

Some years ago, at the site of one of many of Herod's great fortresses, Herodium, just south of Bethlehem, I was struck by the poverty of the nearby Palestinian Arabs, the boys herding sheep (or was it goats?) at the front of the fortress and by the size of this man-made mound in which I believe Herod's tomb has since been found and also at its foot by a compound of yellow JCBs used by the Israeli military to demolish houses. There's imagery enough there for a book or two, or a lifetime – for we have the whole story of humankind's inhumanity to humankind and fear of death in one picture and the difficulty we have of distinguishing between good acts and bad and good people and bad people. This inability to distinguish between good and evil, truth and lies, is especially evident now in the present state of world politics and not least in our own, where one view is presented as being as good as another.

St Martin of Tours stands in marked contrast to this ambivalent state by his willingness to resist the equally confused norms of his own day: unable to reconcile his duty as a soldier with his duty as a Christian and refusing to side with the powerful and wealthy in his very active love of the poor, encapsulated by the cutting of his cloak into two so that a poor man in Amiens might have something to wear. In a later dream, he sees Christ wearing the cloak he has given away and one begins to understand that, to God, to Christ, the divisions we make are not the divisions that actually exist; that our inability to distinguish between sheep and goats, our lack, that is, of a moral compass, is because we fail to see through God's eyes – we fail, in effect, to see reality as it really is and build tombs, instead, in the vain hope of being remembered for their grandeur when the memory that matters and lives on will be the cutting of our cloak in two at Cop27 where, in God's eyes, sheep and goats are one. The ambiguity is ours not God's. The choice is stark: we either share our wealth or build ourselves a tomb.

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour