

377 PS – a persuasive illustration?

Don't get me wrong, I think ClassicFM is doing a great job, enhancing the lives of millions of people by persuading them of the value of classical music (weekly figures: 4.4 million) – but this has sparked an illustration.

Background: I lost my faith totally in 2011 ('Does God exist, even?!') and tried to rebuild it, but in the way I had always been taught, and I wasn't convinced! In 2017, at a new church, I felt I had permission to ask those difficult questions that, as Christians, we often suppress. And, as you might have noticed, I've found something I really do believe in, and am excited about; I'm like a sort of 'preacher' – hence my looking for illustrations.

Apart from the adverts (one more jovial discussion of incontinence pads, and I'll scream!), I get fed up with the repetition of what some Radio 3 listeners disparagingly refer to as 'lollipops', like *Nessun dorma* or *Largo al factotum*. Even those who don't know the titles would instantly recognise them, and can enjoy them – well, if they aren't played *too* often! But how many of us (not me) have ever seen them performed as part of an opera?

To watch those operas, in costume, would be a totally different experience. *Nessun dorma*, say, is just one part of an experience that communicates potentially life-changing themes through the medium of story.^[376]

A weak illustration, perhaps, but it's how I feel about 'the gospel'. In 1968, I encountered a quality of life (at Scargill community in Yorkshire) that instantly grabbed me; then, at the Freshers' Sermon in Cambridge, I heard 'the gospel', was totally persuaded, and 'gave my life to Jesus'.

I'm an engineer, an analyser, a problem-solver, and I like to know how things *work*, and that preacher 'explained' salvation, and I'm very grateful. However, after losing the lot, I was asking why and how could something so life-changing, world-changing, history-changing in the first century have become so difficult to 'sell'?

At first, I heard the voice telling me, 'It's not our fault – the devil has blinded the minds of unbelievers'. But I now think it *is* our fault: we're offering people *Nessun dorma* – good as it is – instead of the full opera.

In 1968, I responded to those persuasive voices that told me I was going to hell, but God had a plan to save me. They didn't call it penal substitution (PS), but that's what it was.

Scott McKnight (supported by Tom Wright)^[376] sees PS as a way of helping us understand personal salvation – but that is just *part* of God's overall restoration plan for the universe, and PS is used to persuade people to join in.

I now believe that the real good news is that **the true story of Jesus** fulfils all the predictions of **the true story of God's** dealings with one people – as seen in 'the Bible' (as the first believers had it) – for God to completely restore the universe, starting now. And that's worth shouting about!

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