

28.17

1 John 2:17—World Is Passing Away

The Corpus Clock is a large, gold-plated clock constructed as a street-level sculpture outside the Taylor Library at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge University, in England. It is regarded as both a work of art, conceived by John C. Taylor, and as a marvel of science.

Completed in 2008, the clock was unveiled to the public by Cambridge physicist Stephen Hawking. It has no hands or numerals but displays the time by opening slits in the clock face; the slits are arranged in concentric circles to display hours, minutes, and seconds. It was chosen by *Time* magazine as one of the “Best Inventions of 2008” and has since been featured in movies and television programs. It appears to be well on its way to becoming a new Cambridge landmark.

Visually, the clock has these striking features:

- Above the gold-plated face sits a large sculpture of a locust, which moves its mouth in such a way that it appears to be eating the seconds as they pass, periodically blinking its eyes with satisfaction. The insect is officially known as “the Chronophage” or “Time Eater.”
- Less noticeable, a small wooden coffin hangs on the back of the clock. It holds a chain that clanks to sound the hour.

- An inscription beneath the clock reads, “*mundus transit et concupiscentia eius*,” words taken from the Latin Vulgate translation of 1 John 2:17. The meaning in English: “The world and its desire are passing away.”

Taylor conceived the clock more as a work of art than as a timepiece. It is intentionally accurate only once every five minutes. At other times, it lags, catches, stops, and then races to get ahead. Taylor says this is to reflect the irregularities and indeterminacies of life.

In a broader sense, Taylor says he intended the work to be “terrifying”—a constant reminder of the inevitable passing of time. “Basically I view time as *not* on your side. It will eat up every minute of your life, and as soon as one moment is gone it is salivating for the next.”¹

Critics have described the work as both “hypnotically beautiful” and “deeply disturbing.” No doubt the Corpus Clock would have been less terrifying or disturbing if Taylor had included all of 1 John 2:17. The full verse reads, “The world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God will live forever.”

1. John C. Taylor, quoted in “Cambridge’s Fantastical New Clock Even Tells Time.” *Associated Press* (Sept. 19, 2008).