

The subject of poetry has been haunting me for some time. I want to read more poetry, better understand its importance, engage its insights, and discern why it is so much a part of the fabric of our humanity. I have not found enough of the time needed to take up these matters or perhaps more to the point I have not been sufficiently intentional – trapped as so many of us are in the breath-taking busyness of ordinary life. For poetry one needs a place of quiet breathing.

Aristotle unlike his teacher Plato – held that poetry can help us get at the truth of things, convey moral values and serve the common good. In his little book *The Witness of Poetry*, Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz (1911-2004) defines poetry as “a passionate pursuit of the real”. There is no doubt that philosophy, religion and art can become accomplices in the dark agenda of tyrannizing power, but they can also become the prophetic voice that unmasks the falsehood and lightens the path that leads out of the darkness.

Milosz strikes a hopeful note at the end of his book believing that poetry – may be of service in helping to relieve the tensions of our modern world. I don't wish to give poetry status as saviour of social ills. I want instead

to suggest that poetry reaches to the heart of what it means to be human and so is capable of generating a humanizing influence in its social context.

I am drawn to what Catholic philosopher

Jacques Maritain says about poetry; “ By Poetry I mean, not the particular art which consists in writing verses, but a process both more general and more primary: that

continued on page 4



Rhythmic Blues

Cancer and a faith rooted in God have deeply shaped my artistic practice, serving as both a catalyst and foundation for my work as it strives to manifest a sense of ethereality, spirituality and mystery while being grounded in the familiar, knowable and scientific. A fascination with the microscopic in particular continually reflects in my work and is often manifested through the use of biomorphic forms and patterns using vibrant color schemes.

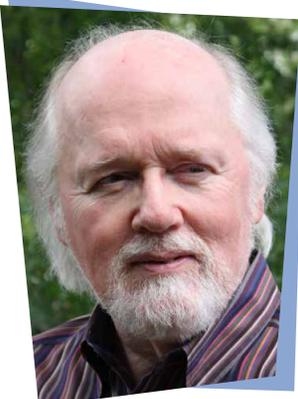
In a narrower context, a microscopic, scientific perspective is used to explore the body as it relates to the experience of illness and healing. This relationship is addressed by exploring the relationship between the internal (psychological) and external

(physical) self as a unified physical, mental and spiritual landscape.

Recently, this fascination with the microscopic has expanded to include the exploration of plant life, particularly seed structures, exemplary in showcasing the beauty and awe-inspiring process that is growth and life expressed at various stages in nature.

Sourcing of imagery for my work is derived from referencing micrographs, images taken using devices such as electron and compound light microscopes. This type of visual reference allows for the integration of a scientific perspective into the immaterial, abstract aspects of life.

Gina Duque (www.ginaduque.com)



On poetry

continued from page 1

intercommunication between the inner being of things and the inner being of the human Self which is a kind of divination.” Put more simply Maritain sees Poetry as a resource of spiritual energy a means of non-conceptual – intuitive knowledge. Here the profound givenness of things – their very existence somehow speaks to the human heart perhaps a resonance made possible because of their common source.

The connection between poetry and the religious is clear. This is true despite the fact that most poets are indifferent or outright negative toward religion. It is as though the poetic impulse reaches beyond the immediate to connect to or be united with some power or presence evident through nature. One must acknowledge that the close connection between poetry and religion means that at times they may be allies and at times the poetic may become a substitute for religion. This risk is unavoidable because the two inhabit the same domain in the rhythm of human life.

A deeper connection that merits attention beyond what I can provide here is the link between poetry and prayer. American poet Denise Levertov (1923-1997) devoted much attention to spiritual matters. Though an agnostic for many years, in the 1970s a shift occurred away from religious doubt toward belief. It was as a result of her writing of poetry that the new direction emerged. A long-time activist for social concerns her work revealed a turn toward to religion. She once claimed that the poet’s goal was “to live with a door of one’s life open to the

transcendent, the numinous.’ For Levertov poetry was something akin to prayer. It was a means of communicating as well as of listening and receiving.

We live in a world where much that is true has been made small, flattened, reduced, and ultimately trivialized. Walter Brueggemann comments on just such a situation in a book on preaching – *Finally Comes the Poet*. “To address the issue of a truth greatly reduced requires us to be *poets that speak against a prose world*. . . . By prose I refer to a world that is organized in settled formulae. . . . By poetry, I do not mean rhyme, rhythm or meter, but language. . . . that jumps at the right moment, that breaks open old worlds with surprise, abrasion and pace, Poetic speech is the only proclamation worth doing in a situation of reductionism.”

I believe all artistic expression belongs in this circle of the poetic and has a capacity to be like a call summoning us to deeper understanding, fresh perspective, intentional action and renewed faith. A stay against confusion a push against reduction.



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Sola Scriptura

It is the word proclaimed, O God,
That now to Thy expectant Church
Conveys the pre-existent Word
Enshrined in flesh.

O Spirit blest!
Imprint upon our hearts that word
Whence, fashioned by its truth, the Church
May laud in rightmost praise her God.

Olive Regina Anstice ©2014

Presence

This is the table I keep.
This is my warm spot in the world.
–Robert Sund

I dream of sustenance, a loaf of bread
that rises every day and gives me, warm,
the taste of ritual, hope that’s free from harm.

I dream of reverence, a cozy bed
enveloped by the quilt my mother made,
the fabric’s perfect colors rising clean
above my arms, the sunlight’s gleam
a filtered warmth, a color that won’t fade.

I dream of knowing where to sit each day–
A solid table that I share with you–
The laughter that is always old and new–
A place to be at peace, a place to say
a prayer for what has yet to come.
A place that I can tell the world that I am from.

Jacob Jans, 2015

Group Process

“Bless you” – she said. A friend who met my need of loving
although herself as yet not found by Him Who is the
key to love.

And I, perceiving my poor, defensive, uncourageous self accepted
I, released, praised God

And in the voiding act of worship took back from Him
my true dimension:

reflected, thence inherent worth,
prized image of the faultless One.

Olive Regina Anstice ©1969

The poets whose poems are included in this issue are friends of Imago. Glen Presley is a new friend who was part of a brief discussion series I led on the subject of beauty. Olive Anstice was a friend of Wilber Sutherland well before the beginning of Imago and is still on the mailing list. Our paths crossed recently. Jacob Jans is a poet who I met just over five years ago The piece here is one he shared with me soon after it was written. He is married to Caitlin who is also a poet.

Imago Evening

Enoch Turner Schoolhouse

Thursday June 16, 2016, 7:30 p.m.

Roger Bergs,
composer, piano, choir director

Kin: Kaili, vocals; Rylan, percussion;
Emily, bass; David, keyboard

Gina Duque, visual artist

Glenn Presley, poet

Michelle Odorico, violin

Jonny Smith, marimba

Cornelia Luna, singer (musical stage)

David Peck,
social change consultant, film-maker

so... beauty.

doffing arrogance and pride
she comes –
soft of foot,
slow of pace,
sure, confident, free.

she does not batter me
with the ways of puppets
or of politics,
rather,
she breathes out
a small and numinous
flame –
(a flicker of grace,
alert and enduring) –
warmth of wonder,
heat of healing,
radiance of a swelling and
extravagant tide.

I feel the pull –
an awakening pulse of belonging
that settles
in my bones,
my blood,
my very being.

beauty touches my hand
– innocent, wild, believing –
she sings an opulent song
in my ears,
an intricate psalm of
hope, trust, goodness,
lyric and melody braided together
into a gentle invitation to
see things
altogether differently.

to discover entrances
where I had put walls.
to find windows, portals, vistas
where I had only known shadows.
to sweep back the veils of darkness
and receive a glorious light.

beauty continues to gather me
into a holy,
an intimate embrace,
and I am finding my life to be –
with each passing, yet memorable
encounter,
a little freer
of the fears, and the fetters,
of strangers...

(beauty speaks a language
that offers to me a Name...)

Glen Presley, 2016

Art and church

I received word about New Life Church in Guelph from Dick Vosburgh whose connection with Imago goes back to its very beginnings. Dick along with Nicole Ensing have provided a brief account offering a window into what has been happening in this Christian Reformed Community.

Art as Worship: One Congregation's Experience

Psalm 150 calls for everything to have a part in worship life. With that thought in mind a few people who were passionate about the arts decided to be more intentional about giving the New Life (CR) congregation, and the arts a chance to become partners in worship. These few champions established a mandate for the Art as Worship team “to integrate art more purposefully into congregational worship and to create a space to host the art of our extended community.” They requested and received Church Council blessing (with a budget) to provide a sustained program of art exhibitions and other contribution to the worship life of the church.

Since the establishment of a regular committee in 2009 thirty-two exhibitions have

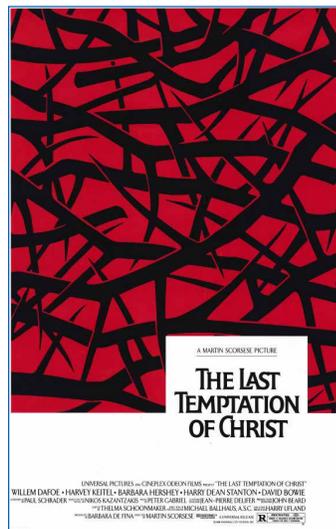
been mounted. An example of how New Life has managed showing is a recent showing of the work of Gina Duque. In addition to showing many of her paintings in the gallery section of the sanctuary, she had a chance to tell her story to the congregation. Also, a short statement of her story was in the exhibition brochure. That story dealt with an illness that opened her to a part of creation we rarely think about. In her art, she wants to share her excitement in learning what marvellous things God has done microscopically. It is a story to which many can relate thus encouraging the artist-as-Psalmist to guide us as we worship.

(Gina's work is featured on page one this newsletter.)

Involving career artists in the life of the church is only part of the rich contribution the arts can make to Psalm 150 worship. Making a conscientious effort to identify, encourage and incorporate gifted people has led to at least one congregational exhibition each year. Growing local talent can take years, particularly when starting with young people, but planting seeds and nurturing gifts makes for a harvest of creative worship leadership where ever these people go.

And then there's the movies....

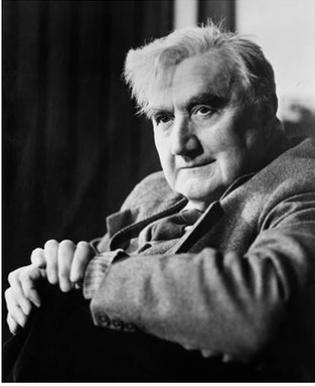
Imago is part of a conversation among four collaborators – including TIFF to plan a conference/event on the theme of film and post-secularity. At the moment it looks like this will happen early in 2017.



Some years ago I attended an interview with the celebrated screen writer/director Paul Schrader (*Taxi Driver*, *Last Temptation of Christ*, *Bringing out the Dead*, and *The Comfort of Strangers*). Here is something he said: “Art fails when I have to do the work for the audience. There is no art in [some films]. You watch it and you see it happen. Art comes into play when something is withheld from you, and you supply it and become part of the process. As a film-maker I can walk up to the door, and I can talk about the door, but I can't walk through. The artist has to be Moses at this point, staying behind so the viewer can walk through the door.”

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Spirituality and Music – Vaughan Williams

The claim that music has a significant role in human culture is not in need of defense as it is so obviously true. But what exactly that role is or perhaps better what the scope of that role may be are questions open to debate. Music is understood to be more abstract than some of the other arts. Whether it's the musical stylings of Oscar Peterson or the symphonic strains of Antonin Dvorak we don't ask what they represent. There are exceptions as for example Prokofiev's Peter and the Wolf. However music is less about representing something than about inviting us to enjoy what is rendered and to be led to unexpected destinations.

Recently I had been listening to the music of British composer Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) when I came upon an article that explores the spiritual insights found in the music of Williams. His father was a pastor but died when Williams was just two years of age and his mother was a believer of evangelical persuasion and a niece of Charles Darwin. He attended Trinity College Cambridge by which time he had slipped from any

religious belief and found support for his disbelief in the likes of philosopher Bertrand Russell. In time he softened his stance from atheist to agnostic. It is interesting that many who cannot find room for God in the small tent of their own mind are nonetheless open to tipping their hat to the divine in the grander spaces of culture and cosmos.

Elizabeth-Jane McGuire author of the article* I read observes the irony of how a non-believer like Williams wrote religious essentials in the modern musical canon. The two spiritual themes found in Williams's life and music were the journey and beauty. It was through these gates that the composer was able to enter to find spiritual significance he was unable to access in organized religion.

What I happened to be listening to was a recording of orchestral pieces among which was the exquisite composition *The Lark Ascending* as well as Williams's *Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* – or the familiar hymn tune *Kingsfold* – (*I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say...*) For those who wish to reach a bit further you might listen to his *Songs of Travel* where, as McGuire notes, the themes of journey and beauty “shed light on Vaughan Williams's personal spiritual transformation not into a believing Christian, but into a person who encountered the transcendent through beauty and who was transformed as a result”.

This is one more example of how art and the spiritual may inhabit the same space reminding us that our world is layered – not flat – and art is one of the windows that enables us to see beyond the immediate.

*Elizabeth-Jane McGuire, *Ralph Vaughan Williams: Spiritual Vagabond* in *ARTS: The Arts in Religion and Theological Studies*, vol. 27 no 1 (2015)

Mystical Landscapes at the Art Gallery of Ontario

October 22, 2016 – January 29, 2017



It's been more than three years that Imago's Executive Director has been part of an Advisory committee for an art exhibition which will open at the Art Gallery of Ontario in October. The exhibition will feature landscape paintings from about 1892 – 1935. Among the artists are many familiar names such as Monet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Kandinsky, Lauren Harris and Emily Carr. There are also some less familiar names such as Eugene Jansson, Ferdinand Hodler and Charles Marie Dulac but all have been selected because their work evokes something of the mystical. This is a show in which visual artwork combines with religious sensibility and provides for the viewer an opportunity to engage at the intersection of these two realities.

The exhibition is large and has since the first press release earlier this year generated a great deal of interest. Imago will be collaborating with the AGO to host some events which are still in the planning. The book that will go along with the exhibition is a substantial work that engages both art historical and religious themes that have

given shape to the art and artists celebrated in this show. At the close of the exhibition in Toronto it will head to Muse d'Orsay in Paris opening March 13 through to June 25, 2017.

Information about Imago events related to the exhibition will appear on the Imago website and the Imago Facebook page.

Canadian Opera Company Directing debut... Joel Ivany

It was a couple years ago now that Joel Ivany had a project with Imago. *Against the Grain Theatre* which was launched under Imago continues to get rave reviews for its innovative staging of traditional opera in very non-traditional ways. Joel still serves as the founding Artistic Director – but this is only a small part of what he does. He has directed opera at Banff School of the arts, staged a performance of Mozart's *Requiem* with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and in April made his directing debut in the Canadian Opera Company's production of the well-known and ever popular *Carmen* by Georges Bizet. It was brilliantly done and received a well-deserved standing ovation. There is much more that Joel is doing to contribute to the arts in Canada – but we want only to note our great pleasure that Imago was able to have a small part in supporting the early stages of his important work.