

FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN /

## There is intense pressure to conform with prevailing ideas over objective truth

It is essential that those who question a popular narrative are listened to, respected, and not shamed into submission, argues **Michael Veitch**



Children's fables, passed on from one generation to the next, survive because of the timeless wisdom they convey.

One of the best examples of this genre is The Emperor's New Clothes wherein a vain king is duped into believing that some mischievous tailors have produced a bespoke royal robe that only the wise can see. Anxious not to be exposed as foolish, the emperor, and eventually everyone else, affirm their belief in the blindingly obvious lie that the clothes exist. Eventually one boy speaks up, stating the self-evident truth, that there is no garment and the emperor is in fact naked. The moral of the story is obvious, namely that 'groupthink' and pressure to conform, even with a self-evident untruth, for fear of social isolation, is all too real.

Why is this relevant in Scotland today? As a centre of both the European Reformation and the Enlightenment, we have a prestigious and globally significant legacy in terms of contending for truth and reason in the public square, the church and the academy. Yet increasingly it seems that in our great universities, the Holyrood chamber, or even in the church, there is an intensifying pressure to conform with prevailing ideas that can take priority over truth itself. This should trouble us all.

'Gas-lighting' has become a popular term in recent days, whereby manipulation of reality is used to cause people to question what they know to be true. The little boy in The Emperor's New Clothes, saw through this, and literally 'called out' what he knew to be the case. Similarly, it is essential that in Scotland today, those who question a prevailing social or ethical narrative from a robust evidence base, are listened to, respected, and, crucially, not shamed into submission for affirming what they know to be objectively true.

Perhaps modern society

is uncomfortable with The Emperor's New Clothes because it reminds us that, by definition, truth is truth, regardless of whether or not we personally choose to endorse or affirm it. It cannot be altered to suit the sensibilities of a particular age. As God himself said through a prophet in ancient times: "execute the judgement of truth and peace in your gates" (Zechariah 8:16).

The objectivity of truth extends beyond the sphere of ethics to even bigger questions about life, death and what follows. As the multiple eye-witness accounts preserved for us in The Bible affirm, God did send his Son, Jesus, into our world at a definite point in history, to a definite location (Roman-occupied Palestine).

This very same Jesus did die upon Cross for the sins of people and rise again, to reconcile them to God, as the ancient Hebrew scriptures from centuries before said he would. This very same Jesus also spoke in uncomfortably unequivocal terms about the judgement to come, and the absolute need for all people to be reconciled to God by faith in Him, asserting: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Of course, no one is forced to believe, however our lack of belief in no way dilutes the truth of the good news of Jesus Christ. And simple rationality tells us that matters of God, faith, life and death are far too important to be left in the realms of subjectivity.

In the midst of these troubled times, what matters most is that individually, and corporately as a nation, we build our lives upon truth. In this, the 450th anniversary of the death of John Knox, who contended for truth more than most for the sake of the country he loved, we would do well to reacquaint ourselves with the God's Word as the ultimate source of truth in a confused world.

**Michael Veitch, Parliamentary Officer, CARE for Scotland**

## My obsession with



The key role that music plays in largely oral cultures cannot be overestimated, writes **Dr John Lwanda**

Ali Mazrui, in his 1990 book Cultural Forces in World Politics (James Currey), argued that culture "provides lenses for perception and cognition, motives for human behaviour, criteria of evaluation, a basis for an identity, a mode of communication, a basis for stratification and the system of production and consumption". By that time I was well into my obsessional collection and study of Malawian music.

I suppose I was born a musicophile, always the first to tap feet or indeed dance. My upbringing, perhaps, exacerbated and, in a way, consolidated this tendency. My dad, an Anglican primary school teacher taught music, Scottish Country dancing, and could sing like NP Kazembe. My mum broke into gospel or hymns at the drop of an argument. I was exposed to all sorts of African, European, and American music from the early 1950s via Radio Lusaka (CABS).

Since 1969, I have collected Malawian music on vinyl, cassette, compact discs, video and digitally and I have written about it since 1981. At some point, especially as I was driving around doing my house calls, the music consumption also became analytical. Time gave me the opportunity to listen to the lyrics and the messages they carried. My research covered traditional music, sacred and gospel music, jazz band music, popular music, mbumba music, afro-jazz and classical music.

I won a locally made Nzeru radio in a writing competition in 1968 and on arrival in Glasgow in 1970 was able to buy a powerful shortwave radio from John McCormack's (Bath St, Glasgow). They had hire purchase terms to arriving international stu-

dents on scholarships. Then on shortwave I could hear some African radio stations (South Africa, Ghana; even, briefly, in the 1970s, the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation).

In the wake of the World Music interest, I run a small record company that issued a number of compilations and new recordings of Malawi music. Later, as a mature PhD student in history and social science, I recorded traditional, gospel and popular music on video. My efforts saw me meet and interact with key Malawi musicians, such as: Alan Namoko, Saleta Phiri, the Kasambwe Brothers, Kalambe, Kamwendo Band, Waliko Makhala, Overton Chimombo, Wyndham Chechamba, George Mbendera, Beatrice Kamwendo, Lucky Stars, the Malawi National Dance Troupe, and the Mount Sinai Choir.

My collections and research have produced papers in newspapers, magazines, journals, books, and encyclopaedias.

I believe that in largely oral cultures – and Malawi is one such – music plays an important role in storing, transmitting, interpreting information, history, and traditions. To understand such cultures, one needs to be able to access some of their public spheres. In Malawi, on the authority side, music is used in most traditional rituals and ceremonies; it is, as everyone familiar with Malawi knows, a major staple of political rallies. It is used in school as well as health education. Gospel is ubiquitous and pervasive.

On the other side, music is part of normal resistance to poor governance, creating beni in colonial times and featuring significantly in post-



colonial popular music. Music is, of course, a major factor in surviving lives blessed with poverty and misery; humour features greatly in Malawi music. Malawians use music to deflate sectarian and political tension; the same tune can carry lyrics by opposing factions. Being oral and communal, musical lyrics in Malawi must, of necessity, be multi-layered and, if needed, ambiguous, so that both children and adults can dance

## Malawian music

communally each at their own level. **Dr John Lwanda is a medical doctor, writer, poet, researcher, social historian and music producer** *John Chipembere Lwanda's Making Music in Malawi (2021), (451 pages) is published by Logos Open Culture, Lilongwe. A few copies are available from Pamtondo, 41 The Fairways, Bothwell, G71 8PB (lwanda2000@yahoo.co.uk) at the discounted launch price of £25.*

↑ Musicians such as the Malawi Mouse Boys play an important role in storing, transmitting and interpreting information, history and traditions



**Barry Fearn** explains how he switched from being a fan to a producer

**B**ack in 2006 I started to listen to podcasts. Ricky Gervais was in the zeitgeist, after the success of The Office. His radio show, The Ricky Gervais Show, launched as a podcast and it flew to the top of the global podcast charts. That year, I also listened to several daily football podcasts covering the World Cup.

Each year since, podcast listenership has grown, as the breadth and variety of genres has snowballed. Now, around 19 million adults in the UK listen to podcasts and industry experts forecast that this will increase to 28 million over the next five years.

Podcast listening is a unique, immersive experience, an "appointment to listen", compared to other forms of media consumption. Often consumed wearing earphones or headphones, the

experience naturally allows listeners to switch off from the outside world, creating a welcomed distraction, whether tuning in in the car, walking the dog – or even listening from the bath.

My own podcast consumption increased during the early stages of the pandemic. The great spring weather, the increased leisure time created by the reality that there was only so much productivity I could genuinely achieve in running my business meant I discovered several new podcasts – from the expertly produced Business Wars, covering business competitors from Ben & Jerry's vs. Haagen-Dazs and Amazon vs. Walmart to the polar opposite, the lively, laid back, but entertaining The Lovejoy Hour, hosted by Tim Lovejoy.

As a podcast fan, I often wondered what it would be like to host my own series. But which genre would I

choose? Football, my first love, is a saturated sector. How would I stand out and who would listen? That's when it clicked. The gap and the opportunity would be to create a podcast that combines my personal passions of marketing, people and storytelling in an engaging, but educational style.

Having been a member of the Marketing Society for several years, the collaboration was somewhat of a no-brainer for all involved. The Marketing Society's member base is full of intelligent and engaging people from a wide variety of marketing and business backgrounds.

Recently, we launched the first episode of the Leading Conversations podcast, focused on how two inspirational ladies launched successful marketing agencies and how they've built these successful businesses whilst juggling

the realities of being full-time working mums.

Subsequent episodes have tackled the intricacies of brain and mental health, brought to life the stories of how some atypical marketing types began their fledging careers in advertising, a lively discussion around the challenges and opportunities that the drinks industry currently faces and our latest episode focuses on arguably the most important subject of all, sustainability.

I've been fortunate enough to indulge

in my passion for podcasts, meet some fascinating people and bring their stories to life via such an immersive medium.

If this intrigues you to tune in and hear more, please head over to Spotify, Apple podcasts, Amazon or search "Leading Conversations" wherever you listen to your favourite podcasts.

**Barry Fearn, Managing Director, Lane Media and Member of The Marketing Society.**



## Let's recognise all the great Scots standing up for nature

The Nature of Scotland Awards celebrate all those looking to protect our wild habitats at a time when we need them more than ever, says **Seonaid Mason**



Scotland's nature is incredible. Ancient Celtic rainforests rich in rare lichens and wildlife; vibrant machair grasslands humming with rare types of bumblebee; sub-arctic alpine plateau in the Cairngorms overlooking 600 square kilometres of wild land and over 5,000 species including capercaillie, golden eagles and wildcats; the largest blanket bog in Europe storing almost 400 million tonnes of carbon; and internationally important populations of some extraordinary endangered species.

Unfortunately, as beautiful and diverse as our nature is, it is also incredibly fragile. We are at a pivotal moment in history with the nature and climate emergency causing a damaging imbalance for the environment. Our wild habitats not only provide a home for some amazing species, they also have enormous potential for locking in carbon from the atmosphere and providing a solution to some of the issues caused by climate change. It has never been more vital to protect our nature.

Together, we can achieve this. Businesses, communities, individuals, and partnerships are standing up for Scotland's nature and ensuring it has space to thrive and grow. The Nature of Scotland Awards celebrate these efforts every year. Organised by RSPB Scotland and co-sponsored by NatureScot, the awards recognise the very best in nature conservation.

Environmental, social and governance criteria are becoming of increasing importance to companies, with investors, clients and customers seeing that ethical impact and sustainability of the business go hand in hand. The refreshed Business for Nature Award recognises that businesses do have a critical role to play in fighting the nature and

climate emergency, and celebrates businesses which grasp the opportunity with both hands. We want to hear from businesses in all sectors and of all sizes, from small businesses using their knowledge of local wildlife to the sector leaders making real changes for nature.

2021's Awards saw Scotia Seeds taking the trophy for the Business Award, after being shortlisted from amongst some truly incredible entries. Believing in biodiversity from the roots up, Scotia Seeds are pioneering producers of wildflower seeds which have been used to create spaces for nature all over Scotland and beyond. Supporting wild animal and plant communities is at the core of their business.

Fiona Guest, co-owner and director of Scotia Seeds said on receipt of the Award, "For over two decades Scotia Seeds has continued to grow as a successful, sustainable rural business with biodiversity at its heart. Recognition of a small but mighty, conservation led business like Scotia Seeds by champions of the natural world like RSPB Scotland and NatureScot is a huge honour."

At nearly 25 years old, Scotia Seeds is a small but mighty sustainable business from both an environmental and commercial perspective, showing that environmental sustainability and commercial growth complement each other to form a successful business model.

Entries for 2022 are now open. If you know an individual, community group, business or organisation who have made a positive difference to Scotland's nature, visit [rspb.org.uk/natureofscotland](http://rspb.org.uk/natureofscotland) to tell us about it and find out how you can apply, or follow our Twitter page @NatureofScot. **Seonaid Mason, Senior Development Officer, RSPB Scotland**



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