



imago

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In the last week of August I was attending the Christian Artist's Seminar in Doorn Holland. This community of artists from all over Europe gathers not only to celebrate the arts but to give attention to a current social issue. The issue this year was multiculturalism. My assignment was to do a workshop on this theme giving special attention to how the arts could be a bridge over our cultural differences.

While at this event I had occasion to be part of a conversation with a young student who is attending Art College in Great Britain. She spoke of how she was living with the tension between art as an activity valued for itself and art as an activity done for the sake of something else. Christian friends at home and some at the conference were encouraging her to use her work in the service of evangelism while others were advocating for doing art without any outside motivation. It had become an uncomfortable problem for someone who wanted to have integrity as an artist and integrity as a Christian.

The conflict experienced by this young artist is one that looms large in the Christian community. This is a thorny issue that shows itself continually in discussions about Christian responsibility in the arts. Western society, particularly in North America, is "relentlessly utilitarian". Usefulness can bestow legitimacy on something that otherwise may be suspect. For many, art is in need of just such justification. But is usefulness a helpful criterion for making judgments about art?

Art work done in order to instruct or to further some moral agenda seems to have less strength than art that has come into being through a passion to create and a desire to get at what is real. Art, I think,



the struggle has already yielded its own strange fruit

Dan Steeves, 2000, etching, 45 x 60.6cm

should not be in the business of nailing things down. Rather art alludes, it suggests, it points. Art does communicate but what is communicated is often more a matter of what is implicit than what is explicit. If an artist is expected to take on an agenda to moralize or teach it is usually accompanied by a call to be explicit in what is said. The call to use art for the purposes of faith is a call which suggests that the

artist is duty-bound to be explicit in expressing faith through that art.

It seems to me that this approach is more indebted to a North American pragmatism than it is to any biblical injunction. Sad to say, many within the Christian community have adopted this cultural trend and become "relentlessly utilitarian". Everything is valued in terms of its usefulness. We are then on the look

out for what we might use as instruments to achieve our particular goals. I want to suggest that it is this kind of thinking which leads to the view which is so

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Artist Statement

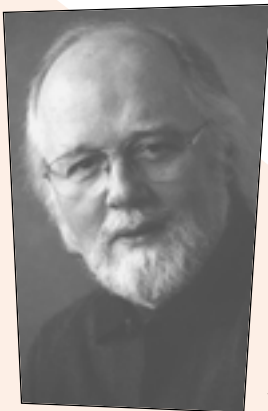
In my personal experience I have found life to be like a moving river that is made up of possible destabilizing situations. This flow of life situations has kept my mind in a state of flux as I attempt to ultimately learn something from them. Through these experiences I have consistently been drawn back to the vision of the house in the landscape and how the process of time and change has affected its physical structure.

This icon of the house is portrayed as something that waits, keeps a vigil and symbolizes a place of shelter and sanctuary. This structure is a metaphor for the changes that affect our lives. In this metaphor, a relationship can be found as to why we build our houses [read lives] into a fortress, a stronghold of security. This stronghold and sanctuary becomes a paradox of restricted isolation with the ideal of building it stronger into a fortress, ultimately making it weaker. It is our fundamental sense of community that is lost within the utopian walls of the fortress.

The process of change in our lives moves beyond the portrayal of the physical structure of the house to the psychological shifts of experience of our mind. There is irony in the fact that beauty is not restricted to the pristine and immutable, but can be found in the inevitable decay of our lives. Wisdom and understanding comes when we realize that when we accept change, our ideal of shelter/sanctuary is not ultimately lost but truly found.

The house as fortress begins with the domicile but moves thematically towards forging hope out of unsettling change. As in our everyday lives, it is the transformation from the simple to the monumental – from the commonplace to the life-changing-that is important.

www.dansteeves.com 



Art as instrument

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insistent that art be explicit about matters of faith. What should be noted here is that art containing explicit reference to faith is not the problem – rather it is the insistence that it should be so that is the problem. Some of the greatest works of art have religious subject matter while some have no religious component whatever. And then there are other great works of art that would not readily be recognized as religious in any way which nonetheless are getting at themes that resonate with a faith perspective.

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There is a great difference here.

J.R.R. Tolkien achieves this in his trilogy *Lord of the Rings*. What Tolkien does here is set out to write a good story. Ralph Wood tells us “Tolkien the Catholic is confident that the sacramental and missional life of the church will convey the Gospel to the world without the assistance of his own art. He wants his epic fantasy to stand on its own as a compelling and convincing story without any adventitious props.” (*The Gospel According to Tolkien*, p.6) Tolkien was not calculating how he might slip the gospel into the story and yet as someone has said his work is ripe with Christian understanding. It is important to distinguish the purpose of a work with the effect achieved. It is easy to confuse these two. We think that by selecting a specific purpose for our art we will achieve the desired effect. Not necessarily. And as it turns out an effect may be achieved through a work of art that had no part in the original “purpose” of the work – if we can speak of it as having a purpose.

Many are critical of works like *Lord of the Rings* because they are fiction or fantasy, not reality. It is argued that they offer only

escape from the world. But it would seem exactly the opposite is true. What is discovered in a fantasy can reveal the truth about the world. In his book *The Gospel According to Tolkien*, Ralph Wood observes that “The essence of fairy-stories is that they satisfy our heart’s deepest desire: to know a world other than our own, a world that has been flattened and shrunk and emptied of mystery.” Speaking of creature in the story he goes on to say “Far from being unreal or fantastic in the popular sense, these creatures embody the invisible qualities of the eternal world – love and death, courage and cowardice, terror and hope – that always impinge on our own visible universe.” (p.7)

And so I want to suggest that instead of thinking of art as instrument – we might better think of it as gift. There is a great difference here. An instrument is something that we wield for purposes we choose while a gift is something for which we put our hands out to receive. These are very different postures. The creative gift when woven into ordinary life may allow us to see and hear what we have not seen or heard before. It will do this not primarily because of what is explicit in the work but because of what is implicit. A good novel engages us not because of the surface story but because of some truth that lurks beneath the surface, great music is more than just a catchy tune, it offers us something that resonates with our spirit, it communicates something we desire – lament, joy, hope.

I think we might have here a third way between the two poles of pure art untouched by any external motive for its existence and propaganda where “art” is simply a vehicle for conveying a message and nothing more. This third way is born out of the integrity of the artist in their work, not driven by any external agenda, but still resourceful for helping us to get at what is true and what is real.

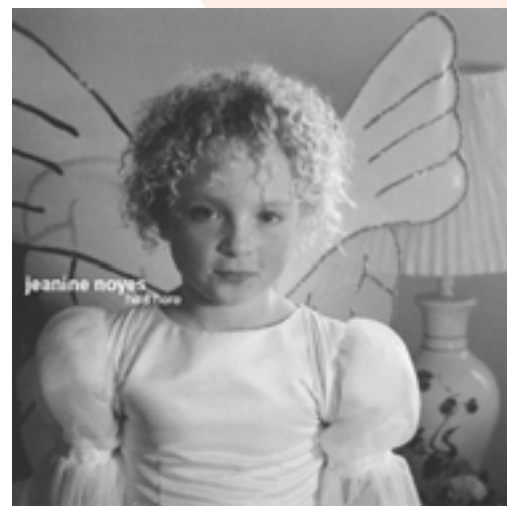
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News & Notes

OUTSIDE the BOX.

This new venture is an Arts Club that backs present-day Christian artists by making their works known and available in print. If you become a member you will receive two high-quality art/gift books per year, each introducing you to the work and ideas of a contemporary Christian artist. www.piquant.net

Jeanine Noyes



Jeanine Noyes is putting the finishing touches on her second project under the Imago umbrella.

Her new Christmas album, entitled *He’s Here*, contains traditional carols with new twists, three original pieces and a couple of rousing gospel numbers with full choir. Produced by Douglas Romanow, the album features a stellar crew of musicians. Their musicianship, combined with Noyes’s songwriting, arrangements and performance, make every track outstanding. *He’s Here* is the kind of Christmas album you will want to play year after year and give as gifts to your friends.

Visit www.jeaninenoyes.com to listen to song clips and find out about purchasing info, pre-release sale offers and concert details.

The CD Release party will be on Saturday November 6 (Venue TBA). Please watch the website for details.

Spora



The Kingston Ontario based group Spora has just released their new CD titled *Bathophobia: fear of depth*. This Imago project is a CD with 10 original tracks recorded at Longshot Studios in Kingston. It is receiving airplay in various locations. The CD will be marketed in the “mainstream” as well as the Christian market. Spora has just finished shooting a video for the first single, *Secret Place*. An east coast tour is planned for the first part of October where they will perform in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. www.spora.org

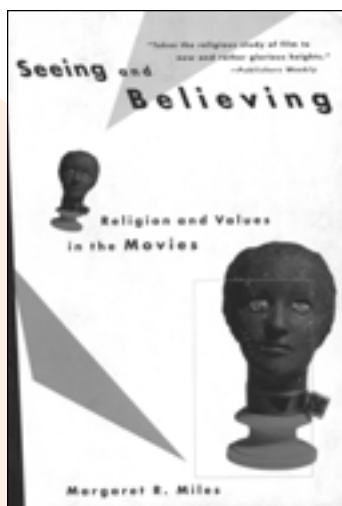
Two Books about the Movies

Though not recent publications the two books reviewed here are valuable resources for reflection on the influence of media in contemporary thought. Each takes up the important subject of film and places it squarely in a faith context. This review is being written while Toronto indulges once again in its very successful annual film festival with a repertoire of over 300 films. This year not a hotel room is available in the city while this annual ritual is underway.

What is it about film that draws the attention of so many in our society? Today it is no longer just a matter of going to the movies, but our commitment to film also includes what is now an industry, supplying us with videos – no DVDs for home viewing. Some have contended that video technology is the dominant influence in shaping public imagination. In a bygone era congregations were to be found in churches where they would hear once again the familiar story present in the liturgy and preaching. All were called to live in that

story and to have their lives shaped by it. We now have many new congregations, groups of common folk who regularly sit in the dark while they watch and listen to a story, a story which not only may shape their lives but reflect back to them something of who they are. Film is the new liturgy upon which we feed in order to give us some clarity about how we are to live.

It is an argument something like this that is at the centre of Margaret R. Miles’ book, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values at the Movies* (Beacon Press, Boston). Miles contends that it is at the



movies that we learn who we are, what our values ought to be and how we should relate to the natural world. She challenges the “myth of pure entertainment” the belief that screen images are innocent of social effect. She points out how that Protestantism took the view that images are irrelevant and this idea she argues, prevails despite cultural shifts that include secularism and religious pluralism.

The book offers thoughtful discussions of films such as *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *The Mission*, *Romero*, *Not Without my Daughter*, *The Chosen*, *Thelma and Louise*, *Jungle Fever* and *Paris is Burning* to name a few. Exploring both plot and character Miles works to support her claim that film is a key resource for values in our culture. She goes so far as to say that film takes on a religious role when she writes; “The media’s secular imagination relies on caricatures of religion while strenuously trying to fill religion’s shoes.” She concludes that “what films do best is to articulate the anxieties of a changing society. ... Films do not provide

readymade solutions, but they can vividly articulate specific problems and longings and reveal their complexity and causes.”

St. Paul Returns to the Movies: Triumph over Shame (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids) is Paul Jewett’s second book on the apostle and film. It may seem unusual to have a professor of New Testament writing about film but it is becoming much more common to find biblical scholars and theologians turning to film to provide help in articulating religious insights. Unlike *Seeing and Believing* this book has a focus on specific theological matters. The author turns to

film to see if some fresh light may be shed on the themes of honour, shame and grace, themes common to the writings of Paul.

The book offers a tantalizing mixture of biblical exegesis and film criticism where important themes of Christian theology emerge as the focus of the discussion. Films discussed include;



Prince of Tides, *Babette’s Feast*, *Forrest Gump*, *Groundhog Day*, *The Firm*, and *Shawshank Redemption*. Values which show up in these films are compared and contrasted to the values that are affirmed in scripture.

Without wanting to say too much about the intentions of these modern filmmakers, it is as though film has a role not unlike the parables of Jesus. What values are supported and what is modeled as a way of living is of course an important question – but that film speaks about values and addresses the issue of how we are to live without doubt.

These are just two of an ever increasing list of works that deal with the interface between film and faith. The significance of film and its impact on our thinking and on our choices in life is not to be overlooked. More needs to be done in our faith communities to help us to “read” film, to discern its meaning and interpret its stories. ▣

Upcoming Events

Urban Compositions

October 1 to November 14, 2004. Visual artists James Paterson and Barbara Amos Murphy have an upcoming show titled *Urban Compositions*. Strong visual compositions, telling stories of the beauty and complexity of the artists' familiar urban, constructed environments. AIC Gallery Burlington Art Centre, 1333 Lakeshore Road, Burlington ON, 905-632-7796. *Reception*: Sunday October 17, 2 to 4 pm. *Artists' tour and talk*: Sunday October 24, 2 pm.

Render in Return

October 3 to October 29, 2004, Tyndale College and Seminary, 25 Ballyconnor Court, 416-226-6620. An art exhibit of porcelain sculptures and paper montages by Elizabeth Henstock. *Reception*: Sunday October 3, 1 to 4 pm.

Jeanine, Dale, Fergus

October 17, Sunday evening, Jeanine Noyes (Toronto) and Dale Nikkel (Winnipeg) (Fergus Marsh on bass and Chapman Stick) will be getting together for a concert in Toronto. Watch for details on the Imago website (www.imago-arts.on.ca) or visit: www.dalennikkel.com or: www.jeaninenoyes.com

Write Montreal

October 23, 2004, 8:30 a.m. to 4:40 pm, The Presbyterian College at McGill University, 3495 University Street, Montréal (Métro McGill). Second annual conference for French- and English-speaking writers who are Christian. Sponsored by Innovation (Christian Direction) and The Word Guild. Choose from workshops in English (Recycling your personal experience; Self-editing; Writing and publishing a book; Writing for the secular press; Getting started in freelance writing) or in French (Chansons et poésie; L'art d'écrire avec clarté; Littérature jeunesse; Écriture de presse) or a bilingual session (Choosing your point of view in fiction writing). Also included is a bilingual round-table discussion with faculty members talking about how faith influences their writing. If you have questions about this event, send e-mail to: eciremontreal@yahoo.ca

Hopkins in Word and Music

November 3, 2004, 7:30 pm, Regis College, Elliot MacGuigan Hall, 67 St Nicholas Street, Toronto (near Bloor and Yonge). An evening of poetry and music in honour of Gerald Manley Hopkins, S.J.

Write Toronto

November 13, 2004, 8:30 am to 5:00 pm, The Stone Church, 45 Davenport Road, Toronto (5 minutes walk from the Yonge and Bloor subway). Reserved parking available. Registration fee: \$99 plus 7% GST \$6.93 = \$106.93 (\$10 discount for members of The Word Guild and for full-time students) includes catered lunch & coffee breaks. Choose from 24 workshops, ranging from beginner to professional experience levels, covering book publishing, magazine and newspaper articles, poetry and professional journalism. Keynote speaker: Richelle Wiseman, *Managing Director, The Centre for Faith and The Media*, Calgary, Alberta (www.faithandmedia.org). The Centre for Faith and the Media is an independent, non-profit organization to inform, advise and help media and the general public achieve a stronger understanding of spiritual history, practices and values in Canadian society. www.thewordguild.com

Arts Intersection 2005: Art, Nature and Medicine

September 28 to October 3, 2005, Trinity Western University. An international symposium and festival exploring and celebrating the intersections between art, nature and medicine is being planned for next year. It is a unique blend of an arts festival and academic conference where participants can share and experience interdisciplinary approaches to research and art practice. This interdisciplinary forum (ai05) will stimulate critical and creative exchanges for artists, scholars, researchers, practitioners and students, while launching a new School of Media and Fine Arts at Trinity Western University. Ai05 will reflect the interdisciplinary vision of the new professional and performing arts program. This event will provide a venue for interested academics, professionals, and members of the local and international community to share

ideas, research and discover connections between art and every day life. Registration information and a full schedule of events will be online in early 2005. You may in the meantime want to look at the website: www.artsintersection.ca 📖

The Light That Lives in Darkness

Dan Steeves, 2002, etching, 11.2 x 20.2 cm



Mark Harris & Dan Steeves

The Light That Lives In Darkness

Gaspereau Press is pleased to announce the release of a limited edition letterpress book entitled *The Light That Lives in Darkness*. This collaborative work features text by Nova Scotia author Mark Harris and prints by New Brunswick artist Dan Steeves. Harris and Steeves have brought together words and images that explore the landscape of the Bay of Fundy and the resilience of faith.

Harris' work draws on the strong presence of darkness and light in Steeves' art and translates it into reflections on faith, hope, isolation and human allegiance with coastal landscapes.

The text is designed in Ludlow Eusebius, cast and printed letterpress on mould-made Johannot paper by Andrew Steeves. Each book includes nine intaglio prints made from zinc plates etched by Dan Steeves. The books are slip-cased and case bound by Ruth Legge (paper-overboards with a calf leather spine). The books measure approximately 11 by 6.5 inches in size and are 66 pages in length.

www.dansteeves.com 📖

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www.imago-arts.on.ca