

Food is at the very heart of human culture. For most of us not a day goes by without us giving some time to eating and drinking. These common habits serve as a reminder of our materiality. As day-six creatures we must draw from the life-giving gifts of the good creation. Beyond our daily bread there has also been the practice of feasting. Feasting has traditionally had a place in communal life. However the patterns of contemporary living have encouraged “fast food”, brief moments of nurture in life on-the-run. Feasting calls us to a different movement of time and may be seen as a metaphor disclosing hints about the shape of Christian spiritual life. For those of you who have attended Imago events in recent years you will know there is always a time at table. It is there that we are able to carry on some of what we have experienced in the artistic offerings of the evening. There is a sense of joy, felicity, play, pleasure and gift and the important experience of communion one with another.

The biblical narrative is replete with references to food and invitations to banquet. I am I confess taken with the rituals of food which are such a vital part of our human condition. There is much to be drawn from our culinary practices and the metaphor of feasting has broad application. A place to begin is to remember that food is a gift. It is the fruit of the earth bountifully provided and freely given for our satisfaction. Feasting is one expression of the “lyric of abundance” found in God’s provision for and through the creation. It is faith that gives us eyes to see this provision and through that same faith we are called to the spiritual practice



Maria Gabankova, *Ode to Joy – A New Song*
acrylic, 60" x 48", 2002, www.paintinggallery.com

Ode to Joy

Maria Gabankova: In this work I used symbolic references from the texts of the Bible. They are intended as symbols of spiritual realities. The attaining and longing for a new heaven and a new earth is represented by attending a banquet.

It is my vision of real people – my friends, gathered around for a heavenly feast: “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.” A *Tree of Life* grows out of the banquet table, the musical instruments speak of praises to God in the playing of a “new song” while food and drink symbolize all that God has prepared for the redeemed. ■

of gratitude. It has been said that without gratitude abundance leads to idolatry. The practice of saying grace before eating is one way we acknowledge gift and express gratitude.

The celebration and enjoyment of abundance that are part of feasting must be tempered by a sense of justice. We best honour the generosity of God by imitating it in our inclusion of others. A Kingdom ethic expects celebration and inclusion to coalesce. Jesus enjoys the table while keeping company with those who are on the margins. His table etiquette broke with the rules and customs of the time disrupting the neat patterns of participation and exclusion. But even an invitation from Jesus will not get every one to the table. There are

those who simply refuse to join in. The elder brother had no patience with the plan to feast in honour of the return of his prodigal sibling. And then there were those invited to a banquet – but for one reason or another they could not come – the instruction that followed was to go to the streets and make the invitation known (Lk. 14:16-24).

Advent is a time of promise and promise entails waiting. One of the signs of promise is feasting. It is a celebratory foretaste of what is yet to come. It is respite from the hard work of contending with human sinfulness both individual and social, not to say the demands of ordinary life. Feasting is akin to a Sabbath rest. It sustains and nurtures us bringing us into fresh relationship with others offering us joy and delight.

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Luci Shaw, poet

Luci Shaw was born in London, England, December 29th, 1928. She attended elementary schools

in England and Australia, and high school in Canada. She graduated from Branksome Hall Girl's School, Toronto, Canada in 1948. Enrolling at Wheaton College in 1949, she graduated magna cum laude in 1953, with a major in English Literature, a minor in New Testament Greek.

A tremendous influence on her imaginative life was Dr. Clyde Kilby (1902-86), professor of English at Wheaton College, who established the world-renowned Wade Center, featuring the writings and belongings of C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien. Kilby, recognizing Shaw's talent, encouraged her to greater efforts. "I'm convinced I'm in writing and literature today because of him," she reflects.

Luci Shaw is often associated with Madeleine L'Engle, and through the 1990s they lectured together at churches and retreats, addressing creativity, faith and the spirituality of friendship.

Shaw advises would-be poets to write every day, and to read with discernment the best writing and literary journals. "Allow the works and words of writers of excellence to seep into your veins and inform your thinking." She recommends participation in writer's workshops, and consistent journaling. "Even the most potent ideas will evaporate from your memory unless you record them," she warns.

She is an adjunct professor and Writer in Residence at Regent College. In *Water My Soul*, Shaw metaphorically parallels the cultivation of the interior life with the seasons of seed and soil, watering and waiting. Indeed, the natural world provides a boundless cache of images for Shaw's work. Her first poetry collection, *Listen to the Green*, appeared in 1974. Her most recent poetry, *Water Lines* (2003), celebrates the myriad forms of water. Her most recent book, *The Crime of Living Cautiously* (InterVarsity Press) discovers the adventure of God's calling.

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These two poems are from *Polishing the Petoskey Stone*, Regent College, 2002, and will appear in her forthcoming book *Angels: Poems of the Incarnation*, Eerdmans. ■

Christmas stars

Blazes the star behind the hill.
Snow stars glint from the wooden sill.
A spider spins her silver still

within Your darkened stable shed:
in asterisks her webs are spread
to ornament your manger bed.

Where does a spider find the skill
to sew a star? Invisible,
obedient, she works Your will

with her swift silences of thread.
I weave star poems in my head;
the spider, wordless, spins instead.

Evergreen

Topped
with an earthbound angel,
burdened
with man-made stars,
tinsel-draped,
but touched with no
true gold,
cropped, girdled
with electricity
why be
a temporary tree,
glass-fruited, dry,
uprooted?

When you may be
planted with purpose
in a flowered field,
and where,
living in clean light,
strong air,
crowned with
the repeated gold
of every evening,
every night
real stars my nest
in your elbow,
rest
be found in your shade,
healing
in your perennial green,
and from deep springs your roots
may suck enough to swell
within you
the Spirit's sweetest fruits.

News & Notes

An Imago evening centred on the theme of 'exile' took place at the end of October. Enoch Turner Schoolhouse was filled to capacity. Drama, dance, music, story and visual art all contributed to a richly textured and widely diverse reading of 'exile'. There is a possibility that a similar Imago event will be held in two or three other centres in southern Ontario in the New Year.

Imago was pleased to partner with the Toronto School of Theology and the Institute for Christian Studies to bring together a visual art show at TST and the annual Art Talks of ICS rolled into a single four day event in early November. This was our first collaboration and it met with good success. About ten visual artists were in the show under the title *Exploring the Threshold: Art and Theology in Dialogue*. Visual artists in the show included, Bruno Capolongo, Maria Gabankova, Wojciech Macherzynski, Reet Mae, Lynne McIlvride Evans and Ted Rettig. The Art Talks lecture held at St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto was given by Imago's Executive Director. The Art Talks for 2006 will be given by Betty Spackman – author of *A Profound Weakness: Christians and Kitsch*. (see the Fall 2005 Newsletter) on a date yet to be determined.

On Saturday December 10, in Cambridge Ontario Glen Soderholm, David White, Jeanine Noyes and Fergus Marsh joined together for an evening of word and music attending to the theme of worship and incarnation. The audience was very appreciative of the fine balance of teaching with performance. This event was put on by a local cadre of folk known as the Seventh Estate in partnership with Imago. This is our first collaboration and we hope there will be more in the days ahead. Take a moment to visit the website of Moveable Feast where you will learn more of the activities of Glen and David (www.glensoderholm.com). You can see what Jeanine Noyes has been doing and how her Christmas CD is being received in Europe if you visit www.jeaninenoyes.com And drop by www.foreverdreamrecords.com to see what Fergus Marsh has been up to. Glen, Jeanine and Fergus have each done CD's under imago.

Between Word and Flesh, a show of the work of Maria Gabankova, was held at the Loop Gallery in Toronto December 3 to 24, 2005.

To learn more about Maria's work (see example on page 1) you may visit www.paintinggalleries.net

Calgary artist Amy Dryer had a few shows in November and her work can be seen at www.fragmentsofsoul.com

Activities of the Vancouver Arts Network can be found at www.manifestarts.com In their December email VAN highlighted the *Arts and Culture World Peace Forum* to take place in Vancouver in June 2006. They are looking for artists to be involved. To find out more visit www.worldpeaceforum.ca

Christians in the Visual Arts (CIVA) celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2005. It continues to flourish They published *Faith & Vision: Twenty-five Years of Christians in the Visual Arts* which is a pictorial history of CIVA www.civa.org

There is plenty of evidence that the conversation between art and theology is gaining momentum. The volume of books and articles exploring the links between art and theology has increased dramatically in the past decade and is showing no signs of retreat. One important player in the conversation is the journal ARTS (The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies). It is published by the Religion and Arts program of United Theological Seminary in the Twin Cities in partnership with Fuller Seminary, St John's University and Wesley Theological Seminary (www.ARTSmag.org). This publication is particularly interested in the connections between art and the life of the church. It is a fine resource for both information and reflection on the place of art in the life of the faith community.



The current issue of ARTS profiles the St. John's Bible. Commissioned by the Benedictine monks of Saint John's Abbey and University, Collegeville Minnesota. The work offers a unique blend of ancient methods and modern images. It is the first handwritten and illuminated Bible commis-



Christ our Light, Donald Jackson, detail from full manuscript page, The Saint John's Bible, 2005.

sioned since the invention of the printing press. Some of the images are available as giclée prints. Using the NRSV this handwritten manuscript will be available in seven distinct volumes. The first volume of the Gospels and Acts is now in print and can be purchased for about \$65 US. You can learn more about this significant project at www.saintjohnsbible.org

International Arts Movement (IAM) based in New York City has planned a conference on the theme *Artists as Reconcilers* to be held February 23-25, 2006. If you are not familiar with IAM you can get a glimpse into what they do at www.iamny.org ■

On the Library Table

Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Popular Culture*, Baker Academic, 2003. This well informed account of the links between popular culture and religious sensibilities is characterized by a direct no-nonsense approach to the issues. What the authors find in popular culture is a deep spiritual longing, one that is voiced in the various arts forms so present and all around us.



Carol Gilbertson and Gregg Mulienberg eds., *Transcendence: Religion, The Arts and Imagination*, Fortress Press, 2004. This book is a collection of essays that

raises a Lutheran voice in the dialogue between theology and art. The discussions range over themes such as imagination, literature, music and poetry. The writing is theologically informed and provides valuable insights to the discussion of art and theology. The title "translucence" becomes a metaphor for understanding the interactions between art and theology. Artwork is neither fully transparent nor simply opaque, but is translucent allowing us to see "as through a glass darkly."

Robert Inchausti, Subversive Orthodoxy: Outlaws Revolutionaries and Other Christians in Disguise, Brazos Press, 2005. This book is not about the arts as such but the figures discussed are mainly literary figures that have had a significant influence though working from the margins. These models from both past and present can assist us in seeing more clearly how we might exercise faithfulness particularly in our artistry.

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On the Library Table

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Calvin Seerveld, *Voicing God's Psalms*, Eerdmans, 2005. This book will warm the heart, nurture the soul and challenge the mind. It is a collection of many of the psalms translated by the author with a little bit of Jonah, Job, Isaiah and even John added in for good measure. The wording is fresh and engaging and serves the intent to draw the reader into the rich resources of this book of praise. A CD is included with the book offering us readings by Seerveld and some musical accompaniment all serving to open up these ancient texts to the modern ear. It is a treasure of a book.

John Terpstra, *The Boys, or, Waiting for the Electrician's Daughter*, Gaspereau Press, 2005. John Terpstra's most recent book is not a book of poetry. From acclaimed author John Terpstra comes the story of his wife's family and the short lives of her three brothers, each of whom lived with muscular dystrophy until their early twenties. With humour, reverence and great love, Terpstra charts the experience of a family under unusual, but resoundingly human, circumstances. He recreates the daily life, the vitality and wit shared by the three boys, and his relationships with them as they entered the final stages of their

illness. Above all, he underlines the privilege of spending time with each of them – Neil, Paul and Eric – coming to know their persistence as individuals, their collective brand of humour and the force field of their personalities in unison. Terpstra recounts the habits, the gentle rituals and oddities of living in the boys' realm: their shared passion for sports, their penchant for nicknames, their records and correspondence, and the steady flow of friends, family and caregivers who participated in their lives. Many times along the way, convictions are checked, challenged and rechecked, faith upended and restored, and perceptions of illness, disability and quality of life vigorously shaken. "I have made a heap of all that I could find..." says Terpstra, "the stuff kept in trunks and boxes; loose photos and albums, a diary, keepsakes, the written notes. What remained, materially, of their lives. Can art be made from terminal disease? After all these years the narrative of their lives had distilled into key moments and events, I would like to say, but it was really in the putting-together and spelling out in words of insignificant and mundane moments and events that their various lights began to shine. I was also thinking about St. Augustine, and the brief, numbered chapters of his *Confessions*. I thought, at first, that each of the chapters should be

addressed directly to God, as they are in that book, because then the big why of the family's story could stay front and centre the whole time. It seemed appropriate. Except that the big why never dominated the story as it originally unfolded, and was not doing so as the story unfolded before me. Scrap St. Augustine. With their lives these brothers who had no future raised life high; in their daily routines, routine itself became holy. Can art be made from terminal disease? I took my cue from them." ■

New Projects with Imago

A number of new projects have been adopted by Imago in the past few months, these include: a *CD project* with Martine Wizman of Montreal; *Manners and Civility project* directed by Judi Vankevich, Langley B.C; *Hope Rising CD* led by Rick Pauw of Hamilton Ontario; *Fisheries project CD* with Glen MacDonald also of Hamilton; Trevor Dick of Guelph Ontario will do a CD playing his electric violin; and Joel Geleyne a singer-songwriter from Guelph will do a CD. There are a few more in the wings and we will be considering them in the weeks and months ahead. ■

Visit Imago on the web at:
www.imago-arts.on.ca

Food and human culture

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It is interesting to note how the arts attend times of celebration. Like food the arts are a reminder of our embodiment and the good gift of creation and like feasting, artistry holds the promise of things to come.

As another year draws to a close we are again invited to remember the drama of the coming of the Christ child – "veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate deity ... Jesus our Emmanuel". The intrusions of our consumerist culture make this invitation difficult for us to hear while at the same time covering it radical nature. In our feasting at this season and always we do well to remember that what we do foreshadows the promise that all things will be made new.

This past year has been a good year for Imago as we have added many new projects

and made new connections with artists across Canada. There is plenty of evidence that Imago is making a difference and is doing its part to see that the arts flourish. I never cease to be amazed by the wealth of artistic talent that resides in our faith communities just another sign of the lyric of abundance.

Thank you for your ongoing interest in imago. The prospects for the arts in Canada among Christian is very bright indeed we will be doing all we can to facilitate that artistic presence in Canada in the coming year.



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*Ho everyone who thirsts,
Come to the waters;
And you that have no money,
come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
Why do you spend money for that
which is not bread,
And your labour for that which does
not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what
is good,
And delight yourselves in rich food.*

Isaiah 55: 1–2