Theology at the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome and lectured in Systematic Theology at Catholic Theological College in Melbourne. In addition to his appointment as the Archbishop of Perth, His Grace holds the following concurrent appointments: President, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC), Chair, Permanent Committee - Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC), Apostolic Administrator, Diocese of Bunbury (Western Australia), President, Synod of Bishops for the XVI General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (2023 – 2024).

**Rev Dr Ian Tozer** was installed as Moderator of the Uniting Church WA in September 2023. The Moderator of the Uniting Church WA is the pastoral head and spokesperson of the church and is held for three years. Ian studied English and Philosophy and then trained for Ministry at Perth Theological Hall. He has been a member of the Uniting Church since union, and was ordained in 1982. Since then, he has ministered to congregations in rural and suburban locations, as well as central city placements in both the Synod of Western Australia and of South Australia. Ian has also worked in Presbytery and Synod roles, and has been a chaplain in school, hospital and aged care settings.

**Dr Brian Harris** is a Perth based theologian and author, and was formerly the principal of Vose Seminary. He now directs the AVENIR Leadership Institute and the Centre for Faith and Life. He has published seven books, the latest of which is *Stirrers and Saints: Forming Spiritual Leaders of Skill, Depth and Character* (Paternoster, 2024).

**Dr Steve McCready** is a Senior Minister at Riverview Church, in Perth. Originally from Belfast, where he led the work of Youth for Christ Northern Ireland, Steve lived and ministered with his family for ten years in Canada, serving large Baptist churches in the roles of executive and senior pastor. Steve and his family moved to Australia in 2021 to join the leadership team at Riverview. Steve is an adjunct lecturer at Morling College in Perth. He is also a faculty member at Kairos University in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, guiding MDiv and DMin students through their programs. He currently supports the educational journey of pastors in Australia, Canada, USA, Kenya, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia. His passion for learning has recently taken Steve into a Doctor of Theology program where he is focusing his studies on the restoration of theologically informed leadership in large churches.

**Dr Lawrence Pang** is Associate Dean of Learning and Teaching at the University of Notre Dame Australia, Fremantle. He completed his doctoral research in Old Testament Studies at Notre Dame and the title of his thesis is "Prophecy, Propaganda or Both: A Rereading of Hosea 1-3". He lectures in Biblical Studies at the Fremantle campus of the University of Notre Dame Australia, focusing on Old Testament, and Theology within the Core Curriculum.

# MANDORLA VISION & MISSION STATEMENT



The Mandorla Art Award is a contemporary fine art award and Australia's most significant thematic Christian art prize.

In conversation with a Biblical text, Mandorla invites artists to contribute to the cultural life of Australia.

The Mandorla Art Award actively fosters a relationship between contemporary fine artists and the writings of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. We start from the belief that these living texts speak to the heart of what it means to be human, our relationship with one another, and the world that is our home.

We believe that fine art speaks to the human condition and that the Mandorla Art Award is well-placed to invite contemporary fine artists to use the selected theme as a catalyst in their own creative processes.

The high calibre of this creative partnership, and the artwork produced, make an important contribution to the cultural life of Australia.



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