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## Broad and Narrow

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# Broad and Narrow

James Calvin Schaap



Let me scratch this thing. I've been itching to say something about a wall-hanging in our library, for at least two reasons: first, *because* it's a wall-hanging in our library. Once upon a time, I put this strange thing in a frame and gave it a place beside all sorts of treasures, including the old samurai sword my dad grabbed on his way home from the war in the South Pacific, and my grandfather's 1897 Parkersburg High diploma. There it hangs, on the wall, honestly, for reasons known only to God. And second, I've got to say something because this old religious print up here on the wall just recently came alive again, hauntingly.

Chapter 1 of this strange saga begins this way. I didn't know the lady well, just enough to tip my hat maybe—I never wore a hat. Maybe I'd say "Hi" is all. She lived on the southwest corner of the block, a widow, her husband long gone before we moved into the neighborhood forty years ago. In those early years of our marriage, we had a house but not much furniture, so I attended a lot of auctions, this one right

on our block. When the widow passed, her earthly possessions were lugged out on her front lawn, and among them I couldn't help but notice a fascinating print of this odd Sunday School lesson—men, women, and children going one of two ways most everyone who's reading these words knows without labels, even if you, like me, can't read the language, which is Dutch.

Let me bring some of it closer.



As you might expect, there are far more people on the road to eternal fire than on their way to Celestial City across the way. As you might expect, the road to ruin and perdition is wide and widely peopled, and it includes several major businesses—that place across the street and upper left is, of course, a bank. (For the record, I have a few bank stocks I inherited when my father died, and yes, he was a banker.)

Let me bring some of this fascination in for closer inspection.



Here's the demarcation zone. The thin striped sign at the entrance, shaped like a cross, communicates caution and features the essence of the eternal choice on the cross section: *Dood* or *Leven*. I don't need to translate or explain. The three dandies hiking up in the wrong direction are behind a street sign that says, simply, *Rijk der Wereld* ("the rich of the world"). It's not an ad for socialism. Jesus himself opined about the pinch rich men feel on their way into and through a needle's eye—his words, not mine. I'm pretty well off actually.

Meanwhile, there's an un-fancy young dominie with his arms raised like a traffic cop, pointing toward destruction while simultaneously directing a mom, a daughter, and her son up the path that leads to the door they'll all have to bow to get through. Behind him, John 3:36 is set upon the wall: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." It's that simple. Read it and weep.

I'm *spotten* a little, making a bit of fun for

which I repent, but the fascinating mix of cartoon imagery with the burning hell of eternal damnation creates some brutal aesthetic dissonance. The open Bible at the base of the cross is turned to II Timothy 3:16 and 17, proclaiming the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, as you might well imagine.

At that auction on the corner, I dug this old print out of a box of sale items, found it perfectly captivating, in large part because although I knew no Dutch, I understood enough of what was going on in the print. The bizarre artwork drew me into

its spell, in the way I can lose myself in some exotic museum piece.

But there's more too. *The Broad and Narrow* had me in it, somewhere on that road to the right. Some part of me was born and reared in the landscape of this remarkable cartoon. How can I not know the story? I'm in it. I didn't bid, or if I did, I didn't want *The Broad and Narrow Way* badly enough to take it home, even though we lived no more than a half a block away. I didn't choose to pay what others would have paid. It couldn't have gone for much either—old print, cheap frame in a box of miscellanies, including a calendar from the Co-op, and maybe a matching set of hot pads. You know.

Besides, how would I explain the charm to my wife? So I walked home without it, not really missing it either, just sort of charmed by its old-fashioned witness. What stayed was the memory of its perfectly understandable familiarity. I knew just about every inch of it even though it was in another language. It was old stuff even though I'd



never seen anything like it before.

Chapter 2 starts here. That same print hangs today in our library. I didn't take it home from the auction, didn't buy it, but somehow it's there, no here. I doubt whether I chose it to hang on our wall. The decorator who helped us dress our new place told us we had odd and interesting stuff, tons of it, including this weird Dutch print, featuring the road to heaven and hell. So there it is, center stage.

But how did it get there? Once long ago, at a time that's beyond the reach of my memory, I must have found that rolled-up print in a closet or drawer, looked it over, giggled again at its plain-and-simple sermon, then thought it so dear that I brought it to a frame shop. Who knows when? Not me. I don't remember. What I know is all of that happened before the Dordt College English Department moved into its new digs, our own space, something we called a pod—as if we were drawn from the pages of *Moby Dick*. Of a sudden, we had our own little corner of the world, with lots of empty wall space and nothing to hang. “Schaap, you got stuff?”

“Sure.” I grabbed *The Broad and the Narrow* from the basement and hung it up on the wall of the English Department pod.

Now Chapter 3. Years passed. Seriously. One day, my son happened by the office. He'd graduated from Dordt several years before. The dialogue must have gone something like this:

David: “Hey! You got my old Dutch print hanging up here—but that's okay, as long as you remember it's mine.”

Me: “It's yours?”

David: “I bought it, remember?”

Me: “You did?”

David: “You forgot?”

Turns out we were in the Netherlands, 1990 or so, and he was just a little shaver. I had determined that if I was going to help this woman I met, Berendina Eman, with her war-time memories, I'd have to at least see the places she'd talked about, places like the Veluwe and Arnhem, Gelderland and Friesland, places of my own origins too, but places no one in my family had ever visited. So we went, the whole family. I'd decided that we should at least visit Terschelling, the Frisian island just off Harlingen, the place my great-grandparents left in 1868 for the enticing possibilities of a new land. That's where we were, at a little island town named Midsland, where the church cemetery is

so choked full of Schaaps that someone just had to leave. My son told me he'd bought that print in a souvenir shop in Midsland, across from the church our ancestors attended. He was a kid.

Did I tell him to buy it or buy it for him? I don't think so. Did I spot it, giggle, and show him *The Broad and Narrow Way*? I'm guessing I did. Was I a salesman? Maybe. Did I encourage him to buy it? Wouldn't have been out of character, but it's doubtful, and I certainly didn't remember. Whatever happened in that touristy shop across the square from the Hervormde Kerk in Midsland, Terschelling, the Netherlands, the entire story had blown out of my memory. But he remembered. And he never fails to remind us that it's his, *The Broad and Narrow Way* I mean.

Chapter 4, as it turns out I now discover, has been around. Oh my, has it. I could have guessed. A British street preacher named Rev. Gawin Kirkham had it reproduced as a large painting which, somewhere around 1870, he used for reaching the lost. We're talking *large* large—massive enough for him to require an assistant with a pool cue to point out mini-sermons Kirkham would deliver when interpreting the thing. As it turns out, the *Broad and Narrow* is not ancient at all, the first one created in Germany about the time of the American Civil War.

But there's more history, and it really is grand. Hang on. Rev. Gawin Kirkham was Secretary of the Open-Air Mission, which was—and still is—a society of street preachers who held (and hold) forth on street corners in London and elsewhere on the isle. *The Broad and Narrow* was Kirkham's own flannelgraph. Up it would go on a street nearby so that people could *come and get saved*.

There's more. Contemporary accounts of its use are amazing:

During the season just closed, it has been expounded fifty-three times—frequently to the poor without payment; but of the sum of £ 200 collected by the Secretary on his year's journeys, covering nearly 9,000 miles .... It has thus been carried to the North in Lancashire, Westmoreland, and Yorkshire; to the West in Worcestershire; and to the South in Hants and Dorset; and the testimonies to its usefulness from mayors, magistrates, and ministers are very encouraging. During the winter of 1882 the Secretary expounded on it more than fifty times. From October to May 1883 he preached about it seventy-two times. In 1886

the number of expositions was one hundred and twenty-four, and in all seven hundred and eighty-nine over seventeen years. In 1892, Kirkham had expounded on its meaning one thousand one hundred and eighteen times, the last time only six days before his death.<sup>1</sup>

It's been around, is what I'm saying. The very first *Broad and Narrow* was the dream of a well-heeled woman from Stuttgart, a devotee of the German Pietism. Convinced that the church had departed from the paths of righteousness, this group (there's always one) formed a movement whose members determined that freedom from the liberal tyranny could only be created by a platform of their own restrictions—no beer, no cards, no dance, and a heap of Sabbatarianism that rivaled Deuteronomy, all of it required to clean up rampant faithlessness with scrupulous sanctimony.

That woman's name was Charlotte Reihlen. Now Ms. Reihlen knew she wasn't blessed with the artistic talent to create *The Broad and Narrow* on paper or parchment or canvas herself, so she sought and found yet another committed pietist, an artist named Herr Schacker, to bring the whole gospel to life, which means, the language of the very first *B and N* was German. The language doesn't matter, right? We still know what's going on. Ms. Reihlen contributed a booklet of explanation with the formidable title *Erklärung des Bildes' Der breite und der shmale Weg, mit Anführung der auf dem Bilde meist nur angedeuteten Schrift*, which I won't try to translate because it's too much fun to try to read *auf Deutsch*. Besides, if you've seen *B and N*, you know very well what the German means anyway.

Eventually, someone noticed it, published a few hundred, and *The Broad and Narrow* caught on, the first legitimate German pietist meme. Then—wouldn't you know?—a pastor from Stuttgart gave one to a judge from Utrecht, who passed it along to Amsterdam's leading religious publisher, H. deHoog, who published the first editions of my wall-hanging in 1867.

Take a breath here for a minute.

Now Pastor Kirkham of the Open-Air Mission spotted it in deHoog's front window, and soon enough *The Broad and the Narrow Way* was off and running to England too. Listen to this: it was Kirkham who brought it back to Stuttgart, as reported by his friend:

The lecture had been well advertized and on two successive nights an audience of 1000 people crowded every corner of the Concert Hall, the finest building in Stuttgart. Mr. Adolf Reihlen [Charlotte's husband] presided. At the close the people crowded round Mr. Kirkham, and at least five-and-twenty kissed him on both cheeks!

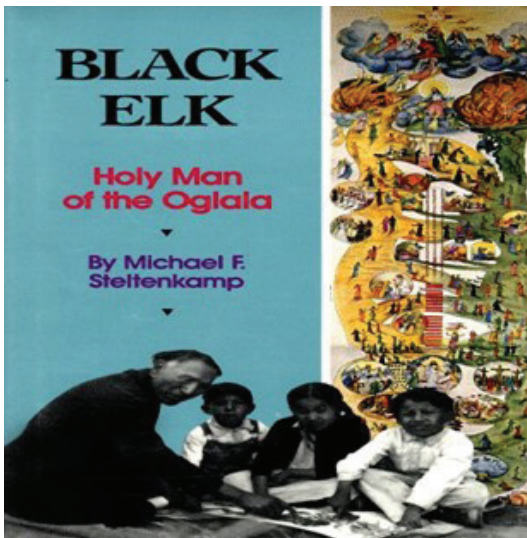
You can't help but love this. All of that history in that odd print too. I swear I never saw it until the auction on the far corner of our block forty years ago. My parents didn't have one, nor did I see it on some friend's bedroom wall. But I knew it immediately on the auction table forty years ago because I was myself in the drama. It featured me—and you.

Strange as it seemed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, some things hadn't changed. What I noticed already at the auction, and when I hung it—my son's copy—was that I was part of it, and just as importantly, *The Broad and Narrow Way* was part of me.

Chapter 5 exists because there's more fascination and wonder. The truth is, I wouldn't even be thinking about it, but just last week I ran into *The Broad and Narrow Way* again in an unlikely place, this one a Roman Catholic version (Martin Luther beckons on the left side of the fence, if you wonder how I know). The Jesuits who came to the Dakotas 150 years ago gave *The Broad and Narrow Way* their own name, *Two Roads*, and found it a great blessing on mission outposts among the Native people, who were fascinated, drawn close by drawings not unlike their own *Winter Counts*. Black Elk, a Lakota holy man who was present at both Little Big Horn and Wounded Knee, found *The Broad and Narrow Way* convincing enough to make him walk away from his own Native religion and take up with the Roman Catholics, even though he had long before been known to his people as a holy man. That wall-hanging in our library was a kissing cousin to something that converted the most famous Lakota holy man of them all, Black Elk. Astounding.

What many Lakota found in *Two Roads*, the Catholic version, was an evocation of the visions they'd always read into their own dreams. "For fifty years I have looked for the road I should walk," one old man said. "Now I have found it."<sup>2</sup> Those two paths meshed into the geography of their inner cultural life and brought many of them to the *black robes* and the Catholic church.

Black Elk himself became a renowned cat-



echist, who, history says, created/stirred real religious awakenings throughout Dakota reservations and among his own by toting with him—I'm serious—his very own *Two Roads* when he'd visit tiny churches at Rosebud and Pine Ridge and even much closer, to the Yanktons at Marty, with a singular intent—to preach the gospel.

The book *Black Elk: Holy Man of the Oglala* features Black Elk speaking to children on its cover, and a side panel of *Two Roads*. See? Here's what I've been itching to say: Black Elk is in this very strange old print too.

But then it seems to me that we all are, one way or another. There have been times in my life when I couldn't help believing that it takes many, many years to unlearn the silliness of long-ago Sunday School. That seems a harsh appraisal, I know, but there is truth in it, don't you think? Then again, tonight I'm thinking that it's a great and wonderful blessing that some of the best of all that kid stuff never, ever really departs. I'm in that thing—I really am, just like you and Black Elk. Not only that: it's in me. I've got to remember that the library hanging belongs to my son. I will.

Chapter 6 of all of this is yet to be written. Create your own tour of the *Broad and Narrow Way*. Keep a Bible handy. English will do.

#### Endnotes

1. Should you love to get lost in the minutia here, go to <https://www.swangallery.co.uk/view-print-image.php?sid=3c3b07b712189cdd91f97892ef2cd4a0&printid=1003245&catid=>
2. Massing, Jean Michel. "The Broad and Narrow Way From German Pietists to English Open-Air Preachers." *Print Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1988, p. 264. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/41823828](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41823828). Accessed 4 Oct. 2020.
3. Ross Enochs, *The Jesuit Mission to the Lakota Sioux: A Study of Pastoral Ministry, 1886-1945* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1997), 113.