

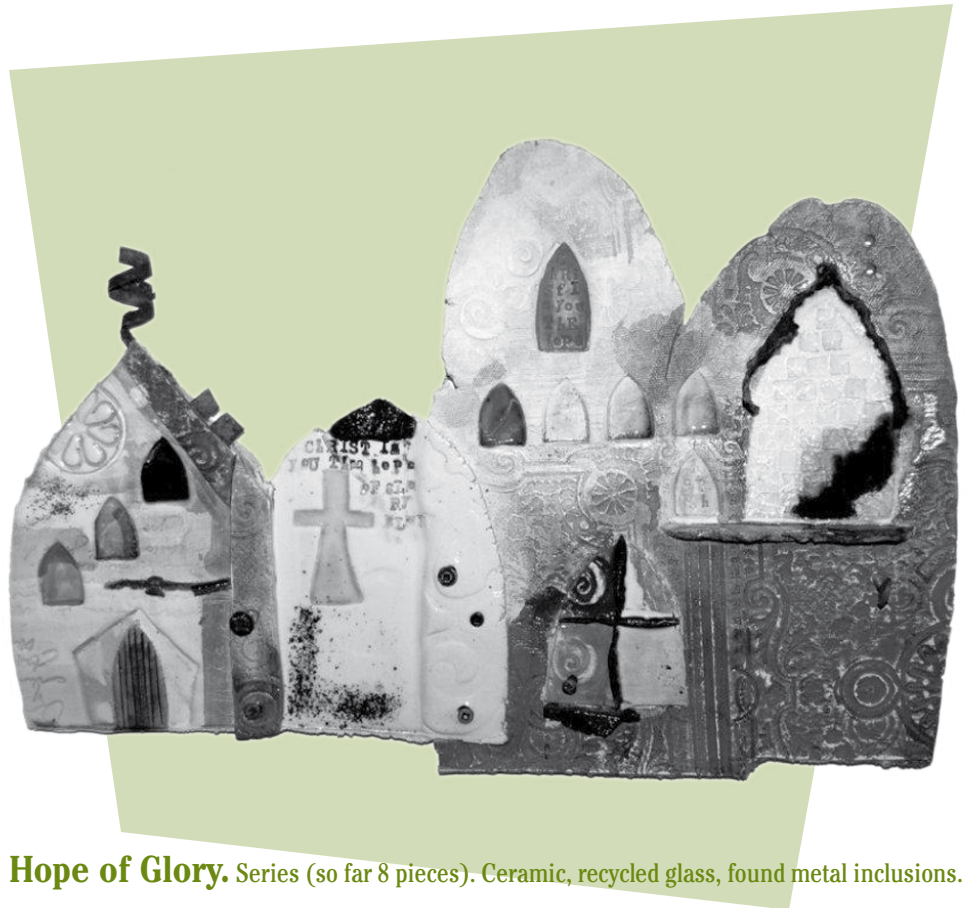
Time spent with artists and with writings on the arts means that the subject of imagination is never far away. I am committed to the value of imagination even its necessity, but I am still sorting out just what it is and how it works. Though some may deem this a pointless venture my curiosity prevails as I search for language to speak about this most human of gifts. Imagination's links with religious sensibilities and specifically the claim that it enables a step toward the transcendent have brought it under a cloud of suspicion in our secularized culture. Though imagination may well open a window to the transcendent it is not the only portal that imagination can take us through. I have been moved to think afresh about this matter through reading an essay by Malcolm Guite, (1) a poet, theologian and cleric living in Cambridge England. The title of the essay includes a line from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, "our truest poetry is the most feigning". It is Guite's intent to recover the value of playfulness and what he calls the freedom to invent. The goal is to discern a path that will direct us toward what is true. He asks:

"How are we to come at the truth? Is she waiting passively to be arrived at, her permanent address the end of the final syllogism in our science or philosophy? Or is she both

more active and more elusive? Does she slip quietly up beside us, to join in our games and our rituals, making herself suddenly and abundantly available in the midst of our playfulness, responding more

to the invitation of our imagination than to the imperatives of reason?"

continued on page 4



Hope of Glory. Series (so far 8 pieces). -Ceramic, recycled glass, found metal inclusions.

Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Colossians 1:27

As a visual artist and musician, the arts have been, for me, the main forum for the working through of such questions as faith, identity, spirituality, worship, poverty, justice, community, healing and aesthetics.

The church, and the folks of whom it is comprised, is a mystery, a conundrum. Where else would such a disparate group of people – often individuals who would likely have little or nothing to do with each other in any other context – come together and seek to not just stay together but to love one another and attempt to manifest God's love to the world around them.

The choice of materials for the *Hope of Glory* series serves as a metaphor: the clay is pieced together and often cracked or broken during the firing (adding, I think, to its interest and beauty). The rusty metal and screws or bolts are cast off fragments that catch my eye as I walk or cycle around the city.

We are the church – broken, yet beautiful: temporal, yet the reflection of a timeless God: consisting of the merely human, yet inspired and enlivened by a divine Spirit. Though generally well meaning, we are such a conflicted and bumbling – and frequently misguided – lot. In the end it is only by the mystery of Christ in us that there is any hope of Glory.

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Liturgical Art

One of the ways the church is striving to re-integrate the practice of the visual arts into their communities is by inviting artists to create works in response to, and as a part of weekly worship services. Recently at St. George the Martyr, an Anglican church located in downtown Toronto, theology student Sam Cavanagh gave leadership to a liturgical arts project; a collaborative painting over three Sundays during the 2010 Advent season.

Meghan Hers, an OCAD student and one of the collaborating artists, interviews Sam about her experience.

MH: What inspired this liturgical arts project?

SC: I recently was involved in a youth mission project called the Go Project, where we lived in a church and engaged in outreach, discernment, worship and community. It was appealing to youth who were having a hard time verbalizing their faith journey... it spoke to people's unraveling faith journey instead of it being a static thing. We set up a huge canvas and three people were painting at the same time, but it was reaction based, so if one person drew a line, then another person would add to that line, and so the art piece would emerge from the community of painters. I wanted something similar to happen within our community over Advent. For three weeks we had different artists come in and respond to what was happening in the liturgy and community, in prayer and in the Word, through image. Scripture readings and sermon details were provided to the artist beforehand. Some artists read these, others didn't. The point was to mimic the idea of waiting that we experience during Advent, so the image was never complete until the week before Christmas, in the same way that we're consistently waiting for the Incarnation during Advent.

MH: How would you characterize liturgical art?

SC: I don't know much about the history behind liturgical art, but I know that it speaks of how we can experience worship in a myriad of ways, and how the arts help us to open up our imaginations, experience

wonder and connect to the moment. Usually liturgical art is simply placed in the sanctuary, but what I wanted to do was create it during the time of worship, so that painting is not separated from prayer, or preaching, but is part of it and equally a means of connecting to God.

MH: What is this particular piece of liturgical art trying to achieve?

SC: I think it functions as a conversation starter. People who have come into the sanctuary and seen it, who weren't present when it was created, are drawn to it. The reason for this is because it's different, not cohesive, interesting, and wild and colorful. It has these embedded spiritual images in it and people want to engage with that, they want to know what it's about. It's a way to approach theological questions.

MH: Why did you choose to put the canvas and artist at the front of the sanctuary?

SC: I think having the art in progress right there meant that it was something that people could meditate on. When Simon was preaching beside you, I was splitting my attention between his words and then the painting, never leaving the words, always having them influence what I was seeing. If we had put the artist at the back of the congregation they would have fought with Simon for the congregation's attention. I think that the point was that it was a piece shaped by the worship experience, which in turn could foster worship in others. I think that it's something that's holy, and that's why I wanted to put it right at the front, beside the font especially.

MH: Art-making is so often an individual act, but I think that liturgical art may be able to redeem that sense of isolation. John Witvliet, in the book *For the Beauty of the Church*, (David Taylor ed. Baker Books 2010) concurs, proclaiming that "the liturgical arts offer remarkable possibilities for realizing the fundamentally communal nature of the church and a Christian way of life... [and] expand our awareness and experience of the church as a functioning corporate body that transcends time and place."

Cross-Country Series on the Arts

Over the next few months IMAGO in collaboration with IMAGE Journal will be hosting a series of events that will profile outstanding Canadian artists of faith. There will be seven events in seven cities. These events are designed to celebrate the arts and to generate momentum among the arts communities of these cities. Writers, musicians, and performing artists will engage and inspire audiences across the country. This series will highlight the depth and range of work by contemporary artists.

For more details visit www.imago-arts.on.ca and www.imagejournal.org

We are grateful to the Granting Partners of **Stronger Together 2010** for making these events possible.

Hamilton – Friday April 15, Hamilton Conservatory for the Arts, 126 James St. S. and a visual art show at The Friendship Gallery, 110 James St. on April 8 and 9.

Toronto – Thursday April 28, Glenn Gould Studio, 250 Front St. W.

Calgary – Wednesday May 11, Engineered Air Theatre.

Winnipeg – Thursday May 12, Ventura Concert Hall West End Cultural Centre.

Vancouver – Thursday June 2, Vancouver Club.

Kitchener – Wednesday June 15, Registry Theatre, 122 Fredrick St.

Montreal – Saturday October 15, venue TBA.

Events

Imago will host its annual AGM arts celebration at the Enoch Turner Schoolhouse, Toronto, Thursday June 9 at 7:30 p.m.

TRIAGE 1: New Drawings from the Creation Psalter by James Tughan.

Hamilton Conservatory For The Arts, 126 James St. S., Hamilton, ON, 905-528-4020.





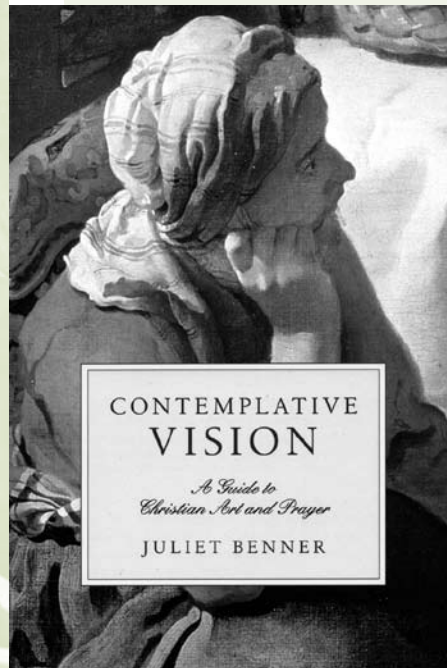
Beautiful Mercy: A Book of Hours, Bramwell Ryan, Editor

In the medieval world a Book of Hours was intended to assist the faithful in daily worship and prayers. It was typical for these early works – published long before the advent of the printing press – to be richly illustrated and hand written. Saint Benedict's Table a faith community in downtown Winnipeg, has taken up this ancient tradition and produced an artful and attractive modern version of a Book of Hours. The work was published to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the establishment of this congregation within the Anglican Diocese of Rupert's Land. But it celebrates much more than an anniversary.

This lavishly illustrated work celebrates the rich artistic giftedness of the community engaging poetry, song writing, visual art, photography, stained glass and the power of story brought together to serve as entry points into the rhythms of prayer and worship. Following the church calendar from Advent through Epiphany, Lent, Pentecost and Ordinary Time the reader is offered image and word – the latter done in a handwritten script. For each of the seasons of the church calendar the seven-fold cycle of monastic prayers provides a resource for personal meditation and prayer. The book then is also a celebration of the gospel and an invitation to the practice of personal prayer and worship. It includes a CD with original music. The book can be obtained through Saint Benedict's Table (www.stbenedictstable.ca).

Contemplative Vision: A Guide to Christian Art and Prayer, Juliet Benner, IVP, 2011, pp. 181

The connection between prayer and image is longstanding, whether we consider the icons of Eastern Orthodoxy or the role of image in the church during pre-reformation times. Art as something to be contemplated has been a common approach within the tradition of western art. However those in the Christian community – particularly Protestants – have resisted this resource for the journey of faith. Juliet Benner's new book provides a rich and insightful account that may well help us begin to recover the value of image for the faith journey.



To be clear this is a book about cultivating a relationship with God and not a book about art. But the works of well know artists serve as the vital means for this spiritual discipline. There are three sections in the book, Transformed Awareness, Transformed Vision and Transformed Living each addressing key elements for the spiritual journey. The author has much to say about “seeing” or the “gaze of faith” a theme common in the biblical stories. Each chapter is a thoughtful weaving together of scripture and image calling the reader to “pay attention”.

Census at Bethlehem by Bruegel the Elder is an image that calls us to think of the rush of life and consider what we may easily overlook. Vermeer's *Jesus in the House of Mary and Martha* (detail on the cover) sets the context for “gazing in stillness”. A reflection on Rembrandt's *Christ in the Storm on the Lake of Galilee*, draws on the theme of “God with us” in the ordinariness of life. Two works by Caravaggio call us into consideration of “seeing and believing” (*The Incredulity of Thomas*) and recognizing Christ (*The Supper at Emmaus*). Finally on the theme of transformed living the images include Rubens *Decent from the Cross*, and *The Visitation* by contemporary artist He Qi.

This is a book for all who value the call to attentiveness as part of the Christian pilgrimage. It is a work that draws upon the rich heritage of the visual arts to open to us a fresh route into deeper contemplation of scripture and be a valuable portal for experiencing God's presence.

A man that looks on glasse,

On it may stay his eye;

Or if he pleaseth, through it passe,

An then the heav'n espie.

George Herbert (1593-1633) “The Elixer”

As You Like It *continued from page one*

One of the worries that people have about imagination is that it produces mere fantasy, fables and falsehood. What we are after of course is truth and imagination so it is argued, takes us in a quite different direction. Yet we are all aware of how story – story that is not true – can serve to open our eyes and get us to see what we have not seen before. In order to enter into a story, play or poem we need what Coleridge referred to as a “willing suspension of disbelief”. When a poet, playwright or story teller plies their craft, they are inviting us to another place and are engaged in deliberate feigning – that is faking or pretending. So we are called to surrender to the make-believe in the story or poem. We are invited to enter a “secondary world” as Tolkien called it, and once inside you believe all that takes place is real. The story is not true but we do not let that fact get in the way of our entering into the story. It would seem that in order to do this we must set aside – for the moment at least – our prejudices, opinions and convictions so they will not be obstacles to our being present in the poem, play or story. Guite makes the observation that “drama enables us to find *the true* through the *seeming*.”

Guite draws on a passage from *Midsummer Night's Dream* to illustrate his point about truth and imagination. Theseus and Hippolyta are quarrelling, Theseus on behalf of reason against imagination.

Hip. Tis strange my Theseus what these lovers speak of.

The. More strange than true: I never may believe
These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.
Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact;

.....

The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

It is worth noting the claim that “shaping fantasies” *apprehend* more than cool reason ever *comprehends*. Because something is not known to reason it does not mean we are dealing with “airy nothing”. Hippolyta replies:

But all the story of the night told over,
And all their minds transfigured so together,
More witnesseth than fancy's images
And grows to something of great constancy....

What imagination and indeed art is able to do on this account is to transfigure our minds “so that we see both what the poet sees and *what he sees though what he sees*,” as Guite puts it. The context of this exchange between these characters is an impending marriage – which is suggestive of the need to bring apparent opposites together for a fruitful outcome avoiding the option of a single note making harmony impossible.

As unlikely as it seems, the poetic practice of feigning through the playfulness of the imagination can shape our apprehension and complement our comprehension in such a way as to move us closer to “something of great constancy” that is, a little closer to the truth about things.

John.

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Audrey: *I do not know
what poetical is: is it
honest in deed and word?*

Is it a true thing?

Touchstone: *No, truly;
for the truest poetry is the
most feigning*

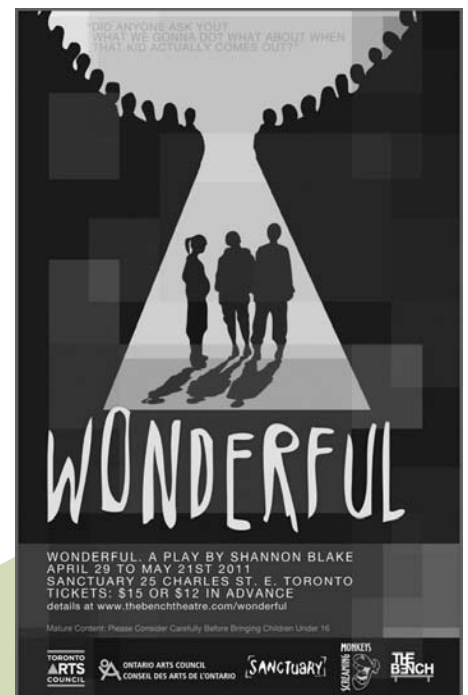
As You Like It Act III scene 3.

Bench Theatre

The Bench Theatre Initiative, a Toronto based company has recently become an Imago project and is seeking to do innovative theatre that informs and challenges.

Wonderful is a new play by Shannon Blake, produced by The Bench Theatre Initiative and Sanctuary. *Wonderful* is the story of three street-involved women who escape to a rooming house rooftop to deliver a baby away from the eyes of authorities and institutions. Throughout this experience, they reflect on friendship, violence, substance abuse, child loss, relationships and poverty, and move towards deciding what they will do when the baby actually comes. *Wonderful* is based on the stories of the street community and performed by a combination of professional, volunteer and street-involved actors.

Wonderful runs Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 8 pm from April 29 to May 21 at Sanctuary, 25 Charles Street East, Toronto. Tickets are \$15 at the door, \$12 in advance, with group rates available. For tickets, call Lyf at 416-922-0628 x215.



Malcolm Guite, “Our Truest Poetry is the Most Feigning... Poetry, Playfulness and Truth” in *Faithful Performances: Enacting the Christian Tradition*, ed. Trevor A. Hart, and Steven R. Guthrie, Ashgate, 2007.

The new photograph of John on page one was taken by Maria Gabankova.