

**M**ission, missional, *missio dei*, transformation, incarnation, reconciliation – these are among the buzz words for current discourse about the church and its responsibility to the broader culture. Over the past few years I have found myself in numerous conversations about mission and what it means. These discussions have taken place in the context of my work in the arts and with artists. One thing is clear – understandings of what it is to be church are in flux and the meaning of missional quite uncertain. Things are a bit foggy at the moment. A recent documentary on this subject under the title OSFA?, (One Size Fits All [www.onesizefitsall.ca](http://www.onesizefitsall.ca)) takes a look at about a dozen examples of new configurations of church across Canada. I have seen the film and was recently part of a conversation about it at Toronto's Freedomize community. It is evident that the arts play a predominant role in these communities – these “fresh expressions” as they are called in Great Britain. ([www.freshexpressions.org.uk](http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk))

As I write this I am attending Street Level – a gathering for those who work with the poor and marginalized on the streets of this country. You may or may not be surprised



to hear that the arts are a permeating presence among many of the initiatives that are committed to diminishing the presence of poverty and homelessness in communities across the land.

There is another place where the arts are now beginning to show up more than in the past. Traditional mission is not a context where one might expect to find a focus on the arts, but there



*Resurrection*, Donald Jackson, Copyright 2002, *The Saint John's Bible* and the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA.

are signs of change. Some may recall my involvement along with James Tughan and Phyllis Novak in shaping a document titled *Redeeming the Arts* back in 2004. That was the first foray into the subject of the arts at a Lausanne event. ([www.lausanne.org](http://www.lausanne.org)). Lausanne will hold its third international Congress in Cape Town South Africa in October 2010. There are plans underway for a pervasive arts presence at that event. On another front, just last November the Mission Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) struck a task force on arts in mission. I have the privilege of direct involvement in both of these initiatives.

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## *The Saint John's Bible: Encountering God in Word and Image*

A Public Lecture featuring Fr. Michael Patella, OSB SSD, Rector, St. John's Seminary, Collegeville, Minnesota, Chair of *The Saint John's Bible* Committee on Illumination and Text will be held Thursday April 16, 2009, at 7:30 p.m., Alumni Hall, St. Michael's College, 121 St. Joseph Street (between Bay and Queen's Park Circle).

The lecture is presented by Imago in collaboration with Saint Michael's College and is made possible by a grant from Caritate Foundation.

*The Saint John's Bible* is the first handwritten, illuminated Bible commissioned since the advent of the printing press over 500 years ago. This recently completed ten-year project has been the subject of a documentary on BBC Television and drawn the attention of media through-

out North America and Europe. The Artistic Director of the project, Donald Jackson, is one of the world's leading calligraphers. Crafted in the spirit of the great medieval Bibles, yet shaped by a contemporary artistic sensibility. *The Saint John's Bible* is monumental – two feet tall and three feet wide and nearly 1,100 pages bound in seven distinct volumes.

A replica edition of the Gospels and Acts will be on display at St. Michael's College, John M. Kelley Library, 113 St. Joseph Street, April 16 to 30, 2009.

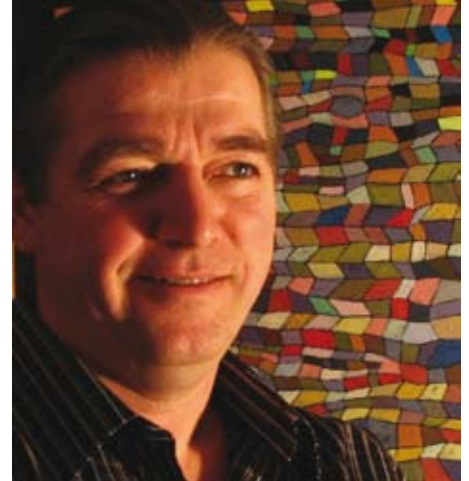
[www.saintjohnsbible.org](http://www.saintjohnsbible.org)

## Gerald Folkerts

Since September 2008 Winnipeg visual artist Gerald Folkerts has been living with the diagnosis of terminal cancer. Some of you may remember that Gerald was the 3rd prize winner in Imago's National Visual Art Competition in 2002. A couple of months ago I had the privilege of being part of a celebration of Gerald's life and work. In December family and friends were doubtful that Gerald would make it to attend the end of January show. He was there for the opening and closing events and spoke on both occasions. His Head over Heels paintings won the First

Award in the annual juried exhibit of the Manitoba Society of Artists in 2006 (the sixth time he had won that award). This unfinished series provides not only insight into the characters he paints but also in the character of the artist.

Calvin Seerveld notes that, "Folkerts has the wisdom to let his Christian faith subtly percolate in the spirit of his painterly art by showing compassion for the problematic figures he treats." In speaking about this series the artist writes; "The homeless, the poor, the sick, the young, the age – the very ones whom we often tend to ignore, or at least overlook – their stories seemed worth



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telling. Such stories are often difficult to hear ... Yet these are often the stories that need to be heard most desperately. ... why not focus on the face and the feet? They might reveal a great deal about the journey of one's life, the road on which one has travelled."

The people found in these paintings are people that the artist took time to get to know. The subjects are burdened in one way or another but the artist depicts them possessing grace and dignity. These important human traits also characterized the artist. He has carried out his artistic calling, deeply shaped by his faith. His work is that of a truth-teller and in the midst of the difficulties of life his faith-ful artist's eye discerns threads of hope. His work nurtures the human spirit and calls us to view the world and others in it through a lens of justice and compassion, seeing us all as bearers of the divine image.

[www.folkerts.ca](http://www.folkerts.ca)

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## George MacDonald

### Scotland's Victorian Myth Maker and Story Teller (1824-1905)

By Bill Moore

George Macdonald is one of a select handful of Christian authors who chose to use their gift of story and imagination to broaden and deepen their understanding and experience of the Christian faith, and in turn, to reflect mature theological insights to British, Canadian and American audiences.

One of nine children born into a rural Scottish family living near Huntly, Aberdeen

Shire, MacDonald nurtured his love for literature while attending the University of Aberdeen.

Upon graduating, MacDonald set out to become a Congregational Minister with a view to inviting his parishioners to join with him in discovering a vibrant Christian faith designed to engage the heart and mind so as to encourage faithful, practical and theological responses to genuine needs.

His efforts stood in stark contrast to a narrow brand of Calvinism found in many Presbyterian/Congregational churches of the era. Not long after securing his first pastorate, MacDonald married his beloved Louisa MacKay in 1844. He and Louisa delighted in the eleven children they would have together, even as MacDonald embarked on a prodigious literary output amidst significant health challenges. At times, his illness left the family's budget in desperate straits, often needing to be rescued by faithful friends such as Lady Byron who acted as a patron to MacDonald as he sought to establish himself.

MacDonald's robust understanding of a gracious and loving God are jewels of a faithful and gifted imagination that entreat us to enter into a graced world of story telling capable of fostering a faith that testifies to the reality of a loving Father who can equip and refresh us with a vibrant vision of faith,

and hope, and love. His work enables us to re-imagine our Christian journey in ways that both teach and delight.

For those new to George MacDonald:  
Fiction: *Robert Falconer*; *David Elginbrod*; *Malcolm*; *Sir Gibbie*; *Donal Grant*; *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*;  
Children's fiction: *At the Back of the North Wind*; *The Princess and the Goblin*; *The Princess and Curdie*.



*Phantastes* and *Lilith*

both considered classics of mythopoeic writing and are more demanding of the reader but provide rich rewards for those who persevere.

MacDonald's books can be sourced directly from [www.johannesen.com](http://www.johannesen.com) for quality hard bound editions. In my experience volumes tend to arrive faster when you order directly from Johannesen – there are over 60 volumes in print.

*Bill Moore practices law in Kingston Ontario and is currently engaged in research on MacDonald. [bill.moore.1@sympatico.ca](mailto:bill.moore.1@sympatico.ca)*



*Deep Waters* by Gerald Folkerts



## Laila Biali

*the radiance project*

A New Season, A New Home: The Same Mission. When the vision for *the radiance project* took its

first steps towards becoming a reality with the support of Imago I never imagined the project would still be growing this spring of 2009. Over these past three years, I have experienced the full range of emotions excitement, hope, frustration, doubt, and then excitement and hope once again. Now looking back, I can see that these years have vitally served the project's mission, which is still fundamentally about generating God's radiance within our communities. Through my touring with singer-songwriter's Paula Cole and Suzanne Vega in 2007 and 2008, and an important move to New York City a year ago, my love for the craft of songwriting was given the nurture and space that it needed to flourish. A new artistic voice has emerged, new compositions and songs have

been realized, and I am now ready to record. Additionally, I have been researching various charitable organizations that are making a difference through the arts and will be donating a percentage of proceeds from all record sales to such a cause. Stay tuned... *the radiance project* is on the move. Please visit [www.theradianceproject.com](http://www.theradianceproject.com) for more details.

## Events

### As We Forgive

Story Umbrella in partnership with Windrider Forum presents, *As We Forgive*, a documentary about two Rwandan women coming face to face with those responsible for killing their families. Tuesday May 12, 2009, 7:30 p.m., U of T Medical Science Bld. Tickets \$20. Part of the Refresh conference. [www.refresh.wycliffecollege.ca](http://www.refresh.wycliffecollege.ca)

### CIVA Conference

While Christians have long-long debated the nature of their relationship to "culture," they have made relatively little progress in actually defining what this "culture" is.

The word "culture" is often joined to other terms to generate curious conjunctions such as "High Culture," "pop-culture," "visual culture," "the culture wars," and "cultural production." Our engagement with contemporary culture is complex and the nature of this complexity is the central theme of the 2009 CIVA Biennial Conference being held June 17 to 21 at Bethel University in Minneapolis, MN. Visual artists, of course, have always exercised a pivotal role in shaping, defining and representing culture. The 2009 CIVA conference asks how 21st Century Christians will find the wisdom needed to live out their calling to the arts with joy, creativity, and obedience? Go to [www.civa.org](http://www.civa.org) for more information and bios on the speakers including our Featured Speakers, Miroslav Volf, Adrienne Chaplin.

### Summer course

Imago's Executive Director will teach a course summer on Theology and the Arts at Emmanuel College, Toronto School of Theology, July 6 to 9, 13 to 16, 2009, 9:00 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. Auditors welcome.

## Mission, missional, *missio dei*

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These trends and these involvements are causing me to ponder how mission and the arts connect. I am well aware that the term mission and its practical outworking fall into the category of 'politically incorrect'. Mission is seen as coercive, imperialistic, culturally insensitive and disrespectful of others. In short a moral failure. One cannot escape the threads of truth in these claims, but neither can one escape the clarion call of the Christian faith to affirm the universality of the good news and its missional character. So how do we do mission that is invitational not coercive, vulnerable not imperialistic, culturally sensitive, not insensitive and fully respectful of others. The character of those who bear the message will be a central concern.

Might art serve as a mollifying influence in carrying out the missional task? Could the arts soften the hard edges of our sometimes preachy style? Could the arts provide openings for exploring the big questions of human existence – which are essen-

tially theological questions, questions with spiritual import? Art is certainly capable in bridging our differences and helping us to see what we as human beings hold in common. It has been typical of some who engage in the missional task to think of others in merely objective terms – and to consider souls not whole persons. Perhaps artistry can serve to bring us to attend to the whole person. The sensual nature of the arts makes it hard to ignore the bodily reality of who we are as image bearers of God. Moreover the arts serve as a reminder that we are creatures of sign and symbol embedded in culture with diverse means for understanding ourselves and our world. They speak to our need to move beyond prose and to step into the world of the poetic, of image, metaphor, drama, movement all ways of communication expressing more than we can say. Much could be said about the healing power of art, of its therapeutic value, or its connection with the spiritual and its capacity to deepen our understanding of the truth of things or to enrich our experience of liturgy and life.

Granted these are preliminary thoughts on the connection between art and mission – I

set them out here to signal my interest in generating conversation on these themes, and the desire to find new ways to talk about how these particular callings of art and mission might coalesce. Calvin Seerveld offers us a model in suggesting that just as the dove came to Noah "bearing fresh olive leaves" was a sign of hope and newness perhaps our artistry can do likewise.

For the record there was no newsletter published in December 2008. We are glad to send out this first issue for 2009. As we all face the challenges of the economic downturn we are mindful of our dependence on the generosity of those in the Imago community across Canada. Your support is always appreciated and we hope you will be able to stand with us in the work of Imago in the months ahead.

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