



# imago

summer 2003 **NEWSLETTER** volume five issue two

## **B**eauty is getting renewed attention.

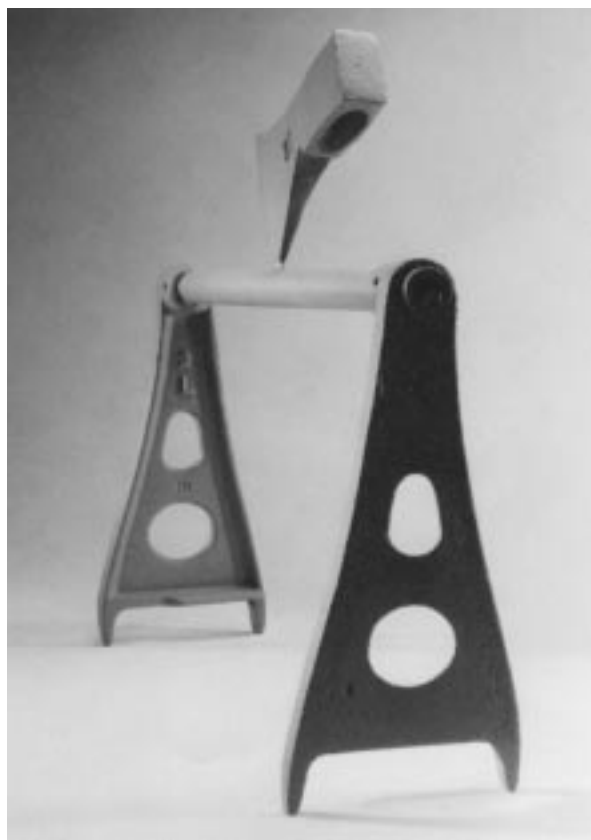
Artists and art critics are addressing this topic with considerable vigor. The term also shows up in the writings of scientists and cosmologists and particularly among theologians. The latter are seeking to make the link between our experience of beauty and our sense of God.

I say “renewed attention” because since the mid twentieth century talk about beauty in the arts had all but disappeared. Perhaps it is not surprising that in the much flattened world of postmodernism, the human spirit would be on the lookout for the transcendentals, goodness, truth and beauty. The integrating power of these ideas is bound to generate a longing among a community seemingly trapped in a world this is fragmented and dis-integrating.

Biblical faith raises the question of whether goodness, truth and beauty may serve as a bridge to the divine or somehow constitute a substitute – idolatry.

Those who adhere to a sacramental view of the arts and hence of beauty are keen to preserve its position as a way to transcendence. A similar position but one without religious faith has looked to aesthetics and the arts as resources for contemplation unconnected with the interests of ordinary life. Others are bent on seeing the arts as embracing the realities of daily life and so being in touch with matters of morality.

It is this latter view I have been wondering about. This is a viewpoint which harkens back to early classical culture and shows up again in the nineteenth century. How and in what way (if at all) does beauty connect



with morality? What links are there, direct or indirect between the harmony that comprises ‘beauty’ and that which we find in social order (justice) and personal order (virtue)?

I am not suggesting that art is to be driven by a moral agenda, nor for that matter am I suggesting that beauty is to be some sort of centre piece for the doing of artistry. My question is whether matters of aesthetic taste have any bearing on matters of moral life. It seems to me that a view that aims to completely separate these two will not ultimately work. Both are concerned with values, different sorts of values to be sure, but the different sorts are not without common ground. To put it succinctly; if you

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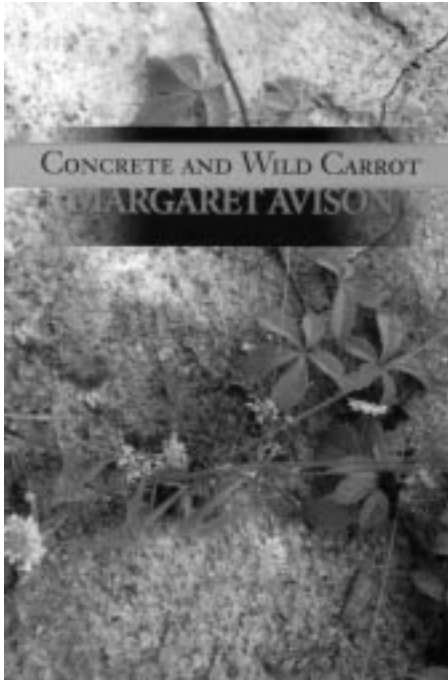
## **Andy Knetsch’s “narrative sculpture”**

Andy Knetsch took an early retirement from the Waterloo Regional Police Service in 2002. He began creating abstract three dimensional art in 2001. Having dealt with the worst of human behaviour he found that doing artwork was a valuable way for him to process some of the stories he had encountered. This past May he had his first solo show at the Robert Mede Gallery in downtown Toronto. Curator Robert Mede dubbed Andy’s work “narrative sculpture”. He was to be at the Imago evening on May 8, 2003 to show and talk about his work, but circumstance prevented him coming to that event.

The piece shown here is the artist’s response to his encounter with “an adult male who had not taken his medication for schizophrenia.” Andy recalls, “...he was totally out of control and was taken to hospital for treatment. He had to be restrained by four officers. His eyes looking straight through me, I wonder what he saw.” There is a fine balance between order and chaos, between being sane or not sane. This piece speaks of just such a fragile balance between order and chaos within the human spirit as we negotiate the narrow path of daily life. This artist’s work is fresh, simple and eloquent in speaking the stories that have been part of the artist’s experience.

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## Margaret Avison wins the 2003 Griffin Prize for Poetry

On June 12, 2003 Canadian poet Margaret Avison was awarded the prestigious Griffin prize which is the largest prize for poetry in North America. The prize was awarded for her most recent book, *Concrete and Wild Carrot* – Toronto: Brick Books, 2002.

Now well into her eighties this “poet’s poet” brings a wealth of experience and much wisdom to her craft. During her 1993 Pascal Lectures titled *A Kind of Perseverance* she was asked if she was ever bored with life. She responded that some years earlier she had times of boredom, and added “... since becoming a Christian I have never been bored.” The awakening she experienced with the coming of faith is all too rare.

Signs of the sacred show up in her work as she turns her careful eye to the world around and the world within. Woven into her perceptive poetic pieces is an unmistakable faith and confidence in the One who has created all things.

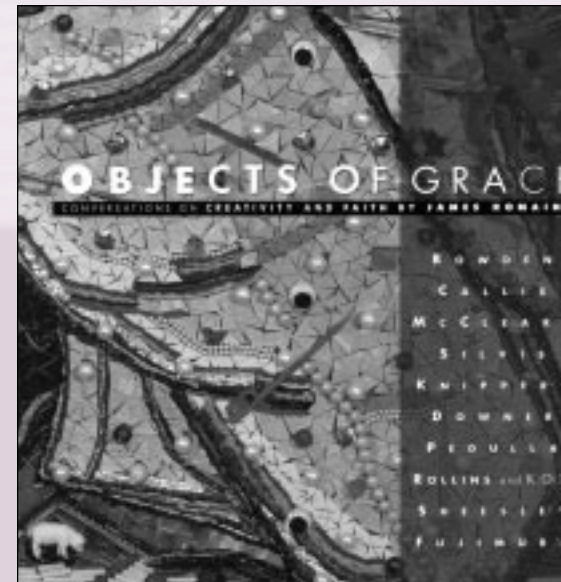
We join with the many others in offering congratulations to Margaret Avison. This public recognition serves not only to commend the work in her recent book, but also to affirm a life time of creative writing that will be an important legacy for generations to come. ☒

## Imago Artist Dale Nikkel visits Toronto

Dale Nikkel from Edmonton was in Toronto in June for a conference on contemporary music. It was an opportunity to find those who would promote your work as well as a chance to hear others perform. Dale performed at the Free Times Café while in Toronto. We took the opportunity to host an evening for him at the home of the Executive Director. With about 35 in attendance Dale performed twice that evening and the second set included performances by Ins Choi and Jeanine Noyes all accompanied by double bassist Ray Radkowski. ☒

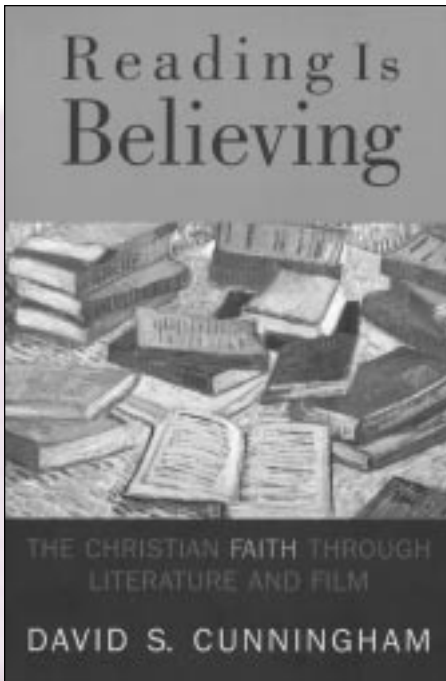
## Beholding the Glory Study Groups – Fall 2003

Imago is currently coordinating a number of study groups across Canada to meet this fall. The groups will gather to work through a book titled *Beholding the Glory*, edited by Jeremy Begbie. This small collection of essays takes up the theme of incarnation and the arts. Topics covered in the chapters include literature, poetry, dance, icons, sculpture and music. Each group will have 8 to 15 members and will meet seven times. We hope to have groups in every province from Halifax to Victoria, but not just in the major urban areas. If you are interested in being part of a group contact the Executive Director at: franklin@ultratech.net ☒



## James Romaine, *Objects of Grace: Conversations on Creativity and Faith*, Square Halo Books, 2002.

James Romaine is an art historian who, in this work engages ten visual artists in conversation about their work and their faith. These are very up to date conversations which engage current trends in the visual arts and speak to the theory and practice of art making from a Christian perspective. The book is rich in illustration in the works of the artists interviewed. These conversations will be helpful to any who may be perplexed by contemporary art. Most of the artists interviewed are connected with CIVA (Christians in the Visual Arts).



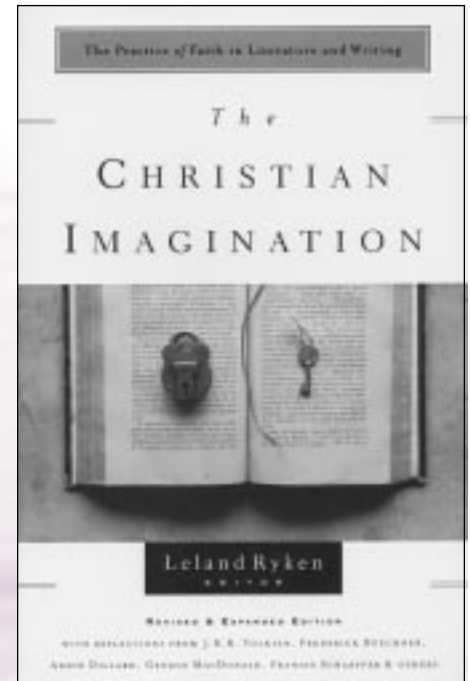
**David S. Cunningham, *Reading is Believing: The Christian Faith Through Literature and Film*, Brazos Press, 2002.**

The author, a professor of theology and ethics, contends that fictional narrative can be an important resource for gaining insight into key themes of the Christian faith. At the heart of his argument is the belief that story has the capacity to take us out of a self-centred life to a place where we are no longer the main character. What the author does in this book is to take each phrase of the Apostle's Creed and link it with a work of film or fiction. After his introduction under the heading *I Believe* he takes us through twelve separate pieces of the creed. Chapter titles include, "God the Father, Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth" Iris Murdoch, *The Time of the Angels*; "Suffered Under Pontius Pilate: Was Crucified Died and Buried" Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*; "Ascended into Heaven, Sits at the Right Hand of God" William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*; "The Forgiveness of Sins" Helen Prejean, *Dead Man Walking*; "The Resurrection of the Flesh" Graeme Green, *The End of the Affair*. This is a work that will inspire faith and deepen your understanding of Christian belief while showing how ancient creed connects with the narratives of a modern world.

**Leland Ryken, ed. *The Christian Imagination*, Shaw Books, 2003.**

This revised and updated anthology has a wide range of authors past and present who have taken seriously the value of imagination. The selected themes are primarily linked to literature, the area most familiar to the editor. However the insights provided have much broader application. This is the sort of book the reader can dabble in and always find thought provoking material to nurture the imagination and the creative impulse.

He draws on a wide number of authors including, Annie Dillard, T.S. Eliot, George MacDonald, Flannery O' Connor, Wendell Berry and G.K. Chesterton. The collection of short essays is accompanied by scores of brief quotations from a wide variety of writers who reflect upon fundamental issues of human existence and the artist's response.

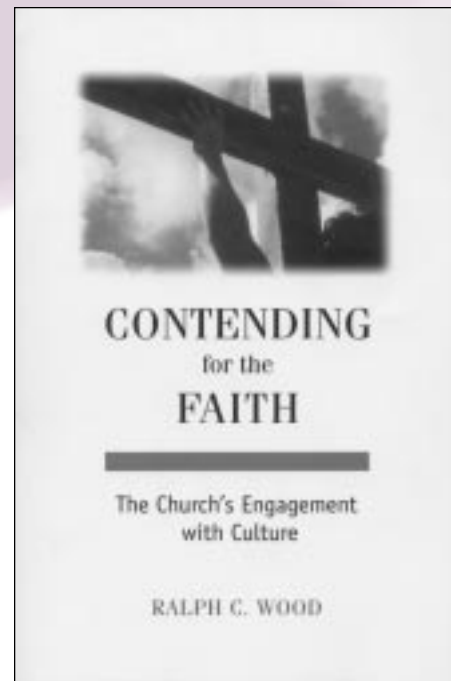


chapter titled *Christian Skepticism vs. Religious Sentimentality* as well as *The Ugly the Beautiful and the Holy in Christian Worship*, will be of particular interest.

Wood's criticisms pose a challenge to both neo-conservative (Russell Kirk) and neo-liberal (Peter Berger) alternatives and he chides evangelicalism for its inadequacy in the task of cultural engagement. He looks to a "Catholicized evangelicalism" as an antidote to the shortfall of the current options. His final chapter questions the proliferation of spiritualities in the current religious market and sees them as often soft substitutes for the real thing. He advocates a deep piety shaped by a deep theology manifest through an active outward faithfulness.

Wood is an important Christian thinker who draws from his wide knowledge of literature and theology to provide us with a valuable resource for faithful living in a postmodern world.

**Note: Plans are underway for Imago in partnership with a local church to bring Prof. Ralph Wood to Toronto to lecture on Tolkien and Lord of the Rings. ... more in the fall newsletter.**



**Ralph Wood, *Contending for the Faith: The Churches Engagement in Culture*, Baylor University Press, 2003.**

Exploring the "crisis afflicting both the church and the culture" Wood offers a critical account of the current social situation, with an eye to calling the church afresh to faithful witness. This is not a book on the arts as such but much that the author says has relevance to artistry. The

## Upcoming Events

### Phil Irish – Summer Shows

A show, curated by Stuart Reid, features work by Phil Irish and three other artists. Thursday, June 26, 2003 to Sunday, September 07, 2003 at the Tom Thomson Memorial Art Gallery, 840 First Avenue West, Owen Sound ON. Tel: (519) 376-1932. Hours : Monday - Saturday, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., and Sunday, 12 p.m. - 5 p.m. link to the Gallery: <http://www.tomthomson.org/exhibitions>

**WATER** – Latcham Gallery, 6240 Main Street, Stouffville, Ontario, June 26 to August 3. Curated by Maura Broadhurst. Includes work by Rob Hengeveld, Phil Irish and others.

### A ROCHA/VAN Labour Day Retreat – August 29 to September 1

**“The Created Life: a weekend celebrating Creation, Creativity and Community.”**

Our first arts retreat is to be held at Pioneer Pacific Camp on Thetis Island from Fri. Aug. 29 'til Mon. Sept. 1. We are partnering with A Rocha (Christians in Conservation) for an event-filled weekend exploring the relationship between God's creativity and ours. You can follow details as they emerge at A Rocha's website: <http://en.arochoa.org/canada/index8.html> On the web site you'll also find a printable PDF poster and

brochure which you can use to help us publicize the event by posting or forwarding to your e-mail friends. If you're an artist and are planning on coming let us know in advance so we can consider ways for you to more fully participate.

### Advance notice: Jeremy S. Begbie to visit Ottawa – March 2004

At the invitation of Augustine College, Ottawa, and generously funded by the Weston Foundation, Jeremy Begbie will visit Ottawa for four days from Friday March 19 to Monday March 22, 2004. The event will combine teaching, seminars and concert performance which draw upon Jeremy Begbie's work on Theology through the Arts. Make a note now of the dates, and organise your calendar so that you can plan to attend this exciting event which is expected to draw together many from the church community, practising musicians as well as academics. Watch for more in the next newsletter, or contact, [registrar@augustinecollege.org](mailto:registrar@augustinecollege.org) for more details or to be included in the mailing list.

### Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery

600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB  
(204) 888 6781 Email Curator Ray Dirks for information about current and upcoming shows: [rdirks@mennonitechurch.ca](mailto:rdirks@mennonitechurch.ca)

## Bonhoeffer: The Documentary

Directed by Martin Doblemeier

**“Action springs not from thought but from a readiness for responsibility.”**



This statement encapsulates the philosophy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the young German theologian who boldly opposed Nazi ideology at a time when the Christian Church had not yet responded to the “Jewish Question.” The story of his struggle for human rights – an endeavor that included outspoken speeches, participation in the underground resistance, and, eventually, an assassination attempt on Adolph Hitler – is recounted in a new ninety-minute documentary that traces Bonhoeffer's evolution from student to activist to martyr. The film, which was shot on location in the United States and Germany, features rare archival footage of Nazi Germany, commentary from modern theologians, and interviews with close friends and family of Bonhoeffer. This intriguing documentary not only recounts the story of Bonhoeffer's outstanding mind and heart, but also beautifully illustrates the effect of one bold voice in the darkness. Writer and director Martin Doblemeier explains: “Bonhoeffer is one of the great examples of moral courage in the face of conflict. I believe part of the reason the film is getting attention now is because many of the issues Bonhoeffer faced – the role of the church in the modern world, national loyalty and personal conscience, what the call to being a “peacemaker” really means – are issues we continue to struggle with today.”

Originally released in cinematic form, *Bonhoeffer* is currently being presented as a theatrical play at a growing number of playhouses nationwide. A release of the *Bonhoeffer* DVD/VHS will follow the theatrical run. For a list of play dates, biographical information and more go to [www.bonhoeffer.com](http://www.bonhoeffer.com)

## Beauty

*Continued from page 1*

are going to talk about beauty, you must talk about life and if you are to talk about life it is not easy to avoid talking about morality.

Though this connection (if it is so) will certainly be of interest to those of religious persuasion, it is of interest not only to them. This link between beauty and morality shows up in the work of those who have no apparent religious interests. This may suggest to some a good reason to be wary of bringing these two aspects of human life together. I have in mind the work of Iris Murdoch and more recently a small work by Harvard professor of aesthet-

ics Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just*. My hunch is that there is a real link and that it will be discerned through imagination coupled with a well rounded perspective on what it means to be human.

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