



imago

autumn 2001 NEWSLETTER volume three issue three

It was my intent to write this brief column on Tuesday, September 11, I come to it now several days later. The impact of that tragic day will be felt for some time to come. As we all try to deal with both the external and internal realities brought about by those events, we earnestly look for some light in the darkness, some hope in the moments of despair. There have certainly been signs of hope along the path, not least in the heartfelt expressions of faith in God and love for one another. We are all confronted in a dramatic way with the human capacity for both evil and good. I am reminded of Pascal's remark when he described humanity as both "wretched and glorious".



I have wondered how artists might respond to this past week. Art at its best speaks eloquently about reality, it calls us to see in ways we may not have seen before, it is a mirror positioned so that we are enabled to look at ourselves – something we often resist. Art offers no solutions, but becomes a resource for comfort, reassurance and a humanizing presence. Plato said – 'when there are no words, then music'. Art may also unsettle us as it points to the dark side of our humanity, reveals what is commonly hidden under the veneer of our social proprieties and presents us with truth about ourselves that we would sooner not know.

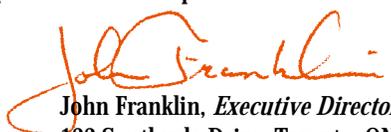
W.B. Yeats' poem, *The Second Coming*, captures something of the moment though written nearly one hundred years ago. I include the full text here (on the next page). There is no intent to participate in 'end of the world' rhetoric. The poem depicts the dark side of humanity, a darkness that is often rooted in religious conviction. We have, it appears, entered an age of vulnerability where the strength we have so long

relied on now seems impotent. We are in need of a 'centre', a centre that can hold and secure us. Set along side of Yeats' poem is the familiar biblical passage on love. The love spoken of here is far from mere sentiment. This eloquent 'poem' speaks of love that has great depth and breadth. It is a 'poem' that issues a call for us to embody that love in life.

Now to things ordinary. In this issue we begin a new column under the title "Art Op". We will be inviting members of the **imago** community to make brief, and we trust engaging and thought provoking, comments out of their own thinking about art and faith. Matt Gill, our first writer, is a Toronto artist and avid reader on themes related to the arts. A report on the launch event for the Vancouver Arts Network, gives a sense of the energy and interest in that growing network. I am pleased to have Vancouver film critic Peter Chattaway review a recent book on theology and film. And we offer you a glimpse into the work of visual artist Phil Irish.

Once again I am grateful for the assistance of Ben Volman in getting this newsletter together. In the last issue I neglected to credit Helena Smrcek as the photographer who provided the photo of Jeremy Begbie. Helena is a freelance journalist and serves as part of the **imago** team. Our website has a new look, thanks to Mike Harding. Please note that **Thursday, November 1, 7:30 p.m.** there will be an **imago** evening at Enoch Turner Schoolhouse in Toronto. See details inside.

The months ahead will involve a lot of activity for **imago**. We are grateful for your continued interest and support and would like to hear from you. If you have ideas or suggestions for us please be in touch.



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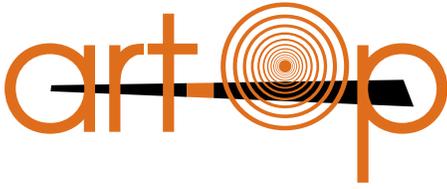
Phil Irish, *Vortex*, Oil on canvas,
165 x 135 cm, 2001

Afloat on History's Ocean

I find water, in its surging force, a humbling thing to behold. Many canoe trips have taught me that it is a substance that commands respect. But gazing at the Atlantic's cold horizon, from the shores of Pouch Cove, Newfoundland, brought the psalms to mind. "Though the waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult," God is still larger.

I have been exploring water imagery in my oil paintings for several years, but my new project is a marked departure. There is tempestuous water, raging. But hovering before the water are tiny images of boats – frail, vulnerable, and somehow out of place. The boats span human history, from ancient Egyptian papyrus boats to modern cruise ships. The vessels become emblematic of cultures and ways of thinking. Thus, our human efforts are humbled by the magnitude of time and space.

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By Matt Gill

The church consists of people united by a common faith in Christ. Christ calls the church to a life characterized by the two greatest commandments, namely, to love God with all heart, soul, mind, strength and to love neighbour as self. This faith and practice unifies the body under the headship of Christ. It is clear from the teachings of Jesus and the apostles that not every act, even though done by a follower of Christ, is exercised in the Spirit of Christ. It is equally clear that any individual must show

submission to the headship of Christ if they claim membership to his body.

This problem extends to artistic composition. A work of art is appreciated as a whole, but it must be composed piece by piece over time. It is therefore an act and is subject to the two greatest commandments. Artists spend their whole lives in pursuit of their art. So it is key that they know how to satisfy the two great commandments through their artistic practice. Artists who disregard this, or satisfy themselves with fuzzy intentions, are like parts of the body acting independently of the head. Trees are known by their fruit. Parts of a body are judged by their utility to the whole and responsiveness to the head. So artists are known by their art.

Matt is a painter who can be found at Crux bookstore, Wycliffe College, University of Toronto.

Afloat on History's Ocean

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The various vessels are carefully chosen to set up provocative scenarios. I place luxury next to destitution, or lump a grand historical vessel in with seadoos. The viewer is left to relish the open ended associations. One painting contrasts the elegance of a Chinese sailing ship with tragic human suffering. At the bottom right, a boat image has been lifted from a newspaper, coupled with its caption. The ship is one used by “illegal migrants” attempting to reach Canada from China. It is striking that so many passengers (190) could cross the ocean in so small a boat. This conveys the urgency and risk of their passage.

My Christian faith shapes my artistic practice in several ways. Art and faith are both about seeking meaning. This often cannot be expressed in axiomatic ways, but rather in allusive, evocative expressions. Also, in life as in painting, the meanings are embodied in physical reality. The tactile quality of paint is as important as whatever images or shapes are shown. The Christian term for this is Incarnation: the transcendent God as visible and tactile.

Ultimately, my faith shapes the themes I choose. One of my preoccupations is the courage and beauty of our efforts as a race, and yet their smallness – their futility – in the scope of this vast and rich universe. We are always seeking control, but so much is beyond our scope. So the vessels are both celebrated and humbled.

Phil Irish, 519-884-8030, www.philirish.com

The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed and
everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those
words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in the sands
of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a
man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking
cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round
at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

William Butler Yeats, 1919

Love is

If I speak in the tongues of mortals
and of angels, but do not have love,
I am a noisy gong,
or a clanging cymbal.
And if I have prophetic powers,
and understand all mysteries,
and all knowledge;
And if I have all faith,
so as to remove mountains,
but do not have love,
I am nothing.
If I give away all my possessions,
and if I hand over my body so that I may
boast, but do not have love,
I gain nothing.
Love is patient; love is kind;
love is not envious
or boastful or arrogant or rude.
It does not insist on its own way;
It is not irritable or resentful;
It does not rejoice in wrongdoing,
but rejoices in the truth.
It bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.
Love never ends.
But as for prophecies,
they will come to an end;
As for tongues they will cease;
As for knowledge, it will come to an end.
For we know only in part,
and we prophesy only in part;

but when the complete comes,
the partial will come to an end.
When I was a child, I spoke like a child,
I thought like a child,
I reasoned like a child;
When I became an adult,
I put an end to childish ways.
For now we see in a mirror dimly,
but then we shall see face to face.
Now I know only in part; then I will know
fully, even as I have been fully known.
And now faith, hope, and love abide,
these three;
and the greatest of these is love.

I Corinthians 13

Report on the Launch Event for imago's Vancouver Arts Network

By *Mark Filiatreau*

Imagine a spiritual desert. The ground is hard as stone, bleached nearly white. Then dark clouds move in and rain comes beating down, forming puddles. As the puddles rise they overflow and join other puddles. This creates an exponential effect: In no time, a flash flood is pouring through the desert.

This is the image Rob des Cotes offered the crowd at the kickoff meeting for the Vancouver Arts Network on July 28. The puddles are solitary Christian artists of all types in the lower Mainland. As they meet and share their hopes and fears, their inspiration and art, the action can create a flood worthy of a work of the Holy Spirit.

The number of people showing up at the kickoff meeting blasted everyone's expectations. Board member Scott Campbell, who is also managing director of the Pacific Theater, supposed 40 people might appear; instead 100 showed up. In the upstairs meeting hall of Holy Trinity Anglican church they enjoyed a four-piece jazz band, an art display, roving white-faced mimes, and a multi-media presentation of quotes and images about art. And then several speakers began to address the question of what it was all about.

Rev. Colin Goode, Rector of Holy Trinity, welcomed the attendees and spoke of his and his church's ministry to support the

...catching a glimpse of each other's artistic dreams and trying to find ways to help them be realized.

artists. The arts, like creation itself, ultimately reflect the glory of God. The arts are an opportunity to bring in others who may not now know Christ. Regarding the upcoming ManiFest Arts Expo in September, Goode said it was "not too early to start praying and thinking about who may be your guest." Then he led the crowd in a prayer of thanksgiving.

Rob des Cotes, Director of the Vancouver Arts Network provided three images to depict the dream behind the Network and how to make it real. A lampstand is a place from where the Holy Spirit's light shines. Church leaders should be inspired to create lampstands: times and spaces for artists to display their work. But des Cotes also saw a muzzle. Artists feel muzzled in church. They feel restrained by expectations or demands of what "Christian art" should look like, and this can quench inspiration. Something new is occurring worldwide regarding the arts and church, but this is a time of birth pains. Many have a picture of what could be, but it is not yet coming to birth. Third, he shared his vision of the flash flood in the desert: Something big is starting to happen regarding Christianity and art. A movement of the Spirit seems to be starting, in the lower Mainland, in Canada and the USA, and over much of the Christian world.

After his remarks, des Cotes told a reporter that he felt the Vancouver Arts Network already had momentum, that it was "something not so much to drive as to follow."

Network members worked to put together the Manifest Arts Exposition to take place again at Holy Trinity Anglican church Vancouver, the last weekend of September. The event will not only display visual art but provide teaching, learning, and "celebrating the arts and all that Christian culture has to offer" the wider community. It will also include plays and multimedia presentations, a coffee house, day-long workshops, lectures, and a variety of liturgical services featuring the arts on Sunday.

You can be in touch by mail at Vancouver Arts Network, P.O. Box 37503, North Vancouver, B.C. V7M 3L7 or visit our website at www.manifestarts.com

A Response to Sept 11, 2001

Visual artist Al Groen wishes to develop an artistic response to the events of September 11 in the US from those within the Christian community. He would like to hear from others who would be interested in participating with him in offering a response to those events. It is not limited to visual arts but can include any of the arts. You may contact him at 905-883-4929 or be in touch with **imago**.

Imago Evening

November 1, 2001, 7:30 – 9:30

Enoch Turner Schoolhouse

(Just east of Parliament and King Streets, Toronto, just behind Little Trinity Church.)

The evening will include:

- Imago Artist, **Brian Belleth**, Lyric Tenor
- **Carl Merinick**, Pianist and Composer
- **Ben Volman**, Author, will read from his work
- Imago Artist, **Jeanine Noyes**, singer, songwriter
- Update from Imago's Executive Director
- the work of two visual artists
- a Reception to follow

An evening to enjoy designed to showcase some exceptional talent and to inform you of what is ahead for **imago**.

Imago Mission Statement

The primary purpose of **imago** is to exercise a biblically based influence upon the development of the arts and artists in Canada and upon Canadian cultural life.

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

Join in at:
IMAGOtalk@yahoo.com

Upcoming Events

Comedian, Singer, Actor, Judy Savoy

– will perform “God Songs and Other Stuff” Saturday, October 20th, 7 p.m., at Wellington Square United Church, 2121 Caroline Street, Burlington. \$10 for the show; \$20 for lasagna dinner and show (dinner is at 5:30 p.m.). Contact Debbie Pugh, 905-333-3772.

The seasoned Scottish actor, Tom Fleming

– will perform a his one man show “Every Blessed Thing” celebrating the life and works of Scottish minister and founder member of the Iona Community, George McLeod. **Imago** is pleased to partner with Yorkminster Park Baptist Church in Toronto where the performances will take place January 31 and February 1, 2002.

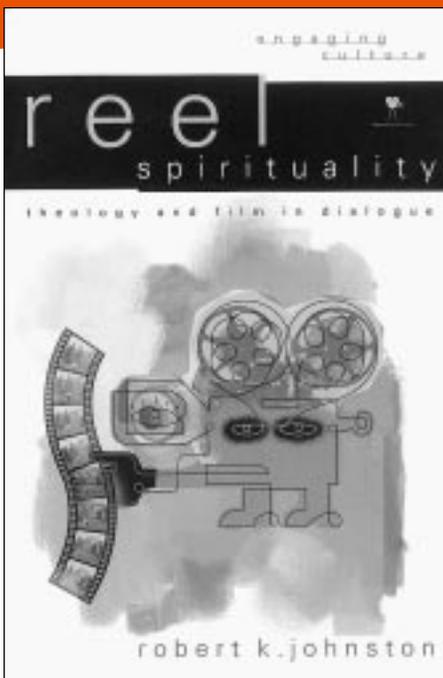
Motus O Dance Theatre

– will perform it’s engaging adaptation of “Alice” at the Markham Theatre (905-305-7469) on November 25, 2001.

Stanley Spencer exhibit

– September 14 to December 16, 2001 at the Art Gallery of Ontario. “To me there are two joys, the joys of innocence and religiousness, and the joys of change and sexual experience; and while these two selves seem unrelated and irreconcilable, still I am convinced of their ultimate union.” – *Stanley Spencer*

Book Review



Robert K. Johnston, *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue*, Baker Academic, 2000, 236 pages.

There have been many books on movies and religion in recent years, but for the most part, each has been written from a fairly limited perspective. To cite just a few examples, Michael Medved and Margaret Miles have tackled the subject with very different cultural agendas, biblical scholar Robert Jewett has allowed film to illuminate his understanding of Pauline theology, and Philip Yancey relied on a series of films on the life of Christ while writing his popular book about Jesus. But there has been little, if any, interaction between these authors, and even less interaction with the larger world of academic film criticism. Robert Johnston, professor of culture and theology

at Fuller Theological Seminary, aims to fill that gap with *Reel Spirituality*, which draws all these other books together and addresses their social, cultural, theological, devotional, and artistic concerns in a single, comprehensive volume. Johnston is certainly familiar with the literature, and in his own contribution to this genre, he outlines several ways in which Christians can respond to films, balancing the narrative and aesthetic demands of the medium with the need to place films within a larger theological context.

Johnston says the church has responded to film in five main ways over the years, from avoidance, when film was just a cheap, worldly entertainment associated with the lower classes at the turn of the century, to caution, dialogue, appropriation and, finally, divine encounter. If Christians, especially those of a Protestant persuasion, tend to avoid any serious engagement with film or similar aspects of popular culture, Johnston says it is because we have been overly suspicious of images, preferring the abstractions of the rational word instead, and because we have tended to emphasize redemption theology to the exclusion of creation theology. But Johnston says Christians are increasingly willing to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit as it speaks to us through film, and to allow movies to transform our lives. Films have the power to open our minds to a sense of wonder, and they can help us to re-discover what it means to live within a narrative. One can quibble with Johnston over his interpretations of particular films, and his regular use of diagrams can seem a little dry at times, but he consistently points his readers back to the experience of watching films themselves. His book will hopefully play an

important part in helping Christians to relate to their culture, each other, and God.

Peter T. Chattaway is associate editor of *BC Christian News* and a freelance writer whose articles on film and faith have appeared in *The Vancouver Sun*, *Books & Culture*, *Christianity Today*, *Bible Review* and *Beliefnet.com*.



We've renovated – You must visit!

We've just done major renovations at our **imago** web site and you're invited over for a visit. You'll notice some serious re-decorating. There's a dynamic new look, better access to our features and important links. But the best reason to look us up is that we want you to do more than just visit. We plan to invite submissions from writers, visual artists and those who reflect on the arts. Can you imagine yourself in **imago**? We'll also be seeking out links to relevant sites of interest to our community. So come on over, and feel free to tell us how we can improve the décor. Thanks go to Michael Harding, MTH Productions (webmaster and designer) for his fine work. Our address is: www.imago-arts.on.ca