

Works that have been published on art and faith in recent decades generally attend more to the visual arts than to other art forms. Accounting for why this is so is more complex than at first meets the eye. However that metaphor I just invoked holds a clue. It has been characteristic of the Western culture to privilege sight over sound, seeing over hearing. Metaphors of sight abound in our language: perspective, viewpoint, mind's eye, worldview, 'I see what you mean' visioning process, and more. Postmodern critics have noted how things are able to get frozen as simply objects under our gaze as we become mere spectators. There is a whole nest of problems found in the attention to sight as the key metaphor for how we come to know. I say this not to suggest that visual metaphors should be discarded – they are valuable indeed – but only to note that there is a drift away from “seeing” toward “listening” as the norm for how we come to know. In the visual field you cannot have two things in the same space – if the centre of the canvass is blue it cannot red. With sound the notes fill the entire space and several notes can be heard at the same time and in the same space. A moment's reflection suggests

that “seeing” requires more detachment than “listening” and so the former is more akin to the technological while the latter is more relational.

Some have observed that the difference

between Hebrew and Greek ways of thinking points precisely to these two options. Thorlief Bowman has suggested that the Hebrew notion of “word” is linked to

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Paul Fournier, *Three Wise Men*

Paul Fournier has had a long and distinguished career as an artist. His works are varied and here is one that offers a gentle depiction of the “wise men” a carefully crafted drawing that captures the ancient story of those in search of a king.

His large canvas paintings reveal his remarkable talent as a colourist with a keen intuitive sense of the beauty and wonder of the world. Drawing his primary inspiration from creation, he fills his canvasses with strong colours and shapes that convey an almost childlike wonder of the universe.

“I like dramatic things with sharp contrasts.” says Fournier, “They seem to represent the mystery of life ... I am drawn to mystery, but through my art, I like to explore and reveal it.” Images appear to emerge from the colour, as if to suggest a form seen indistinctly through the mist. When asked about his fascination for the “indistinct,” Fournier playfully cites J. M. W. Turner: “You should tell him that indistinctness is my forte.” – Turner’s reply upon hearing that someone had complained that the painting *Fingal’s Cave* was “indistinct.”

He expresses a fine balance between spontaneity and intuition. The artist explains: “there is a beauty and a sense of rightness about things that happen immediately,” yet behind the fluid lyricism lays an exacting precision. Fournier says that “paint is a wonderful substance” and, as an artist, he is able to transform this substance in order to take the elements of nature to a more poetic realm.



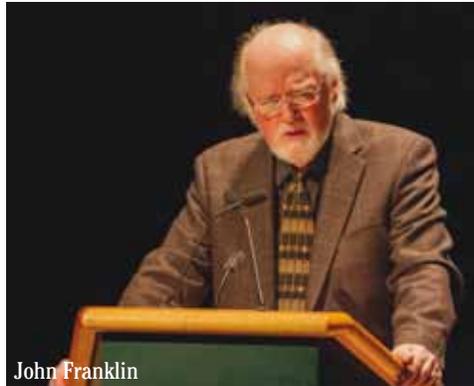
Paul Fournier, *Nocturnal Overture-5841*, 2008

Gregory Wolfe, *Beauty Will Save the World: Recovering the Human in an Ideological Age*, Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2011. (266 pp.)

After several decades of exile from conversations about art “beauty is back”. It has become a focus for discussion among artists, art critics and philosophers of art in a way that would have been resisted in the recent past. The twentieth century was not welcoming to the subject of beauty. This return of beauty is manifest not only in discourse on the arts but also in discourse on theology. Theologians are giving fresh attention to the aesthetic and are once again making age-old connections between beauty and the transcendent that are now only a faint memory amid the currents of our postmodern world.

This insightful work by Gregory Wolfe – the founding Editor of *Image* – takes up the theme of beauty with a particular focus on literature. The title “beauty will save the world” is drawn from the writings of Dostoevsky. Just what it means is a matter open for discussion. But for Wolfe it is clear that beauty will serve as the antidote to our inclination to look to “politics and intellectual dialectics” to address the decadence of the West. These have been tried and found wanting. Our current tendency toward entrenched ideological positioning makes this work particularly timely. Wolfe invites us to set our hopes for renewal on the “imaginative visions of the artist and the mystic” as these provide the cultural grounding of all politics and rhetoric. (pp. 1-2)

Believing as he does that it is in imagination that we will find the resources for a renewal of culture Wolfe laments the fact that “... a large body of believers ... have essentially given up on contemporary culture... they do not believe that Western culture can produce anything that might inform and deepen their own faith.” He continues, “For me, the most depressing trend of all is the extent to which Christians have belittled or ignored the imagination and succumbed to politicized and ideological thinking.” (pp. 18-19) It is Wolfe’s contention that the renaissance of fiction, poetry and music that host religious themes augers well for a fresh influence of faith on our culture of confusion and uncertainty. He is an advocate for Christian humanism, which he suggests is



John Franklin

On Friday November 2nd Imago hosted a full house at Toronto’s Glenn Gould Studio. This 40th anniversary celebration included a variety of performing artists as well as visual artists. In my preparations for this event and for the fall newsletter I discovered a lot about the history of Imago and its influence both past and present. As part of the evening there was a video presentation with a dozen artists commenting about their connection with Imago. The video can be viewed on the Imago website: www.imago-arts.org. Also, we are putting together a disc which will include the video shown that evening, a full audio recording of all of the performances and a brief video interview with Imago’s Executive Director.

As many of you were not able to attend we have asked a few of those who were there on November 2nd to provide some comments on their experience of the evening.

characterized by the effort to first grasp our current condition and then to speak into it with the voice of faith. There is no intent to be preachy or moralistic, as art by nature is indirect and shies away from the didactic. The Christian subculture of publishers, record labels and art galleries are for Wolfe, products of a failed imagination. Instead of being innovative the art is merely derivative. (pp. 24-25)

It is evident throughout the book that Wolfe is not only well versed in the literature about which he writes but that his own thinking has been shaped by a rich array of authors who carry no fear of the partnership between deep faith and good art. Among the writers he cites are George Bernanos, Fredrick Buechner, Annie Dillard, Graham Greene, Flannery O’Connor, Walker Percy, Evelyn Waugh and poets T.S. Eliot, G.M.

Imago 40th anniversary event



Kevin Ramessar



Brad Woods

“My wife Sandra and I were delighted to attend the Imago 40th Anniversary celebration. This was an inspiring event recognizing that the entire world of the creative arts

Hopkins, Geoffrey Hill, Denise Levertov and Richard Wilbur. These and others cited in the book might be thought of as stewards of mystery; that dimension of life over which we have no control. Many of the details of Wolfe’s own journey to Catholicism are recounted in the book.

In the chapter on his teacher and mentor Russell Kirk reference is made to the “tragic sense of life” a phrase borrowed from the Catholic existentialist philosopher Miguel de Unamuno. “The tragic sense of life is opposed to ideology, which posits a belief in the malleability of human nature.” says Wolfe. This affirmation of human nature as fallen is for Kirk “a check on political arrogance...”. Grounding Kirk’s view was a “sacramental vision, his vivid sense of the createdness of the world.” (p. 211)

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belongs to God our creator, and recognizing that he wants his redeemed people to reflect his glory, grace and truth in this immensely important sphere of contemporary life and culture. The mini biographies of the performers, and of 40 other artists, in the program notes, afforded a much appreciated insight into the lives of those whose gifts and dedication made the evening a time of



Laila Biali

Photos: Ken Meats

admiration and joy. The history of European art and music reminds us that there was a time when the artistic expression of faith in Jesus Christ was not confined to a Christian sub-culture. The forty years of Imago's ministry gives us hope that we may be seeing the dawn of an

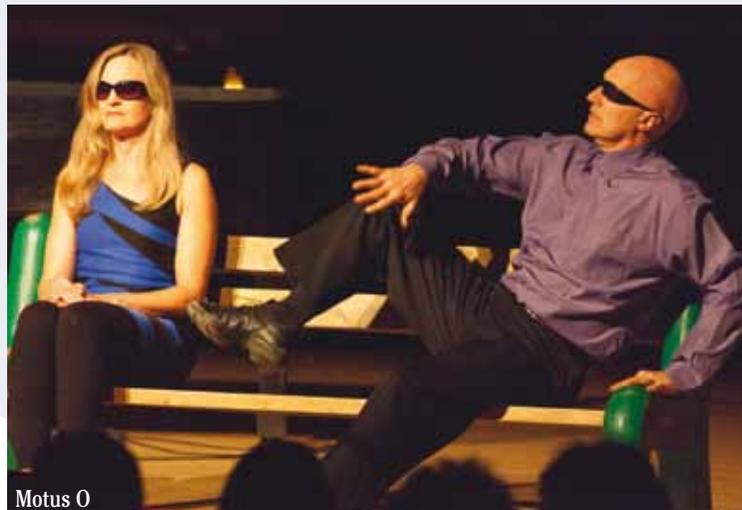
era when that will again be true. Thank you John and your team, and the fourteen brilliant performers, we are deeply in your debt." ~ Robin Guinness

"The 40th anniversary of Imago was a not-to-be-missed event! Executive Director, John Franklin, brought together a variety of performances from dance to storytelling, from jazz to a visual arts display. Every artist was chosen for their connection with Imago and showed how this innovative organization has nurtured Christian artists in Canada and profited their varied artistic expressions. The night was a tribute to the original vision of Imago's founder, Wilbur Sutherland. It was also a trip down memory lane for those of us who have served on the board, or been

involved as donors, or received encouragement and financial support from Imago. After the performances, the audience gathered in the lobby for gourmet treats. They reunited with friends old and new to celebrate the arts. The last guests lingered long into the night – it was that kind of celebration. ~ Carolyn Dartnell

Imago's 40th Anniversary event at Glenn Gould studio was a breathtaking celebration of Christians in the arts. Before that evening I had not appreciated the level of artistic accomplishment which they all displayed and wondered why we haven't seen more of them in public performances. But that evening was one of sheer delight from opera to comedy, violin to guitar, jazz to classical and everything in between, with the common thread of doing everything for the glory of God. A wonderful experience!" ~ Bob Morris

"Wonder, the buzzword of the Christmas season, and the cumulative gift of each performance given at Imago's 40th Birthday Celebration. Each offering gave witness to the astonishing work of the Creator – God in dance, in song, in laughter, in heartache, in perseverance, and in excellence. The importance of affirming artistic expression



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that penetrates our deepest fears, expresses our greatest joy, that poses difficult questions, that reveals our own hearts...is immeasurable. Imago's gathering left me humbled, comforted and deeply grateful to see, hear and feel God's presence through each unique performance. Many thanks, Imago." ~ Jo-Ann Dell

"The November 2nd celebration of Imago's 40th Anniversary was indeed a memorable occasion. For me personally, it was an

opportunity to reconnect with many people involved in the early days of Imago and to recall memories of those days. I marvel at how the meetings, first held in our living room forty years ago, were the beginning of this amazing ministry. It was uplifting to me to see what Gordon, my husband, had a part in so long ago is continuing as a vital organization. Throughout the evening there was a noticeable energy and excitement. I was not surprised that all the artists were very talented, skilled and professional. However, I was surprised at the enormous number of artists Imago has supported over the years. I was surprised at the great variety of artistic expression. I was surprised that the reach of Imago extends across Canada and I was delighted to learn of the community, even family-like feeling existing among the artists. Imago's influence has been both deep and extensive. I could not help reflecting how Wilbur's vision for Imago has been fulfilled over and over again and how God continues to honour the dedication and good work of John Franklin and the Imago Board." ~ Nancy McKye

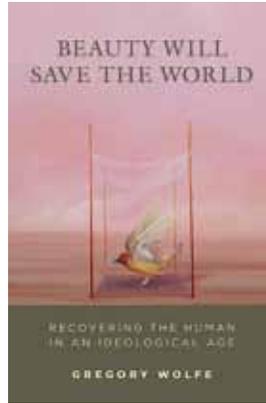
"There are events that one attends and later forgets, and there are events that linger with delight in one's memory; Imago's 40th anniversary event was the latter. This event celebrated the arts and the artists' God-given gifts and their stewardship of those gifts. It celebrated the community of faith and creativity that Imago has fostered. The evening was a feast of music, dance, visual arts, and word, all honouring 40 years of networking, support, education, patronage and donations, underpinned by God's grace and faithfulness. Beyond the calibre of the arts, this delightful event was particularly significant on two levels; it demonstrated that Christian artists can rightfully claim their voices in any media, and it also demonstrated that Imago's work is vital and needs to continue. As each new generation of artists emerges and searches for its audience, these artists will need mentoring, support, and conversations about what it means to be Christian art-makers. May God continue to bring blessing on the arts, and may Imago continue to bless God's creative children by providing a place for conversation, challenge and encouragement." ~ Cindie Chaise

Beauty Will Save the World

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It is just such a sacramental vision that sustains Wolfe's belief that "beauty will save the world". This is a deeply Catholic work. He writes, "The communitarian, sacramental and tragic dimensions of the Catholic tradition grew out of a faith attuned to beauty. The effort to renew this tradition through literature and the arts shapes my own form of Catholic civil engagement." (p.15)

The question remains as to how confident we can be in the "redemptive power of beauty". One can't help but wonder if this is not too great a burden to put on the gift of human art making. But I expect we can



all agree that art provides some sign suggesting that there is more to the world than reason is able to deliver. Lest we expect too much from the title I will conclude with a quote from the open-

ing chapter. "If art cannot save our souls, it can do much to redeem the time, to give us a true image of ourselves, both in the horror and the boredom to which we can descend, and in the glory which we may, in rare moments, be privileged to glimpse." (p.8)

Sound and sight

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actions, presentations, and events, while the Greek notion of "word" is based on abstract reason and thought. ... So for Bowman the Hebrews lived in an eventful world of sound, whereas the Greeks lived in a static world of sight." (J. Sterne, *Theology of Sound*) My intent here is to invite you to consider the place of voice and sound in the biblical story – particularly that of Advent. If faith is to be meaningful it must include communication. Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and eventually the wise men were all invited to "listen".

In the first chapter of Genesis the creation story notes that all that comes into being is a result of the Divine voice – "God said..." It is the voice of God that results in the filling of the void with heaven and earth, in the dispelling of the darkness with light and in the enlivening of the earth with animal and human presence. It is hard to say just how it is that God speaks but Augustine addressed this question and concluded that the divine "speaking" was an activity of the Word "all things were made by him..." as noted in the first chapter of John's gospel. In that same chapter is the declaration noting the same Word that spoke creation into being "became flesh and dwelt among us".

The earthly beginning of that world-changing event came in the encounter

between an angel and a young woman – the *Annunciation*. The message received was one of promise and hope – "the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" and "his reign shall never end". For the young woman it was a disruptive message – breaking cultural norms, putting her at risk and setting the stage for embarrassment and shame, both for her and for the one she was soon to marry. Uncertainty, fear and confusion are natural responses to these unexpected words. But clearly Mary also experienced the sustaining power of these words and the authority with which they came to her. Identifying herself as the "Lord's servant" she was "transformed by her obedience and generosity into *Theotokos* – the Bringer of God, the most favoured among women. She listened and humbly received the message, gestures which brought far reaching consequences for humanity's relationship with God.

An important question for all who are on the journey of faith is; how do we hear God's voice? The speech of God is not just a matter of words but of actions and events. Something happens – we are changed, we discern something new, unexpected and surprising, we are compelled by what we 'hear'.

Can the arts be a location for the divine voice? I think so. Art may bear witness to voice of God in our noise ridden culture. Music can be one way in which we 'hear'

Upcoming

Imago evening

Thursday April 4th

Enoch Turner Schoolhouse

[Watch the website for details.](#)

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God's voice. Not just in the lyrics but in the sounds which reach deeply into our lives, touch our emotions speak into our turmoil, express our brokenness or perhaps bring reassurance, hope and comfort. In theological terms hearing the voice of God requires the presence of the Spirit and it is the Spirit's presence that is so often in evidence in our experience of the arts though not so often recognized. I want to suggest that we would do well to be more attentive so that we might discern the sounds of God in our noisy world.

Your support and interest in Imago is greatly appreciated. In this our 40th year we are grateful for the long history and legacy that has brought us to this time and place. We trust that you will continue to stand with us as we seek to strengthen the voice of Christian artists in Canada.

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