

The season of Advent comes to us with a considerable mixture of demands and emotions. I have often been struck by the stark contrast between the strains of music singing out – “mild he lays his glory by/born that man no more may die” as background to the push and rush of consumer shopping. The deep truths of a powerful story and long tradition are trivialized in the hurry-up of the season.

Annunciation is a key part of the story of Advent – a lot of making known, declaring, proclaiming. Angels show up repeatedly. An angel told Zachariah he would be mute till the birth of his son John, Mary was astonished by an angelic encounter letting her know she had found favour with God and would bear a son who would be great and called the Son of the Most High. Joseph had his plans disrupted by an angelic assurance that all was well with Mary and the child she would bear would be called Emmanuel – God with us. The shepherds received word of this extraordinary moment in history in a dramatic appearing of an angelic host and they rose up and went to find the one of whom they had been told. The history of art in the west is replete with images of these encounters particularly that of Gabriel and Mary.

These works become icons to suggest/remind us that the world as we know it is not the whole story – they make plain the idea that there is more activity afoot in our world than our limited perceptions allow us to

know. Perhaps this is something of what is meant by the words of the prophet Isaiah – On that day the deaf shall hear....and... the

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Homeless Jesus Sculpture

For a couple of years it was as sculpture that no one wanted. It was turned down by two prominent Catholic churches. Earlier this year Regis College was offered the sculpture and accepted it where it now on display in front of their building at Wellesley and Queen's Park in Toronto. This Jesuit community takes seriously their commitment to the poor. And I suppose it was just a matter of time until the first Jesuit Pope got wind of this work by Canadian sculptor Timothy Schmalz. An image and comments from the artist are on the front page of the newsletter.

The sculpture Jesus the Homeless is a visual representation of the Gospel Matthew 25: 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.' The sculpture shows Jesus as one of

the least. This work encourages the viewer to acknowledge the sameness of Jesus and all the marginalized in our world by showing Him as a homeless person sleeping on a park bench. All distinguishing features of specific identity are obscured through the figure being covered by the blanket, making Him identifiable only by the Crucifixion wound marks on his feet.

The effect of this representation is similar to theater. The viewer approaches the work - initially thinking it is a real homeless person - and then realizes it is a sculpture of a marginalized person. It is then only through a closer inspection of the exposed feet that the viewer realizes it is indeed a sculpture of the Son of Man. This is the

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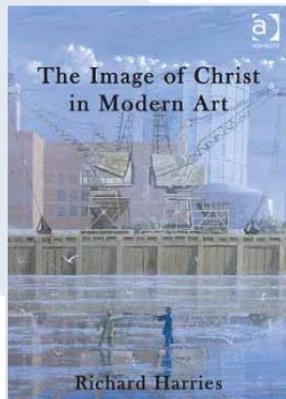
News & Notes

The Image of Christ in Modern Art, Richard Harries, Ashgate 2013

The author of this informative and lavishly illustrated work is a former bishop of Oxford and has published at least two other works on art related themes, *The Passion in Art* and *Art and the Beauty of God*. This is a book that draws on the rich resources of religious art in the 20th century. Most of the artists are British many still living, while others are familiar names in art history, Max Beckman, Emile Nolde, Otto Dix, Jacob Epstein, Henry Moore, Georges Rouault and Marc Chagall to name a few. His primary interest is art that is related to traditional Christian iconography.

He begins the book noting “The Break” as the Welsh poet and painter David Jones called it. Two things are indicated by this notion. First the long history of the dominant cultural and religious views that unified Europe is now behind us. Second, the world is now dominated by technology, which leaves the arts marginalized and their previous role as signs no longer has public resonance. In our secularized world the artist of faith faces the challenging problem of how to convey something of the transcendent through the mundane.

With the modernist turn simple representations of the world around us took a back seat to powerful expressions of the emotion of the artist. One thinks of Van Gogh. The author covers a wide range of style from both the Catholic and Protestant traditions and includes stained glass in his discussions. The underlying theme tying things together is the effort to address the question of how



modern artists have responded to the challenge of Christian iconography while maintaining artistic integrity. There were many shifts and changes in the artistic landscape in the twentieth century and finding fresh ways to express and depict common Christian icons called upon the imagination of these artists.

Harries makes clear that there was more religious art being produced in the twentieth century than most would know. Artists such as Albert Herbert and Norman Adams and Elizabeth Frink are key figures in the changing world of religious art in England in the latter half of the twentieth century.

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The cover shows a work by Roger Wagner who paints biblical stories against the backdrop of contemporary scenes. Walking on water III found in an urban setting signs of business and industry in the background. Wagner's work weaves together familiar icons of industrial landscape with traditional icons of the Judeo – Christian faith. Harries takes the reader on a rich and informative artistic journey that makes clear the staying power of Christian imagery.

New Arts and Theology Chair

Regent College Vancouver has taken the initiative to establish an endowed chair in theology and the arts. Known over many years to be an arts friendly institution this new initiative takes things to a new level. The Chair is named in honour of Eugene and Jan Peterson. The Petersons were part of the fabric of life at Regent from 1993–1998 while Eugene served as professor of Spiritual Theology.

This new venture was celebrated with a cluster of three evenings October 24–26, 2013. The first evening was the Opening of an exhibit at Lookout Gallery in Regent College. Artists featured were David Robinson and Grace Tan. Robinson's sculpture is well known and well appreciated at Regent. This show included a number of smaller pieces as well as a large installation piece called

Homeless Jesus Sculpture

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surprise or conversion part of the art work, teaching us that when we see marginalized people around us, we should see Jesus.

While in downtown Toronto, December, 2011, I noticed a homeless man was wrapped in a blanket. Initially when I saw him, I thought “that's Jesus”. In the weeks after this experience, I felt the urgent need to have other people feel what I felt that day.

In November 2013, I travelled to Rome to present the original small maquette of the work to Pope Francis.

On my first night in Rome, directly outside my hotel window was a homeless man trying to sleep in the rain. The homeless man

looked identical to my sculpture but for a small umbrella perched over his head. All night long, I was awake and he was as well (I could see the periodic light of his cigarette); I understood this as a spiritual sign from God, for what are the chances of a homeless man sleeping outside my window the night before I present *Jesus the Homeless* to Pope Francis? The next day, I saw many homeless people around Rome and decided that my ‘sign’ was all too common an occurrence and not at all miraculous. In fact, there were dozens of homeless sleeping every night around the centre of Rome that resembled the figure in my sculpture. Upon further reflection, however, I finally revisited my original conclusion: what I was seeing everywhere around me was most certainly a sign by God that I was



in the right time and place with the message delivered by this piece.

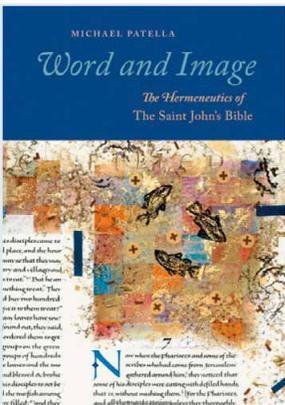
The next day, Pope Francis received the sculpture, prayed in front of it, and blessed it. Afterwards he told me he thought the Homeless Jesus sculpture is “beautiful”.

By Timothy Schmalz

Chair suspended in mid-air just over the railing at one end of the gallery. Grace Tan's work included a number of large portraits a few of which were figures familiar to the Regent community. The second evening was devoted to Eugene and Jan Peterson. Eugene gave a talk that evening articulating his interest in the arts and the value of the poetic for the life of faith.

Sitting in the new chair is Dr. Iwan Russell – Jones a theologian and former film maker for the BBC in Great Britain. He brings energy and experience to his new role and is likely to draw students who are on the lookout for places to study that will allow them to engage both art and theology.

Word and Image, St. John's Bible

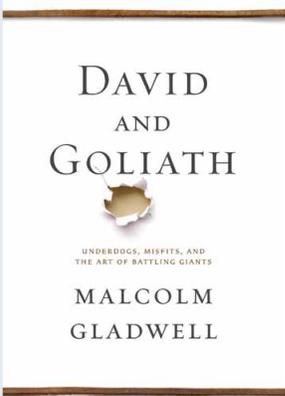


In April 2009 Imago hosted a lecture on the St. John's Bible at St. Michael's College in Toronto. This extraordinary project is a completely hand written and illuminated work of the entire biblical text – the first such work commissioned in since the

advent of the printing press. The guest lecture was Fr. Michael Patella who spoke about the links between word and image in the shaping of this unique project. I was pleased to see Fr. Patella at a recent conference and to discover that his book titled *Word and Image: The Hermeneutics of the St. John's Bible* has just been published by Liturgical Press.

Author Malcolm Gladwell

has been getting a lot of attention recently. This is not new for this Canadian author as his books have been on the best seller list for a decade or more. His first two books *The Tipping Point* and *Blink* have sold nearly five million copies combined. Current attention to Gladwell has to do with



his most recent book *David and Goliath*. This too is destined to be a bestseller.

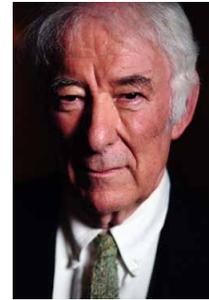
The central story that opens the way for fresh understanding is the well-known biblical narrative of David and Goliath. It seems this is a fairly straight-forward story of an underdog and unlikely victor actually winning the battle. What Gladwell wishes to show is “the advantages of disadvantages and the disadvantages of advantages”. Goliath appeared to have all the advantages – size, strength, skill, experience and weaponry, while David was small, inexperienced and no armour for protection, no weapons that could compete with those of the giant. Yet David wins the battle. This is a book about taking on giants, not being daunted by the odds.

It is often those who face overwhelming odds actually triumph and provide us with memorable examples of greatness and beauty. What were the chances that Nelson Mandela would become President of South Africa? Gladwell observes that being an underdog can change people and make possible what might otherwise have been considered unthinkable.

He tells the story of Ranadive from Mumbai and now living in America. He had no experience with basketball and had never coached a team. He took on the coaching of his daughter's Little League team – all poor players and took that team to the National Championships. He tells us of Wyatt Walker a black leader who worked with Martin Luther King and how he engaged the power of a photograph. And then there is Rosemary Lawlor – who lived in Belfast with her husband and young child at the time of the Troubles in 1969. These and other stories provide a much needed perspective on the power of human ingenuity and the courage to face formidable odds undaunted.

Gladwell* has made many appearances since this book came out in October. His is interviewed by Eleanor Wachtel on CBC, and by George Stroumboulopoulos and has appeared on the cover of McLean's magazine. It seems the writing of this book has served to re-ignite the faith of his childhood.

*Imago was pleased to have Joyce Gladwell – Malcolm's mother read from her book *Brown Face, Big Master* at the Imago evening on October 11th 2013.



Seamus Heaney, Poet (April 1939 – August 2013)

Heaney wrote of his desire to consider poetry's possible service to programs of cultural and political realignment. Some years ago he penned these words: “I want to profess the surprise of poetry as well as its reliability; I want to celebrate its given, unforeseeable thereness, the way it enters our field of vision and animates our physical and intelligent being in much the same way as those bird-shapes stencilled on the transparent surfaces of glass wall or windows – ...change the direction of real birds' flight.” This gifted Irish poet knew something of the need for cultural and political realignment – not least in his homeland. Poetry offered a thread of hope in the midst of unsettled times.



Remembering C.S. Lewis

On November 16th, Imago, in partnership with Trinity College Divinity Faculty at the University of Toronto hosted an evening to remember C.S. Lewis now 50 years since his death in 1963. The influence of Lewis has been extraordinary with *Narnia Chronicles* alone selling 100 million copies. The evening included some personal stories (Jeff Bersche, John Bowen), poetry inspired by Lewis (D.S. Martin) and a dramatic piece with Dorothy L. Sayers engaging with “Jack” (Gwendolyn Starks). A panel of three engaged with Lewis through his work and friends. Jesse Billet took up the story in *Pilgrim's Regress*, E Davey remembered the impact of *Till We have Faces* and Frank Faulk who produced the recent CBC Ideas programs on Lewis and the *Inklings*, spoke of how Owen Barfield was his path to Lewis.

Well over 150 attended the evening held in Seeley Hall at Trinity College, a venue that conjured up a Lewisian atmosphere for the conversation. The evening reminded us all of not only the man but the power of the written word and of the engaged imagination.



Imago at Context Offices

The well known television program *Context: with Lorna Dueck* moved its office to the ground floor of the CBC building in Toronto a couple of years ago. Imago was invited to be a resource for visual artists whose work could be displayed in the expansive walls of the new office. Tina Newlove, Jim Paterson, Bruno Capolongo, Doug Thompson and Janet Read have been among the artists who work has served to enhance the environment at the Context office. Lynne McIlvrde's show has just concluded and the work of Cambridge artist Heidi Brannan is on display until February.

The Healing by Heidi Brannan

The season of Advent

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eyes of the blind shall see". (Isaiah 29:18) The Advent story invites us to hear and to see, knowing that both activities remain within our power. I delight in a rendering of the birth of Jesus by British artist Albert Herbert called *Nativity with Burning Bush*. This simple perhaps some would say naïve work captures a vital thread in the Advent story. The young mother proudly holds the infant perhaps to show or perhaps to share with the devoted kneeling figure. Just behind is the strong Hebraic symbol of the burning bush. The place where Moses stood on holy ground and encountered the One whose name is I AM. And though I can't be sure I sometimes think I see just above a heavenly host looking on at these extraordinary earthly scenes.

What do we make of the "annunciations" those declarations so central to the Advent story? How do we connect this distant time past to speak to the person of faith today? Editor Ned Bustard in an Afterward to his book *It Was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God*, asks how we speak into a world that seems to ignore if not reject the possibility of redemption as articulated in this ancient story. He quotes Flannery O'Connor:

"When you can assume your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax a little and use a more normal means of talking to it; when you have to assume it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock – to the hard of hearing you shout and for the almost blind you draw large and startling figures."



Nativity with Burning Bush, 1991, Albert Herbert

Whatever one may think of O'Connor's approach it seems right to suggest that the times call for "large and startling figures". But not for the sake of "shock" so much as for the sake of declaring a hope and articulating an invitation. I would like to think that artists are one group of people who can engage in just such declarations – telling it slant to be sure but capturing resonate truths that speak into the realities of our world. My years with Imago have taught me a lot about art and among the discoveries is that good art can speak the truth – whether a dark truth or a hopeful truth, it is able to challenge us, remind us, delight us, disrupt us, nurture us, enrich us, unmask us (remember the prophet Nathan and the

story he told to King David) it can move us, it can instruct us, it can assist us in worship, it can change us and it can forcefully impact our culture – and in all of this it seems a little like the story of Advent.

John.

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