

## Theology in Scotland on arts and culture

# The Band & the Promise

*Martin Donaghey*

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*Martin Donaghey is a 35-year-old Baptist minister, based on Westray, one of Orkney's Outer North Isles. He has been writing poetry since the age of 9, and was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome in his early teens. Growing up in the Roman Catholic tradition, he became aware – at a young age and in a deeply personal way – of the conversation between faith, art and the human soul and mind. Exploring these intertwinings in a Baptist context has been formative of both his community ministry and individual faith walk, especially as a Neurodivergent person. He lives with his wife, Jamie, and their West Highland Terrier/Chihuahua cross, Sophie.*



The poem that became “The Band & the Promise” first began to emerge in July of 2021. I will not here attempt to ascribe to it every inch of my intent either at that time, or in the on-off months of editing and redevelopment since. My Baptist (and, I trust, Christ-like) commitment to interdependence of interpretation conducts a motif of reader-response and embrace (*à la* Volf)<sup>1</sup> in my own reading: of Scripture; of nature; of the works of others.

To some, this tendency may feel like a hard-and-fast, logically-deduced rule. However, for me, and to *my* mind, it emerges naturally. In my classically Autistic sensory experience, I encounter texts (trends, places, people) as a collage of individual pieces, which are then assembled

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<sup>1</sup> Miroslaf Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. Revised and updated ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019).

*Poem: The Band & the Promise*

together, mutually transforming each other into the pre-constructed whole that Neurotypical people are commonly gifted to see straight-off.

For Neurodivergent people, sense-making so often begins in the world behind-the-text: robbed of the luxury of perceiving things ‘as they really are’, our gifted advantage is an innate ability to construct that world-of-the-text for ourselves; to go on our own journey of meaning just to arrive at a ‘basic’ definition.

For example, if you’re Neurotypical, perhaps you’re reading this very introduction and saying to yourself, ‘My! I didn’t ask for an essay!’ – I ask you to please be mindful of your privilege not to require one! Certainly for me, and for many Neurodivergent people, to live is to exegete – everything: the interpersonal, societal, and yes, theological and biblical. I make no choice in this; it *just happens*. More often than not, it is an intimate experience; precious, vulnerable, overwhelming, isolating, fascinating, thrilling.

So I hope you will not feel it an ironic authorial imposition when I invite you to read my poem without too much other background introduction from me: come on in to my way of reading. Incidentally, that invitation became part of my intent somewhere along the journey of constructing the piece.

**The Band & the Promise**

Picturing  
A rainbow  
Presupposes  
A context in  
Grey-blue-gold,  
Wet rays.  
It takes some sense  
Of particular  
Nature –  
Contradiction –  
To appear  
In a sky  
More than canvas.

*Poem: The Band & the Promise*

It's not like  
Other weather  
Isn't  
Diverse,  
Or beautiful, in itself;  
With colours

On display  
All together  
Already.

Nonetheless, horizon  
Beams end to end with  
That other spectrum –

Altogether – all ready?  
Let's play!

[Symphony that went unheard  
In Hoffman's tuned palms beating head;  
Beyond the staccato:]  
*You may not find us on the forecast ...*