

The Visions of Norbert Kox

Zoe Alderton

Norbert Kox was born on the August 6, 1954 and had a turbulent youth involving gangs, alcohol and drugs. He maintained a Christian faith throughout these years, but felt that he was destined for Hell. After constant prayer, Kox underwent a series of spiritual experiences that convinced him there was more to the world than its physical attributes.¹ These initial engagements with divinity were as a result of hallucinogenic drug use, rather than participation in religious ritual. A disturbed reaction to LSD led him to seek the redemptive power of God as he describes below:

Vicious dogs were in the air all around, snarling. Everyone was walking through fire...My brother Magoo was wearing an underwater snorkling [sic] mask. He broke the glass out while it was still on his face. He would laugh hideously, waving a broken-off car antenna, sparks flying in every direction...I thought I would die of fear, but when death didn't come, I thought that I had already died and gone to hell. I'd been through these hell circles four, five, six times, and then they were still going. By now I had almost given up hope thinking that I'd ever see my family again. I was in another world. If I was not dead, I was a zombie locked in an insane asylum.

I wanted to repent. I wanted another chance. "Oh God," I said, "don't let me be like this forever." I do not know how long I prayed, or all that I said, but God did hear me. The air began to feel different. The ice-cold chill had melted away in the summer breeze.²

While Kox adheres to a typical Western view of Hell and the Christian God, he lacks any significant connection to a church group or Christian community, and although raised in a Catholic household, he never attended services or Scripture lessons.³

After his drug-induced conversion, Kox retreated into the woods for ten years where he lived in solitude with study, prayer and meditation.⁴ After he began to define himself as a Christian, he underwent visionary experiences that came to characterize the nature of his art. While he was speaking with his father, he had the following experience:

It was like I didn't see him anymore. Instead I saw a crucifixion. It looked real. I had never seen anything like that before. All I had ever seen pictured was a crucifixion with hardly any blood; a couple of nails in the hands and feet and a little hole in the side with maybe a trickle or two of blood. When I saw this, my hair stood on end. I had goosebumps and tears ran down my eyes.⁵

Kox's artistic technique developed alongside his religious views. Prior to his visionary engagement with Christianity, he displayed characteristics of automatic painting and spiritual thought. He writes of his overwhelming feelings of *déjà vu* and the powers of precognition this afforded him.⁶ Kox's earliest artworks were surrealistic pieces, derived from semi-conscious states, and he claims that "I could dream while I was awake. I'd just shut the lights off and I'd start to see things".⁷ As his spirituality became more defined, so too did his message and artistic technique. He claims "the things I do now are really planned out. They're things I'm

¹ Norbert Kox: 'Norbert Kox' in D. Krug, A. Parker (eds.), *Miracles of the Spirit: Folk, Art, and Stories from Wisconsin*, Jackson MS, University Press of Mississippi, 2005, 32-33.

² Norbert Kox: 'Six Nights Till Morning', unpublished manuscript cited in Adam Parfrey 'Jesus or Lucifer? Santa or Satan? The Apocalyptic Parables of Norbert H. Kox' in Adam Parfrey (ed.), *Apocalypse Culture II*, Los Angeles, Feral House, 2000, 372-373.

³ Kox, 'Norbert Kox', 34-35

⁴ *Ibid*, 34

⁵ *Ibid*, 34

⁶ *Ibid*, 31

⁷ *Ibid*, 31

interpreting symbolically from the scriptures". However, he concedes "I'm sure there is still a certain amount of the subconscious that takes place".⁸ While Kox's visionary tendencies have afforded him an uncanny creative process, his artworks show a conscious effort to pervade American society with his personal reading of Biblical texts. His artworks contain strong and often confrontational messages that aim to challenge the American conception of Jesus and the narrow path of salvation. Kox's art is didactic, and his message is focused on guidance.

It is important to understand the role of the visionary in Kox's own society so that his religious context can be illuminated. This notion of visionary leadership is a popular phenomenon in contemporary America, and 'visionary leadership' is a fashionable term in the modern American church. It is claimed that "vision makes the call and destiny that come from heaven sacramental, tangible and *real*".⁹ In other words, visionary leaders are able to present a contemporary, dynamic theology with a specific connection to their congregation. Visionary leadership is a means of invigorating and engaging Christians in a religious climate that is heavily focused on enjoyment and the self. These religious visionaries "cast a God-sized vision, bigger than life itself, and in the process become celebrity-heroes of the faith".¹⁰ In contemporary America, this is seen as an exciting and relevant practice. It brings Christianity out of the relative obscurity of its Middle Eastern prophets, and into the realm of the modern American. While the pre-existing Biblical texts are never denied and necessarily serve as the core of American fundamentalism, visionary leaders give a localised perspective of an international faith. The notion of vision also connects business leadership with that of the church. In his book *God at Work*, Rich Marshall claims "if you are a CEO, a business owner or leader, you are probably visionary".¹¹ While this term is used with secular connotations, it still evokes the notion that visionary skills are what drives America forward in the economic realm. God is conceptualised as a force of great power that can bring wealth and success to those who run their businesses in keeping with His will and inspired by His plan. While this overt accrue-ment of money and the merging of business with Christian spirituality seems to ignore Jesus' denouncement of wealth, visionary business is seen as benefiting humanity through noble aims and the provision of useful technology.¹² Visionary leaders allow for the affirmation of capitalism, veiled by overt references to Christian themes.

The visionary leader is thought to be someone who is "a father figure, mentor, or one standing in an apostolic role".¹³ It is important that the visionary leader can be looked up to, trusted, and admired. "These leaders do what is right in the face of evil and destruction".¹⁴ Visionary leaders seek "a higher cause, a more noble purpose".¹⁵ Kox, as a social outsider, does not fit the model of visionary leader as successful businessman. However, he is able to function within the American notion of a visionary leader due to his firm religious ideas and drive for change. Through YouTube and his personal homepage, Kox is able to position himself as an internet celebrity, imparting knowledge and leadership regardless of his retreat to the Bimini Islands and non-participation in the economic realm. Using the internet, Kox promotes himself as a reliable, fatherly figure. While the content of his work may be graphic and disturbing, Kox is able to align himself with the true path to salvation. With his heavily apocalyptic art, Kox positions himself as a source of knowledge and a strong foundation in a declining universe. His withdrawal from mainstream society marks him as someone who rejects the commercial and heretical trappings of modern America. He is perceived as a new prophet and a new source of knowledge by his followers, who are able to communicate with him via the internet. His online presence allows for a rejection of society and its evils while maintaining a close

⁸ *Ibid*, 33-34

⁹ R. H. Schuler: 'A Living Church Serving a Living God: Mission and Ministry in the Twenty-First Century' in N. Humphrey (ed.), *Gathering the NeXt Generation: Essays on the Formation and Ministry of GenX Priests*, Harrisburg, Morehouse Publishing, 2000, 142.

¹⁰ W. J. Larkin: 'The Relevance of Jesus as the Source of Salvation and Mission for the Twenty-first Century Global Context' in M Barnett and M Pocock, *The Centrality of Christ in Contemporary Missions*, Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2005, 251-252.

¹¹ R. Marshall, *God at Work*, Shippensburg, Destiny Image, 2000, 104.

¹² Larkin, *op. cit.*, 251.

¹³ D. Sheets and C. Jackson, *Second in Command: Becoming a Next Generation Leader of Excellence*, Shippensburg, Destiny Image, 2005, 112.

¹⁴ Larkin, *op. cit.*, 250.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 251.

relationship with his followers through the immediacy of video blogs and email discussion. While his views are grim and often violent, they still offer salvation to those who understand his message and live the teachings of the Bible as he sees it. Kox also attracts other apocalyptic thinkers with radical view points. He is much admired by Adam Parfrey, a publisher and journalist associated with movements such as 'The Second Coming Association', which sought to clone Jesus from blood cells left on holy relics.¹⁶ This project seems to have vanished, suggesting followers failed to fertilise a virgin with the Jesus zygote by their intended date of April, 2000.¹⁷ For the average American who is not revolted by his art, Kox can be perceived as dynamic, progressive, and strong, and he occupies an important niche in American society where the visionary religious leader is a well-recognised archetype.

The notion of the apocalypse is also prevalent in modern American Christianity, as demonstrated by the enormous popularity of novels such as the 'Left Behind' series.¹⁸ The imminent threat of nuclear weaponry or biological catastrophe has spurred on the notion that the world will end in fire and destruction, as predicted in the Bible.¹⁹ There is a profound sense of fatalism amongst the American people, the majority of whom feel that the world will one day come to an end, perhaps even in their lifetimes.²⁰ Kox taps into this paranoia, offering comfort through a Biblically-based route to salvation. Apocalyptic thought is a longstanding tradition in American Protestantism, starting with the Puritans who "felt they were enacting the final era of human history".²¹ Since this early colonial period, a notion of millenarianism has been forecast with the American people conceptualised as forgers of destiny in a truly independent state under Christian leadership.²² This idea has coloured international relations and cultural hegemony ever since. In the current political climate, the spread of American capitalism and spirituality is seen as the global evangelism that harkens the end of days.²³ The immediacy of this threat gives importance to Kox's teachings, which include contemporary signals of the apocalypse such as attacks upon New York, in 2001. Americans have long thought that within "apocalyptic texts of the Bible lay critical clues to the impending course of history".²⁴ There is an attitude that "God has taken command",²⁵ sculpting American political events to match the prophetic scriptures. American apocalyptic writings demonstrate a strong localisation of Christianity. Christian leader Danny Snapp reassures his congregation that although "there are many who claim America is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible... God hasn't left out any nation."²⁶ Snapp merges America into prophetic texts that explicitly mention Israel as the centre of the apocalypse. By aligning America with Middle-Eastern nations, Snapp brings tangibility and reality, connecting ancient scripture with the contemporary Christian. By taking on the mantle of visionary leader, Kox positions himself in a similar role. Referencing popular modes of leadership and apocalyptic rhetoric, Kox taps in to an important part of the American psyche.

Kox is exceptionally skilful at comprehending his audience and the way that they communicate. In addition to the more traditional medium of paint, Kox embraces artistic modes that suit a virtual environment. While it may be difficult to see one of his paintings in a gallery, the majority of Kox's fans and his curious followers can engage with his art online, and he can also be found on many popular social networking sights like MySpace and Facebook. He uses highly visceral YouTube videos to put forward his religious message. An example of this is his 'Fire of Life' series, comprising of moving abstract patterns and

¹⁶ Parfrey, *op.cit.*, 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 2.

¹⁸ These books are written by Jerry B. Jenkins and Tim LaHaye.

¹⁹ D. Wojcik: *End of the World as We Know It: Faith, Fatalism, and Apocalypse in America*, New York, New York University Press, 1997, 1.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 2.

²¹ M.S. Northcott: *An Angel Directs The Storm: Apocalyptic Religion And American Empire*, New York, IB Tauris & Co, 2004, 14.

²² *Ibid*, 17.

²³ *Ibid*, 36.

²⁴ S.J. Stein: 'American Millennial Visions: Towards Construction of a New Architectonic of American Apocalypticism' in A. Amanat and M.T. Bernhardtsson (eds.), *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America*, New York, IB Tauris & Co., 2002, 190.

²⁵ D.W. Snapp: *America in Prophecy and the Apocalypse*, Zanesville, New Concord Press, 2004, 8.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 85.

discordant, hypnotising music. These artworks are based on a sculpture from Kox's 'The End is a New Beginning' exhibition.²⁷ Although this video series is essentially non-figurative, the patterns used by Kox connote images of flames and demonic figures. The overall effect is both disconcerting and mesmerising. The series contains a frightening vision of the afterlife. Kox uses his technique of 'spontaneous symmetrical surrealism', which involves the splitting and reflecting of an abstract image. He suggests that this technique reflects the tree of knowledge, light and dark, and good and evil.²⁸ Kox believes that "symmetry is a key to unlocking the mysteries of God".²⁹ He claims that his symmetrical images are revealed truths that require no creativity on his part. Kox does not perceive himself as controlling the artworks or determining the religious elements that are revealed. Nor does he see himself as a medium for the message. Kox writes,

images beyond the artist's control appear in the work. They are not placed there by the artist, but discovered. The images are revealed through completely natural means. There is no automatic writing, no trance state, nor spirit medium. In a sense, it is just like turning over a stone to see what is on the other side. Whatever you find, good or evil, it was there before you turned the stone.³⁰

Kox feels that his artworks respond directly to the truth of God without any reinterpretation or insertions on his behalf. In the style of a visionary artist, Kox sees divine inspiration as the driving force of his art, rather than his personal creative decisions. The abstract nature of Kox's symmetrical works allows for audience engagement and independent thought as viewers look for their own signs and symbols inside Kox's reflections of 'God's blueprint'.³¹

While much of Kox's audio-visual work is abstract and meditative, he also provides a series of lectures with more overt pedagogical messages. These lessons are a combination of video blog and artistic visual distortion. The loose, semi-scripted form of the video blog is a highly popular tool for expressing personal opinion, often of a scandalous or confrontational nature. By employing the techniques of video blogging, Kox is able to engage with a pre-existing audience, many of whom scour YouTube for vitriol or unusual opinion. These viewers are familiar with the notion of a video blog, thus are likely to engage with Kox in this medium. By avoiding a restrictive script, Kox's natural voice and occasional verbal stumbles create a relaxed and intimate feel, as if he were involved in a conversation. Although his subject matter is both serious and bizarre, Kox does not wish to alienate his audience, but rather to instruct them in a sociable manner. YouTube also enables easy sharing of its content. With a few clicks of the mouse, Kox's lectures can be imbedded in other websites or emailed to a friend. The video blog is portable, familiar, and engaging for the many Internet users. One of Kox's most popular video blog lectures is *The Source is The Force (mind of God)*, which functions as a Star Wars pastiche.³² Kox uses pop culture to deliver a message about the nature of God. In keeping with the visionary nature of his art and edification, Kox uses unusual special effects, and his lectures are discernable from regular video blogs by their striking visual qualities. He uses digital effects to distort his face, or to insert material reminiscent of sacred visions. The abstracted, solarised, and technicolour images create a slight feeling of apprehension. The uneasy nature of these visuals is not severe enough to cause alienation. Instead, Kox's special effects link him to a bizarre, liminal state.

In *The Source is The Force (mind of God)* Kox uses digital technology to mould his own face into that of a cyborg. In this video blog artwork, Kox discusses the notion of collective consciousness and how it should be interpreted in terms of the Bible. Kox believes that he has tapped into the collective consciousness, claiming "I've already been, you know, yielded

²⁷ Norbert Kox: *Fire of Life I*, 11 May, 2007, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=FHVyEoyOn0E>, accessed 13/03/2009.

²⁸ Norbert Kox: 'Deep Waters: Glory and Shame'. Featured article on the Dilettante Press website, <http://dilettantepress.com/articles/kox.html>, accessed 13/03/2009.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Norbert Kox: *The Source is The Force (mind of God) Part I*, 10 May, 2007, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=UZW9S21NXBw>, accessed 13/03.2009.

to the power of the Holy Spirit so I've been able to work under the power of God".³³ Through his own experiences, Kox wishes to help others. He states that his purpose is to "encourage people to think for themselves and to do their own research into spiritual matters, dig deeply into the word of God and reject the religious falsehoods which contradict it".³⁴ In the video Kox responds to the increased public awareness of collective consciousness via new religious movements. He positions this knowledge as originating with Abrahamic religions, stating that "this has been known... by the Biblical people, Jews and Christians, been knowing this for thousands of years".³⁵ He views these faiths as holders of the oldest and most authentic knowledge, and suggests that collective consciousness is the bond between man and God, coupled with divine omnipresence. He warns that "every good and evil thought is held within the consciousness. We can tap into the good or the evil and they can tap into us".³⁶ His video serves as a warning to 'New Age' adherents who misuse and misunderstand the true nature of collective consciousness. Kox is careful to address issues related to current religious practices and ideology, yet his criticisms are firmly grounded in popular trends within spirituality.³⁷

Although Kox is dealing with serious themes, he keeps his video blog friendly, with "kidding" and "joking around" about cyborgs.³⁸ He describes this artwork as "a light-hearted approach to a very serious and deeply profound subject".³⁹ By using humour to engage his audience, he comes across as a fun and authentic human being, rather than a distant or oblique religious zealot. Kox's most popular videos have several thousand views, suggesting a highly responsive audience. This technique also creates a dialogue with the audience. One viewer writes, "You create many nice video's [sic], you are right in everything you right [sic] and do, it almosts [sic] seems you are like a messenger from god himself!",⁴⁰ while another claims, "I love what you said about seaching [sic] yes it says this in the Bible but most people do not really read it. Not kidding, I do and was tought [sic] to never take anyone at thier [sic] word look it up for yourself! Take notes and check it out , I love it dig it out and research. Make sure it is the truth. thank you for this clip!"⁴¹ These reactions demonstrate Kox as a figure of leadership and guidance, suggesting that his followers understand his message of Biblical scholarship as independent of established churches. His extended writings attempt to open the hearts and minds of his contemporaries to God. Rather than viewing his audience in the abstract, he applies God to modern themes and shows His place in current thought. Kox feels that "quantum physics is just now learning what the Bible has always told us, all things are made of light, electromagnetic waves (we are children of the Light). It all comes from one source they call the Universe. Summed up, the Source is God".⁴² By attaching a Biblical message to ideas of modern science, Kox allows his audience to engage with Christianity via the more rational spheres of their intellect. He dislikes the tendency of church groups to rely on inherited knowledge and tradition, rather than allowing individuals to find God through

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Norbert Kox: 'Note from the Mr Kox' in *Norbert Kox*, <http://www.stormloader.com/birch/kox.html>, accessed 13/03/2009.

³⁵ Kox, *The Source is The Force (mind of God) Part I*, *op.cit.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Many other Christian groups provide online warnings against New Age philosophy, generally perceiving it as a spiritual danger and a sign of the apocalypse. Information is provided by sources such as Dr D.A. Robbins (<http://www.victorious.org/newage.htm>), Christian Answers (<http://www.christiananswers.net/q-eden/edn-r007.html>), and Spotlight Ministries (<http://www.spotlightministries.org.uk/newage.htm>). However, publications such as The Christian* New Age Quarterly (<http://www.christiannewage.com/>) encourage tolerance of alternative beliefs and inter-faith dialogue.

³⁸ Kox, *The Source is The Force (mind of God)*, *op.cit.*

³⁹ Norbert Kox: *The Source is The Force (revisited):The Real Star Wars*, MySpace blog entry, August 14, 2007, <http://blog.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view&friendID=201779789&blogID=299461083>, accessed 13/03/2009.

⁴⁰ Text Comment from 'Exavolt1', in Kox, *Fire of Life*, *op.cit.* This citation convention will be used throughout for user text comments on YouTube videos.

⁴¹ Text Comment from 'booku4' in Norbert Kox, *The Beast has Risen*, 5 June, 2007, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=R1zXTf1wIEs>, accessed 13/03/2009.

⁴² Norbert Kox: 'The Source: We Are One With The Omnipresent God of The Universe', 2007, http://nkox.homestead.com/writings_one.html, accessed 13/03/2009.

sound interpretation of the Bible. Kox encourages his audience to seek the true nature of the Christian God, rather than the potentially flawed version of divinity as provided by traditional religious groups.

Kox feels that his works have a didactic purpose. He claims, "I think of my paintings as teaching tools. I think people look at them and read them like books".⁴³ Kox aims to educate his viewers against flaws in mainstream Biblical interpretation. He feels that idolatry and hypocrisy are the sins of organised religion.⁴⁴ Rather than referring to popular Biblical commentators or English translations of the sacred text, Kox's method of Biblical investigation is focused on the Greek and Hebrew texts.⁴⁵ He is critical of the names Jesus and Jehovah, preferring Yesu and Yahweh, which he views as "names given from heaven".⁴⁶ He originates his conspiracy with ancient Jewish priests who did not want the majority to know the name of God. He blames them for perpetuating ignorance towards the nature of God and forcing their exclusive tendencies on future Biblical studies. Kox suggests that the name 'Jesus' is an eighteenth century invention, corrupted by the same misunderstanding of Hebrew pronunciation. He states "God chose the Greek language as the key to pronouncing his name, let us not be guilty of taking away that key".⁴⁷ Kox believes that God is damaged by improper use of his name and asks "if knowledge of the name of a god puts one in contact with him, what happens if it is the wrong name? This is the most serious problem that we may ever encounter, for if we are calling on a counterfeit name, who knows what god or what spirit will answer?"⁴⁸ He advises his readers to avoid corruptions of the sacred words. Kox employs YouTube as a means of clarification towards these complex language issues. His two-part video 'Jesus or Yahushua or What?' acts as a study aide the more complex writings on the topic. This video employs a highly simplistic and straightforward style without the use of special effects. Kox claims to sympathise with the audience, who may be confused by the origin of Biblical names. He speaks in a comforting manner, engaging his viewers with second-person speech and does not denounce people who use the names Jesus and Jehovah, preferring instead to educate them in a rational manner. He clarifies development of Biblical names with a slow and persuasive approach and attempts to assist those with less developed computer skills, using the video format as a visual guide to webpage navigation.

Kox also criticises the popular visual image of Jesus, which he feels to be historically unsound. Working on the notion that antichrist means 'in place of Christ', Kox shows how inaccurate images of Jesus are false and potentially damaging. This can be seen in his series of Christ portraits in the style of Warner Sallman.⁴⁹ He criticises the inheritance of Sallman's portrait as the generic Western image of Christ and claims that this popular image of Jesus is actually a false idol sculpted in Sallman's own appearance, coupled with plagiarism from Leon Lhermitte's 1892 portrait. Kox condemns the power given to this image by public faith and adoration, likening this process to the image of the beast in Revelation. Aiming to expose the falsehoods of Sallman's work, Kox has reinterpreted his portrait numerous times with the addition of ludicrous or satanic characterisation. *Masquerade Serenade* shows a blue demon wearing the mask of Christ. *Counterfeit Christ* blends Sallman's Jesus with Santa, referencing the pagan and secular overtones of Christmas. *Sallmanstein* depicts the image of Christ as a manufactured monster, alluding to Frankenstein's creation. There are many other portraits in this series, all of similar intent. One of the other major errors pointed out by Kox is the worship of The Virgin Mary. He refers his readers to the apocalyptic group 'Modern Manna Ministries' who conduct a 'Mary Watch'. Their writings connect the Christian practice of goddess worship

⁴³ Kox, 'Norbert Kox', *op.cit.*, 31.

⁴⁴ Norbert Kox: 'Apocalyptic Surrealism Statement', <http://nkox.homestead.com/index3.html>, accessed 13/03/2009.

⁴⁵ Kox, 'Norbert Kox', *op.cit.*, 31.

⁴⁶ Norbert Kox: 'Exposition on the Names Yesu-Yahweh and Jesus-Jehovah', 2002, http://nkox.homestead.com/files/some_additions_corrections_Who_Cganged_God_s_Name_545_568_HTML2.htm, accessed 13/03/2009.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ 'Head of Christ' is considered to be one of the most iconic images of Jesus of all time. See J.R. Lundbomb: *Master Painter: Warner E. Sallman*, Macon, Mercer University Press, 1999, xiv.

to the wide-spread religious archetype of a mother-and-son twofold god.⁵⁰ This is explained as the Christian transformation of pagan gods into icons of the church. Kox believes that adoration of Mary is forbidden idol worship.⁵¹ The underlying damnation of such practices is evident in works such as the 2002 *Lady of Light* which alludes to the figure of Mary as a veiled woman, but imbues her with a red satanic light. Such works stand as a warning to those who view Mary as a beloved Christian figure. Kox's "paintings depict most organized religious practices and symbols as having a concealed basis in pagan, non-Christian belief".⁵² Through the pedagogical nature of his works, Kox hopes that Christians will look further into the practices of their church.

In 2002 Kox and William Thomas Thompson collaborated to create the painting *Idolatry: The Drugging of the Nations*. The artists suggest that modern Christians are drugged into dependence on false teachings:

The religious addict clings to false doctrine with a belligerent pride equivalent to that of the drunken alcoholic, refusing to acknowledge his intoxication. He is unwilling to let go of that which is making him feel good even if the security it provides is based on a falsehood. When the truth does not fit organized religion it is rejected by the religious.⁵³

A list of sins are written on tombstones, including "idolatry, harlotry, adultery, necromancy/séance, Sabbath breaking, lies, stealing, witchcraft, false witness, hatred, murder, coveting/envy, haughtiness/pride, swearing/cursing, drunkenness/drugs /alcohol, carnal lust, abortions, falsifying Yahweh's name, strife, greed, and self-righteousness".⁵⁴ The image of the false church is adorned with riches, referring to the evils of money and greed of many Christian groups. The blood and paper dolls represent the slaughter of the innocent through practices such as abortion. The various churches are joined together by the false image of Christ, referencing the apocalyptic prophecy that all faiths will merge to make way for the antichrist. This collaborative work is filled with text and images of the apocalypse and the folly of the modern Christian who adheres too closely to the message and ritual of established churches. It intends to lecture on the dangers of inherited beliefs, or any practice or image not taken directly from Biblical texts. Kox and Thompson hope that the viewer will "question traditions and inherited beliefs while embarking on an active search for and investigation of truth".⁵⁵

Kox is especially critical of Catholicism, which he feels to have strayed from the true message of Christ. In an email to Richard Metzger he demonstrates particular suspicion towards the clerical system, claiming

I do not understand how decent people can continue to be Catholics and even take communion from the hands of the same priests who are raping their children. The Catholic Church has since its historical beginning used the rank of priesthood to molest and sodomize men, women and children in the name of God... It is time for Catholics to realize that their hierarchy does not represent God. GOD IS NOT ON EARTH RAPING THE CHILDREN, BUT THE DEVIL IS.⁵⁶

Kox highlights these claims in his 2002-2003 *Bad Priest* artworks. There are two versions of this painting. One is a traditional acrylic piece, while the other is an animated version made

⁵⁰ Modern Manna Ministries: 'Virgin Mary Watch', <http://www.virginmarybook.com/watch/index.html>, accessed 13/03/2009.

⁵¹ Kox, 'Apocalyptic Surrealism Statement', *op.cit.*

⁵² D. Damkoehler, 'Norbert Kox, Visionary Artist', <http://nkox.homestead.com/dd.html>, accessed 13/03/2009.

⁵³ William Thomas Thompson and Norbert H. Kox: 'Idolatry: The Drugging of the Nations', <http://nkox.homestead.com/clridol.html>.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Norbert Kox: e-mail correspondence to Richard Metzger, March 19, 2002, <http://nkox.homestead.com/priestexpo.html>, accessed 13/03/2009.

only for the internet. The latter uses grotesque pixel art in the form of squirming insects and flames to represent the unpleasant evils of the priesthood. Both artworks show an 'altered boy' crouching below the robes of a priest who is enveloped by a disconcerting image of the Virgin Mary. Her head appears evil and unfriendly, surrounded by symbols of magic and the occult such as five-pointed stars, a magician's hat, and the word 'SORCERER'. The priest is depicted as a depraved lunatic with a lumpy, pig-like face and a long, drooling tongue. Text placed below his collar reads "Romans 1:25-28", referencing a Biblical passage that speaks of God's anger towards pagans and their degrading sexual practices.

Kox's 2008 YouTube artwork *Under the Cloth* is described as a "short special effects video created to point a finger at the atrociously vile shepherds who are raping and destroying our innocent children".⁵⁷ The video starts with red smoke moving across the screen, accompanied by the visual effect of Kox's spontaneous symmetrical surrealism. Thunder cracks as a symmetrical church emerges, coloured to resemble fire. Gregorian chanting plays as the church is engulfed by flames. Altar boys and priests are displayed in numerous church scenes, always with their eyes blacked out for anonymity. A fake newspaper appears on screen, reading, "PERVERTED PRIESTS PROTECTED: Pedophiles Saved by the Mother". Images from the *Bad Priest* artwork are displayed, changing colour on the screen. The grotesque characters are given a new dimension of horror. The word 'LUST' curls around the screen, framing the piggish face of the priest. The chanting becomes discordant and is replaced with the sound of burning wood emphasising the damnation of the priesthood and revulsion towards child abuse. Not surprisingly, Kox's views are highly unpopular with the Catholic Church, and he was reported for offensive artworks in the 1999 Catholic League report of Anti-Catholicism.⁵⁸ Kox rejoices in his role as a denouncer of Catholicism. He asks his followers to "Stop telling your confession to a drooling pervert, and quit letting his filthy hands lay a "communion" host on your tongue. This evil system that is molesting your sons and daughters is truly [sic] the Mother Harlot".⁵⁹

Kox's apocalyptic views are paramount to his notion of the Mother Harlot, which is a frequent theme in his art. Kox wrote a prophesy known as "Mother of Harlots", in which he claims to have predicted the September 11 attacks on New York. Written in 1998 and published the following year, his text was part of an appraisal of Myrtice West, a fellow visionary artist. Kox criticises West for her depiction of Christ as inherited from Medieval artists, rather than scriptural evidence. He suggests that "although consistent with Roman Catholic theology, this depiction does have discrepancies with biblical and historical evidence,"⁶⁰ alluding to his critiques of modern Biblical interpretation. Kox offers his own version of the New York Apocalypse titled *Mother of Harlots: The Pie-Eyed Piper*. Although this work was painted in 1996, it depicts the New York skyline in flames, which Kox believes to be a manifestation of his prophetic visions. The predominant image is the antichrist adorned in symbols that Kox connects to the worship of false idols. He is morphed with the Statue of Liberty (interpreted as a tool of civil religion),⁶¹ possesses the Catholic Sacred Heart, and has the face and hair of Sallman's Christ. Kox believes that Satan will deceive Christians by appearing as a false Messiah.⁶² The false Jesus wears the clothes and shoes of a prostitute, referencing the Whore of Babylon. The creature he rides upon is part locust, one of Kox's symbols for false prophets and preachers.⁶³ It is clearly the Beast of Revelation with seven heads and ten horns. The crowns resting on the beast's heads represent the prophesied kings, while the Statue of Liberty's cup is aligned with the cup of the whore, filled with abomination and filth.

⁵⁷ Norbert Kox: *Under the Cloth*, 11 July, 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBz4ZSonuG8>, accessed 13/03/2009.

⁵⁸ Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights: *1999 Report on Anti-Catholicism: The Arts*, 1999, <http://www.catholicleague.org/annualreport.php?year=1999&id=49>, accessed 13/03/2009.

⁵⁹ Norbert Kox: 'Pedophile Priests (video expose, 39-min)', in Apocalypse House Web-log, July 7, 2007, <http://apocalypsehouse.blogspot.com/2007/07/pedophile-priests-video-expose.html>, accessed 13/03/2009.

⁶⁰ Norbert Kox: 'Mother of Harlots' in C. Crown (ed.), *Wonders to Behold*, Memphis, Mustang Publishing, 1999, 114.

⁶¹ M. Roncace and P. Gray: *Teaching the Bible Through Popular Culture and the Arts*, Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2007, 228.

⁶² Kox, 'Norbert Kox', *op.cit.*, 41.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

The symbols found in Revelation are overtly present in Kox's modern version of Babylon. Kox inserts energy and fear into his apocalyptic vision via the YouTube video *New York in Prophecy: "The End Is Come"*. This visual aide shows the outline of Kox's head in vivid blue. This silhouette is placed on a background of rolling red waves, suggesting hell and destruction. Uneasiness is created by slight percussion, making Kox's speech sound like a chant. Kox opens the video by stating: "This is the apocalypse and the end times and New York is about to be destroyed".⁶⁴ He claims that the obliteration of New York will herald the end of America, citing scientific predictions of natural disasters in the area and revelations from symmetrical Bible codes. The presentation ends with an advertisement for the book *The End is to Come* including price and details on how to order. Through YouTube, Kox is able to create a dynamic warning of destruction to come, affecting his audience with eerie prophesy.

New York is a popular locale for apocalyptic vision. The Virgin Mary has frequently been seen in the borough of Queens, and is connected to predictions of destruction due to the evils of modern society.⁶⁵ Kox is not the only Christian thinker to view New York as Babylon. Lori Ann Holt believes that New York has revealed itself as the prophesied great city that reigns over the kingdoms of the earth due to its UN headquarters and international embassies.⁶⁶ Fellow apocalyptic writer, Danny W. Snapp, prophesied the imminent destruction of New York City in 2005.⁶⁷ While Kox's Americanisation of the apocalypse may seem in conflict with his rigorous Biblical scholarship, he resolves this by stating "Some of the Old Testament references to Babylon have a double fulfilment [sic]: one in ancient Babylon, the other in a mysterious Babylon of the end time".⁶⁸ David Damkoehler suggests that "images of America are painted to reveal the diabolical purpose behind most of modern life. Biblical stories are given new imagery to reflect Kox's vision and to place the images in a modern context".⁶⁹ The city of New York is a powerful symbol to the contemporary American. The nationalistic folklore surrounding the Statue of Liberty and the Ellis Island immigrants has forged notions of 'The American Dream' and conceptualised New York as merging point of international culture. The economic and political notoriety of the stock exchange and United Nations headquarters are legitimate reasons for viewing New York as the centre of the world. However, New York is also tainted by dubious morality, decadence and crime. The attacks on the World Trade Centre have caused a feeling of religious and cultural persecution, and created a real threat to American security. By linking the depravity and destruction of New York to Babylon, apocalyptic prophesiers like Kox are able to fuel a Biblical interpretation of national calamity and uncertainty.

The artworks and essays of Norbert Kox are defined by this sense of apocalyptic anxiety. By presenting himself as a visionary leader, Kox is able to engage with Americans who fear an impending spiritual judgement. Through the medium of YouTube, Kox presents his apocalyptic predictions and religious guidance in a format that is easy to view and share. His short video blogs and revelations suit the limited attention span of internet users, aided by his engaging combination of video, traditional painting, and text. While Kox's unsettling and often violent images are unlikely to achieve mainstream popularity, they are an effective tool of communication in a climate of fear. The American public has demonstrated receptiveness towards Biblical leadership, especially in times of uncertainty. Despite Kox's anti-ecclesiastical messages and rejection of inherited religious traditions, he is still strongly associated with the Christian faith. He is also skilful in his localisation of Christianity. While the prophesies written in the Book of Revelation make no mention of North America, Kox is able to equate Babylon to New York in keeping with contemporary Biblical approximations and the civil unease associated with an era marked by terrorism. Kox shows a strong comprehension of his audience and their world view. He is also skilful with his use of technology, meaning that his artworks can be transferred to popular new mediums. By presenting his apocalyptic message through the internet, principally on YouTube and Myspace, Kox is able to

⁶⁴ Norbert Kox: *New York in Prophecy: "The End Is Come"*, 31 March, 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFm9uNDB9Xs>, accessed 13/03/2009.

⁶⁵ Wojcik, *op.cit.*, 61.

⁶⁶ L.A. Holt: *Daniel's Key: Exposing a Dark America at the Epicenter of Apocalypse*, Lincoln, iUniverse, 2005, 122.

⁶⁷ Snapp *op.cit.*, 8.

⁶⁸ Kox, 'Mother of Harlots', *op.cit.*, 114.

⁶⁹ Damkoehler, *op.cit.*

Eternal Sunshine of the Academic Mind

communicate his views in a domain that is profoundly secular. As many people use the internet to find engaging and new viewpoints, he is able to insert relatively unknown Biblical scholarship and theological ideas such as the linguistic corruption of Christ's name and image. Kox hopes to unveil the lurking antichrist and the corruption of the church in order to unmask the barriers toward salvation. By creating didactic artworks with strong symbolism and supporting literature, Kox offers his audience a harsh warning of depravity, ecclesiastical failings, and final judgement.