

So what does “imago” mean?

This is a question I have been asked many times during my sojourn with Imago.

Imago dei, the image of God is the inspiration for our name. Humanity is shaped by the fact that we bear the divine image and art is one expression of this. Sorting out what *imago dei* means has posed a challenge to theologians over many centuries.

Humans appear to dwell in that threshold place between time and eternity. Eternity has slipped out of our contemporary discourse as we have become pre-occupied with the temporal. However to think only in terms of the temporal is – as some have described it – a one eyed vision. The modern bent has shaped our thinking about the world in such a way that the temporal is pervasive. To be sure we are creatures of time but there is something in the human condition that resists the view that there is nothing more. It’s all too easy to become trapped in a flattened world – mesmerized by the desire to have everything explained. And it’s a great temptation to engage our cleverness to eliminate as much mystery as possible. Such efforts it seems are doomed to failure not least because we bear the *imago dei* which allows us to apprehend something of

meaning and significance that points beyond the merely temporal, a second eye though which to see if only ‘darkly’ beyond the temporal. There are many settings in which we can catch a glimpse of that realm we call the eternal and one of those is art. What I mean here by glimpsing the eternal is those moments in which we seem to be lifted out of ordinary time.

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Chestnut by Bill Mason

Soul Friends

By Becky Mason

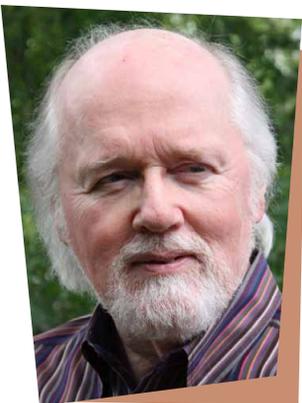
It was an auspicious day indeed when in 1947 my Dad, Bill Mason met Wilber Sutherland for the first time. Neither of them could know at the time that the Inter School Christian Fellowship meeting held at Kelvin High School in Winnipeg would form bonds of friendship and collaboration between them that would last a lifetime.

Shortly after that first meeting Dad invited Wilber to one of his screenings of his slide presentation entitled “God Revealed”. The show was a compilation of many beautiful wilderness images of nature with a Christian message woven through it. Although Dad’s technical know-how may have impressed Wilber I think what really caught his attention was how he could tell a story. Wilber saw a unique creative energy

and spark in my Dad and he could see they shared a similar belief in God’s love as seen through the beauty of creation. A few years later Wilber approached my Dad with the idea of making a film about Manitoba Pioneer Camp, a Christian children’s camp situated in Lake of the Woods. The result was Bill Mason’s first film, “Wilderness Treasure”. Wilber was the facilitator and Bill was the artist and these roles they carried through to the end of their lives.

Wilber and my Dad took great pleasure in talking. Wilber would come to our house for dinner and we used to joke that he won’t even remember what he ate. They would be so engrossed in discussing the ideas, plans and projects they were working on that we figured that we could feed them sawdust and they wouldn’t notice! My Mom’s home baked

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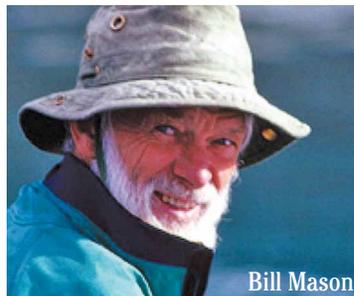


Cascade by Bill Mason

Soul Friends *continued from page 1*

cooking was delicious but he probably saw it more as a fuel for the ideas that he loved to discuss. It truly was “food for thought.”

The meeting of their creative minds came full circle in the 1980s. What started in film ended in film when Wilber again put his belief in my Dad and raised part of the funds for the production of “Waterwalker” the last film of Dad’s career. It was a canoeing odyssey that managed to weave together environmentalism, his Christian beliefs and love of nature into a spectacular masterpiece. No matter what they did together they held a common commitment in their pursuit of excellence for all disciplines concerning artistry and supporting works of Christian artists.



Bill Mason



Live stream viewing of Waterwalker.
Free viewing at <http://www.nfb.ca>
More about Bill Mason artistic career
<http://www.redcanoes.ca>



Fire in the bones

In his 1996 book *Fire in the Bones*, James Raffan takes up the story of Bill Mason. He takes you on a journey into the landscapes that fed his imagination and nurtured his faith. The title is taken from the a text found in the Old Testament book of Jeremiah (20:9) “His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.”

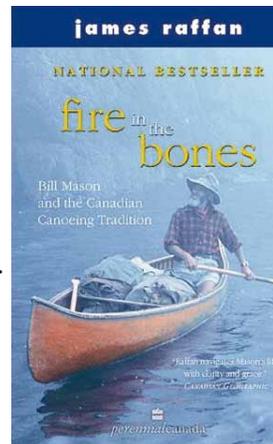
Raffan tells the story of Bill Mason in a candid and engaging style. I offer here a brief snippet from the book which speaks of the involvement of Wilber Sutherland and Imago in bringing the film *Waterwalker* to completion.

“...in early 1983, still hanging onto the dream of getting out of film and painting full-time, that Bill understood that to break the stalemate and finish the sixth canoeing film he would have to leave the Film Board and try to finish it privately. And it was at that point, just as he had done under the pines at Manitoba Pioneer Camp twenty-five years before, with *Wilderness Treasure*, that Wilber Sutherland, a third character in the *Waterwalker* supporting cast to have grown up in a Plymouth Brethren household, arrived on the scene to help steer *Waterwalker* to completion. While Mason negotiated his early retirement from the Board, Sutherland dickered with the Film Board and secured a deal in which Imago and the Board undertook co-production of *Waterwalker*. Had it not been for Sutherland coming on the scene at precisely that moment coming to the rescue of Bill and his precious last film, *Waterwalker* would have faded into obscurity.” (p.246)

“...urged on by Alan Whatmough, Sutherland got in touch with singer Bruce Cockburn, who liked the idea of working on a Bill Mason film, and eventually teamed up with musician Hugh Marsh to compose and record the musical score for *Waterwalker*.” (p.248)

< Poster for the film *Waterwalker*.

< (left to right) Fergus March, Hugh Marsh, Bruce Cockburn, ? and Wilber Sutherland.





Looking back

It has been forty years since the issuing of the charter of Imago, on November 1, 1972. The water that first flowed under that bridge has long reached lake and ocean, but the stream

is still flowing. Who was there? What were they thinking?

The charter document lists five original directors. Wilber Sutherland was described as a 'home missionary'. The other four were Bill Mason, filmmaker perhaps best known for 'Paddle to the Sea' (died in 1988); Gordon McKye, high school teacher (died in 2009); Harry Robinson, priest (died in 2011); and myself, Paul Gooch, faculty member in philosophy at the Scarborough campus of the University of Toronto.

Why did they join in this venture? The answer is Wilber himself. He had been the writer for Bill Mason's film "Wilderness Treasure", and the two shared not only their faith but also their love of camping and the outdoors. Harry was priest at Little Trinity Anglican Church in east Toronto, and had a long involvement with Inter-Varsity

Christian Fellowship, of which Wilber had been the director. Gordon likewise supported IVCF and also attended Grad Camp, another of Wilber's initiatives in bringing faith and reason, commitment and openness, into dialogue. As an undergraduate I had met Wilber and invited him to the newly formed IVCF chapter at Bishop's University; when I returned to Toronto for graduate work I deepened my connection with him in ventures such as the Graduate Christian Fellowship and the journal CRUX.

Wilber was the point of intersection, then, for each of us. But why Imago? I think we all recognized a unique set of gifts in Wilber centred in a passion for bringing together grace and gospel with truth to be found in unexpected places in the whole of God's world. Wilber had an abiding interest in the creative arts as sources of insight and provocation, not so much as didactic tools, as occasions rather for the Spirit's stirrings. For many of us, he opened up new vistas, encouraging an intelligent faith that engages with creation rather than seeing the 'world' as an unholy partner with flesh and devil. But for others, Wilber was unsettling and problematic. He resigned from IVCF in 1969 (some of the story is to be found in Part Two, Chapter 5 of John G Stackhouse Jr, *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*). With a continued

sense of Christian vocation but no obvious positions to apply for among the organizations he knew, Wilber set about creating a new entity. He called it Imago, seeing the image of God especially in creative artists. The original directors shared that vision, largely because Wilber himself embodied that image so profoundly.

Among the central purposes of Imago were three related especially to Wilber's own life story and commitments:

- To explore, initially assist and evaluate the development of promising new forms of Christian expression or communication
- To strengthen the Christian presence in the world of the arts and in the world of the mass media
- To clarify and encourage the Christian community's understanding and use of the arts, artists and the mass media.

It's my guess that the original directors saw themselves as supporting Wilber Sutherland in his personal quest and his ministry to those in Christian communities hungry for the freedom and acceptance he exemplified so faithfully. That forty years on his vision and work continues is tribute to him, and to those he inspired.

Paul Gooch, *President Victoria College, University of Toronto*

Imago on the crawl

A year ago this past April, John Franklin of Imago partnered with a number of artists, and educators from the Hamilton area to stage the first exhibition evening of its kind, smack dab in the middle of the the most exciting new art market in Ontario, the James Street North *Art Crawl*. This event is held monthly in Hamilton (the second Friday night) on a 5 block stretch of galleries, cafes, artist studios, student shows, street vendors and musicians with routinely up to six thousand people exploring the street. Supercrawl in September draws over 50,000 each year. The Imago event last year helped launch several young artist's careers, and drew over 4000 (in one night) of the public into this one street space alone.

What Imago began has led to several new initiatives to support Christian artists in the Hamilton city core, with clear ties to several

inner city church projects and the influence of Redeemer University Fine Art department. This one event has been a great jump start for all of us who work in this area.

Most recently James Tughan and Heidi Brannan of the Semaphore Fellowship are exploring the founding of a new cooperative gallery on James Street North, that will feature, the work of not only established Christian artists, but those just emerging into the field. This gallery will also feature Semaphore's interest in mission, education and partnerships with churches in badly needed support (on many levels) for visual artists. Anyone interested in being a part of this venture should contact James at 905-337-8252, or perigee@cogeco.ca

James Tughan is a visual artist living in Oakville, Ontario.

Please consider
supporting Imago.
You can make
a donation on the
new Imago website
at
<http://www.imago-arts.org>

imago 40th Anniversary Celebration Friday November 2, 2012 at 7:30pm

Glen Gould Studio, 250 Front Street West, Toronto

Laila Biali – all that jazz • Trevor Dick – voice of the violin

Adam Luther and Laura Albino accompanied by Anne Larlee – a touch of Opera

James and Cynthia Croker and Jack Langenhuizen – Motus O Dance Theatre – gotta dance!

Joycelin Ng – a little classic piano • Kevin Ramessar – strains of the guitar

Calvin Seerveld – thoughts for heart and soul • Brad Woods – a story to be told

Hosted by Executive Director John Franklin • Reception to follow

Visit Imago's new website for information about tickets: www.imago-arts.org

What does Imago mean?

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In his book *Real Presences* George Steiner captures well this idea when he writes:

“...all good art and literature begin in immanence ... it is the privilege of the aesthetic to quicken into lit presence the continuum between temporality and eternity, between matter and spirit, between man and ‘the other’. ... The questions: What is poetry, music, art? How do they act upon us and how do we interpret them?, are ultimately theological questions.”
(*Real Presences*, p.227)

I expect was this kind of double vision which was a catalyst for the founding of Imago. Early in his journey Wilber Sutherland had been nurtured in the faith by those who saw no obvious connections between spiritual life and cultural engagement or between Christian faith and the arts. However his extensive experience as General Secretary of Inter Varsity Canada brought him in touch with a diverse community of friends many of whom he mentored. There were several artists in his life as well, including his wife Barbara who had studied ballet, gifted pianist Bill Aide and Bill Mason who became proficient in both film and painting. Wilber took an interest in the arts not least in film which he studies for two years at Ryerson. He became well aware of how the arts could provide a window into God's world and the

cultures in which we live our lives, while disclosing a hint of something more.

Bringing together Wilber's ever growing appreciation for the arts and his special gifting as a mentor and encourager of others, Imago became the setting to facilitate projects in the arts as well as those engaging issues of social justice. Since 1972 Imago has sought to be a catalyst for encouraging and affirming artists of faith. Its presence has served well to be a resource of support and a beacon of hope for Christian artists often marginalized by both church and culture.

Wilber was keenly interested in taking up the challenge to speak the gospel into a changing culture of the 1960s and 70s. In the 1960s Wilber served as chair of a Canadian committee on evangelism for the World Congress held in 1966 in Berlin which was part of the process culminating in the World Congress on Evangelism in Lausanne in 1974. It was only a few days ago that I became aware of his involvement in that movement and that Wilber wanted to see the arts included in that early congress. What is surprising to me is the convergence of my activities with his. Since 2004 I have been directly involved in advocating for the arts in the Lausanne movement. Most recently that advocacy was done as a member of the program committee for Lausanne International promoting the arts including an arts presence at the third World Congress held in Cape Town South Africa in October 2010. The Chair of that program committee was Ramez Attalah (from Egypt) who while

he served as IV staff in Montreal in those early days was mentored by Wilber.

Wilber was committed to find all the ways possible to enable people to see beyond the merely temporal and to glimpse if only briefly the “something more” which we all long to discover. The truth about that something more is embedded in the biblical story and is manifest supremely in Jesus. The mandate of Imago continues to affirm the importance of a double vision from which we are able to draw our hope. The words of poet George Herbert which have been found in this column before – capture in four succinct lines the potential we have as those created bearing the *imago dei*. It is a potential too often neglected because of our failure to take up the ‘cultural mandate’ and too often missed because of the razzle dazzle of our consumerist society.

A man that looks on glass
On it may stay his eye
Or if he pleaseth through it pass
And then the heavens espy
(*The Elixir*)



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