

imago

spring 2004 **NEWSLETTER** volume six issue one

*The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full...
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind,
down the vast edges of drear
And naked shingles of the world.*

*Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! For the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really, neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain...*

These words from Matthew Arnold's poem *Dover Beach* seem like a lament. Written in 1867 his poetic vision captures a social reality of eroding religious sensibilities, an ebb tide in which religion is drained out of the world, and yet not without a certain nostalgia for its absence. Though we hear much of secularism's influence, efforts to keep religious sensibilities at bay seem futile. We cannot live comfortably with such absence for long. We become restless when confronted by an empty 'darkling plain', when

meaning is dispersed and we can find no place to stand secure, homeless and all the while longing for something more. Institutional religion certainly has a diminished role in society but the increasing presence of diverse spiritualities has

made it clear the transcendent is a compelling reality in human experience.

A notable current example of the interest in the spiritual is the attention received by Mel



Ecco homo – Wojciech Macherzynski came to Canada with his family in 1994 from his native Poland. Though born in Czestochowa the spiritual capital of Polish Catholicism, his own spiritual pilgrimage took place among a Protestant minority. As a teen he moved to Krakow where he took up his art education at Fine Art University. He sees art as a language to communicate and comment on the values, beliefs and understandings of the artist. He is

committed to the view that art is not so much intended to please an audience as it is to speak to an audience.

As a painter and sculptor he affirms artistry as a way to respond to the challenges of life, sometimes as a shout sometimes as a whisper. His landscape work he sees as a way to recognize and celebrate God's good creation. When it comes to the human body in art he turns his creative gift to address the tensions in a bent and broken world. These are tensions which he believes can be expressed in a peaceful and redemptive way. Art is like prayer – it draws upon a sense of the presence of God.

The idea for *Ecco Homo* came to him some time ago, but he felt unprepared to execute this work. What moved him

finally to do the work was an inner sense of pain on hearing about the ongoing political and domestic violence around the world.

It was not his intention to sculpt a torso of Christ, but the torso of a suffering humanity. The Christ figure which emerged is for him a response of embrace to that suffering humanity. It is a work shaped by a redemptive hope. ❖



Ecco Homo, Wojciech Macherzynski, wood sculpture, 2000

Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. What is unsettling about this cinematic version of the passion is the clear link between violence and the sacred. Of course this is not new but its reality can come to us in new ways. For Christians the sacred component draws us to the film while the violence repels us. This is a film in which it is difficult to be simply a spectator. The

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Literature is a vital resource

for us in helping us to make sense of our lives. Those whose lives are too busy to find time for fiction or are just not inclined to it are the poorer for this omission. There are more good books out there than one can number let alone read. We offer five titles here, four fiction, one nonfiction, in the hope that if you don't know these authors you will get to know them.

Joanne Gerber's book of short stories *In the Misleading Absence of Light* (Coteau Books) is an elegantly written collection which looks into the lives of people facing extraordinary circumstances. There is nothing superficial about this work. These stories face squarely the difficult realities, probe the darkness and yet are not without hope. These are stories that serve any who have encountered evil and suffering in ordinary life. As one writer has put it "To read Gerber is to recover, in the midst of the pain, the ability to sing."



Brown Face, Big Master by Joyce Gladwell is an exceptional book. It was first published in England by InterVarsity Press in 1969 and has just been republished nearly forty years later by Macmillan in their Caribbean Classics series. It is a spiritual autobiography. The story provides an intimate account of the author's early life in Jamaica and of her move to England to attend University. It was there she met and married an Englishman and they eventually came to Waterloo Ontario. The book does not shy away from the difficult realities of discrimination which were very much a part of her experience in England in the 1960's, nor does she neglect the importance of faith in her pilgrimage. This is a courageous book and cannot help but reward the reader. Today Joyce is a Marriage and Family Therapist

and her husband Graham – a retired mathematics professor they have three grown children and live in Southern Ontario.

Linda Hall's most recent book *Chat Room* (Multnomah Publishers) is a mystery that revolves around an internet chat room. What appears to be a benign opportunity to discuss the bible turns into something far more complex. Glynis hires Teri to find her only friend who disappeared after meeting a man on the Internet. This is a book that will interest mystery fans and a story that moves along with intensity of pace hooking the reader into the fascinating world of the tale.

Compensation (Epic Press) is a recently published work by Grace Irwin. Seven of her novels have been available over many years. This one is an exception. *Compensation* is her first novel and was written at the end of her second year at Victoria College University of Toronto in 1927. It has never been in print until now. It provides a first hand account of life in Haliburton and Toronto in the 1920's. Grace Irwin lives in Toronto and continues to lead an active life though well into her nineties.

A Song for Nettie Johnson (Coteau Books) is a collection of short stories by Alberta author Gloria Sawai. This first book has been recognized with five awards including the Governor General's award for fiction. The stories take you into small town prairie life with an honesty and insight that is compelling. "Sawai goes to the heart of those pivotal moments that wrench naivete from us and replace it with the hard knowledge of adulthood. These are parables of doubt faith and love. (Globe & Mail) "The power of grace illumines her world" said the Governor General's award jury. The author holds steadfastly to truth and uncovers, in the end, the power of hope. ▣



News & Notes

► **Brookstone Theatre Productions** in Toronto has had a 12 year history under the artistic direction of Dennis Hassell offering engaging shows for a wide and appreciative audience in this theatre drenched city. It is no mean feat to survive for over a decade in a competitive theatre environment. Brookstone faced a financial crisis in latter half of 2003. In the waning months of that year through January 2004 it was unclear whether Brookstone would be able to survive. Through the diligent work of the Board and the unflagging support of loyal constituents – Brookstone will continue to carry out its mandate. It will however be a Brookstone with a different look. Just what that look will be remains to be seen. Now that the crisis has past there is a great sense of relief and of hopefulness for the future.

► In the last newsletter we had noted the coming of **Jason Carter**, a British guitar player, living in Finland and playing in many parts of the world. February saw Jason's first trip to Canada and it was a very successful debut. His artistry is impressive by any standards and he captivated audiences in



Toronto, Vancouver and Calgary. The Toronto concert included **Mike Janzen** on piano and **Fergus Marsh** on Chapman Stick. The evening opened with solo pieces performed by Jason followed by improvised work with all three musicians. It was an exceptional musical event. Our hope is that Jason will return to Toronto in the fall for another concert. If that is to happen we will let you know in the next newsletter. www.jasoncarter.net

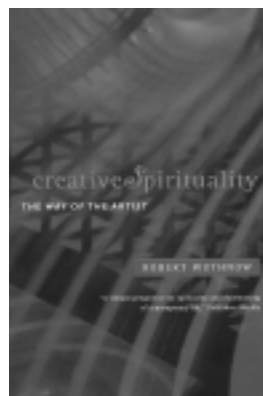
► **Richelle Wiseman** of Calgary was appointed Managing Director of the **Centre for Faith and Media** in the fall of 2003. The Centre was established in 2002 as a non-profit independent organization to be a bridge between Canada's faith communities and the media. Its goal is to help media, religious organizations, and the public understand attitudes and practices of faith and spirituality and how these can be communicated in the public sphere. In early February I had the opportunity to attend a workshop at Ryerson University in Toronto, titled *Telling our Stories: Working with the Media*. This event was a collaborative effort between the Centre for Faith and the Media and Ryerson. Presenters included Michael Enright host of CBC Sunday Morning Edition, Ron Csillag a Toronto based representative for Religious News Service in Washington D.C., Dr. Joyce Smith, Assistant Professor of Journalism at Ryerson, and John Longhurst, Marketing and Media Director for the Mennonite Economic Development Associates of Winnipeg. What became evident to me at this workshop is that there is no shortage of stories carried in the media that have religious content. It appears that media are not interested in a religious story as such, but are always interested in a good story whether it has religious content or not. We hope the Centre will be able to soften the relationship between religious groups and the media and that more 'good stories' will find their way to a broader public. 1-877-210-0077 or faithandmedia@telus.net www.faithandmedia.org

► **Lausanne Congress** has over its thirty year history been putting on events that draw delegates from around the world to explore practical and theoretical issues related to global evangelism. For the first time in that thirty year history the Lausanne Forum – 2004 that is to be held in

Thailand this fall will include in its roster of group discussions – a group that will be focused on the arts. The arts group will include members from over 20 different countries and will address questions concerning how the arts may be engaged in the church's call to "go into all the world" speaking forth the good news. We are grateful that Imago's Executive Director will be part of this conversation.

► Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ* has received considerable attention both before its release and since opening in theatres on Ash Wednesday. The responses are mixed among those within faith communities and among those outside. It has generated a good deal of talk about the violence depicted in the film, which moves some and offends others. It should not be surprising that a film which takes up the most controversial and intense events in the life of history's most celebrated figure should stir up a variety of responses. It is interesting to note the difference between the very considerable amount of attention given *The Passion*, and the relatively little attention received by *The Gospel of John* – first shown last September at the Toronto Film Festival. What makes the difference here may be something worth exploring. They are quite different sorts of films. One thing they hold in common is their intent to be true to the story, to take the canon seriously.

► **Robert Wuthnow**, Professor of Social Science, Director of the Center for the Study of Religion at Princeton University and arguably America's best known sociologist of religion, has recently published two books on the subject of the arts. *Creative Spirituality: The Way of the Artist*, 2001 and *All in Sync: How Music and Art are Revitalizing American Religion* 2003 are both published by



University of California Press. Sociologists are not known for their attention to art and so it is natural to ask why Wuthnow has taken up this topic. The landscape of



American religion has for some time now embraced a broad spectrum of understandings of spirituality. As Wuthnow observes "...music and poetry, paintings

and sculpture, drama and dance play a powerful role in many Americans' spiritual journeys. Music and art are closely wedded to spiritual experience." So it is this link of art with spirituality that is so compelling. There is no doubt that Wuthnow makes a valuable contribution to the conversation about faith and art. But in the end one is left asking whether religious experience differs at all from aesthetic experience. Perhaps there is some overlap between these categories, but are they the same thing? It is easy to see how one can enhance the other but that is a different matter than one being taken for the other.

► **WRITE CANADA** an annual conference for Christian writers of all kinds will mark its 20th anniversary in Guelph June 17–19, 2004. Known as "God Uses Ink" over its 20 year history it has just recently adopted WRITE CANADA as it seeks to shape a new image. Under the auspices of The Word Guild (an Imago project) this is one of several events put on each year. Write Toronto, Write Victoria and Write Montreal, are some of the other venues in which this energetic group has sought to provide support, instruction and opportunity for Christian writers in this country. Award winning New Brunswick writer Linda Hall (whose most recent book *Chat Room* is a good read) will be the keynote speaker at the June event. She will also interview Canadian author Janette Oke. The program is diverse and loaded with workshops and talks to inspire those who take up the important task of writing. With a current membership of nearly 300 they are still on the lookout for new members to participate in the conversation. If you want to know more about this group or attend one of its events see www.thewordguild.com

► By the time you have this newsletter in hand **Oratorio Terezin** (an Imago project)

will be on its European tour March 4–18. Twenty choristers in the children's choir will be traveling from Canada along with soloists and others overseeing the tour. Just before leaving for Europe word was received that Welsh tenor Huw Priday had taken ill and would not be able to perform on the tour. The composer Ruth Fazal was delighted that Canadian lyric tenor Mark DuBois was able to fill the gap and take on the role as the voice of God, sung by Huw Priday in the Toronto performances last fall. The Oratorio will be performed in the Catholic Cathedral in Brno Slovakia and also in Vienna. The CD of the Toronto performance has come out and is available through www.oratorioterezin.com

► **Augustine College** in Ottawa over the past several months has been planning a weekend that will feature **Jeremy Begbie**. On the weekend of March 19–22 under the title *The Sound of Hope* Begbie will lecture on themes related to theology and the arts particularly as it relates to music. **Imago** is pleased to collaborate with Augustine

College for this event. On the Saturday night Begbie will speak at the Museum of Civilization where his lecture will be on Bach and he will perform Busoni's transcription for piano of Bach's Chaconne. The evening will include a jazz trio with Rob Des Cotes, David Longenecker and Carl Merenick. Begbie is providing outstanding leadership in his writing and speaking on theology and music. His influence is widespread and he is a great catalyst for generating discussion on important issues related to faith and the arts. Among other responsibilities he is a faculty member for the Institute for Imagination, Theology and Art at St. Andrew's University in Scotland. For more on *The Sound of Hope* www.soundhope.ca

► Each year the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto holds its lecture series called **Art Talks**. For a number of years now **Imago** has partnered with ICS in support of this venture. This year the topic is *Words Made Flesh: Restoring Faith in the Theatre*. The founding Artistic Director of Pacific Theatre in Vancouver, Ron Reed will be the



featured lecturer. With 20 years of experience in directing a theatre company he brings a wealth of experience to his Friday night lecture on the theme *Suspending Disbelief: Why Stories Matter*. Saturday morning will be a panel discussion on the topic – *Plotting our Tales: Theatre's Role in Making Sense of our Lives*. All of this will happen March 26 and 27. The lecture will be at Wycliffe College at 7:30 pm and the panel discussion at ICS at 9:00 am. www.icscanada.edu or www.imago-arts.on.ca 📖

The lecture by Ralph Wood author of *The Gospel According to Tolkien* has been postponed due to scheduling problems. It was to have taken place on May 8 and will now be held in September 2004.

The Sea of Faith

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power of the images and the way in which they are used draw you into the story so that you feel you are a participant. The film opened on Ash Wednesday to coincide with the beginning of Lent, that time when Christians are invited to enter into the sufferings of Christ. The brutal violence depicted in the film does not fit well with the sanitized notions of Jesus that many of us grew up with and entertain to this day. It counters the naiveté of triumphalism which refuses to see the dark realities of life. The film is an artistic work less interested in words than images and their power to communicate. We are inclined to resist the specter of suffering perhaps because it discloses our mortality and reminds us we are finite creatures. Moreover suffering cuts across the grain of all notions of self-sufficiency. It is among current expectations that we are to manage our worlds, both the one inside and the one outside. Suffering intrudes and is in many ways unmanageable. It leaves us uneasy.

I have said that the violence repels us, but lets be honest violence too can be a great attraction. Why does it have appeal? On the negative side it may provide a sense of control over others, when we can see it from our own place of safety. We all seem to have the capacity to take pleasure in the suffering of others. But a strange twist occurs when we believe the one who suffers is in fact suffering for the sake of others including ourselves. Here a redemptive theme emerges in which we have the paradox of life coming out of death, of peace coming out of pain and salvation out of suffering.

There is a long history of artistic works that take up Lenten themes, particularly in the visual arts. These run from Grunewald to Dali and include a whole host of unknown artists who have crafted in wood and stone images in churches around the world each with their own sense of the passion and its meaning. These themes are also found in music – usually in a minor key – such as J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew's Passion* or Allegri's *Miserere*. What the artist tries to capture whether in word, sound or image is a

sacred moment or event strong in its continued symbolic meaning.

There is, in the story of the passion, something that speaks to the mystery of the human condition. It is here we witness the intersection of menace and grace, of darkness and light and as one theologian has put it, "a narrative of a vulnerable God". It is a narrative whose telling invites something beyond a neat representational account. We need the imagination and the rich resources of artistic vision to help us see a little more clearly what meaning is present in these mysterious events and how they might be taken into the fabric of our own lives to do a work of transformation – to bring us salvation.

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "John Franklin". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light green background.

John Franklin, *Executive Director*
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