

Normally what I undertake to do in this column is to explore or reflect upon a single theme. On this occasion you will find I have chosen to offer some brief remarks on four different topics, topics I have been thinking about in recent weeks.

Thought vs. Feeling

It has been common practice to split the inner human world into thought and feeling. This division has not always been so. There was a time when thought was well integrated with feeling and embodiment. T.S. Eliot referred to this split as the “dissociation of sensibility” and saw its beginning in the seventeenth century. James Elkins’ book *Pictures and Tears* documents this division as it has manifested itself in the world of the arts, particularly by the observers. Though the popularity of conceptual art suggests that artists too make this same division. One could argue that this is mostly a western phenomenon. Artists in other parts of the world are not shy about bringing together passionate concerns with artistic endeavours. One such example is the Wole Soyinka the Nigerian author and winner of a Nobel Prize for Literature. A brilliant writer deeply discontent about his homeland. I

first discovered this important writer in a book titled *Shaming the Devil: Essays in Truth-telling* by Alan Jacobs. The “father of lies” is shamed by the truth telling and for Jacobs Soyinka is one of the truth tellers.



His writing is a strong and eloquent, if not always charitable, communication on matters about which he is passionate. Politics looms large for Soyinka, he is no stranger to outrage and he is intent on doing what he

Why birds?

I have been increasingly interested in painting birds, because of their wide range of mythical and poetic symbolism. At the same time I find myself impressed with early Renaissance icons and altarpieces for their simplicity and directness, both in composition and meaning. This series of icon paintings is a combination of these two ideas: humans replaced with birds in the traditional format of icons.



By doing so, it is my belief that this work questions what is sacred. Though compositionally simple, the “bird icons” point towards a complex reflection on the relationship between nature, art, and the sacred. Through this series I am also reminded that art can be both a fun and provocative way to explore big questions.

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Puffin by Paul Cox, 2006
(oil and im. gold leaf)

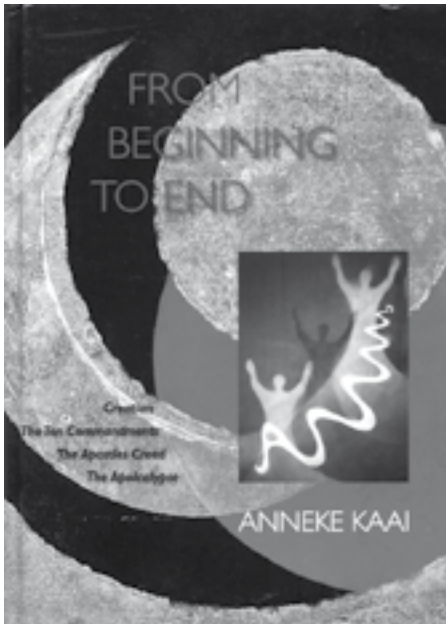
can to preserve his beloved Yoruba culture. For Soyinka there is a strong link between thought and feeling amply evident in his skillful writing.

Incarnation in Art

Dorothy L. Sayers wrote for a generation past in the mid 20th century, but her work has had a staying power and continues to get attention. I am thinking not only of her mystery books but of her theological writings as well. Perhaps best known for her translation of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, she was also a practicing lay theologian with plenty of thoughtful things to say to the community of faith. Laura K. Simmons in her book *Creed without Chaos* provides an in-

sightful commentary on Sayers’ theological writings. One chapter of this book is devoted to Sayers’ reflection on creativity and art. Simmons observes, “She personally believed that it never benefited an artist or the church to make art out of duty or evangelistic intent.” Sayers was a strong advocate for artistic integrity and believed an artist is to do art because they have something to say. That art is best grounded in Christian theology was a key theme for Sayers. It was her conviction that it is as image-bearers of God we possess the artistic gift the gift of making – creativity. Any account of art that fails to acknowledge this divine imprint is weakened and falls short of what it ought

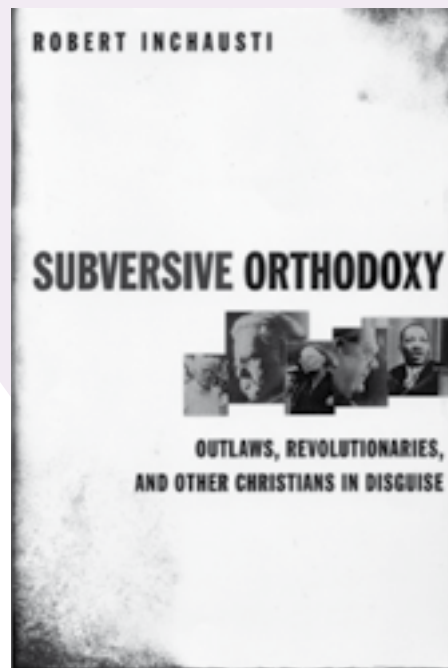
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From Beginning to End (Piquant Editions 2007) is a newly published book featuring the visual art work of Dutch artist Anneke Kaai. It brings together in a single volume four previously published books. For the past several years Anneke has been painting in response to biblical passages and theological themes. Her books are collaborations between word and image, where the text is either scripture from the Message by Eugene Peterson or text written by Peterson on theological themes. In this volume abstract images accompany words on Creation, the Ten Commandments, the Apostle's Creed and the Apocalypse. Her work is characterized by strong colour and is emotionally provocative. Imago was pleased to host an evening with Anneke Kaai when she visited Toronto this past February. At that gathering we had the opportunity to hear Anneke speak about her work and the process for creating these paintings inspired by biblical themes.

Eugene Peterson writes, "Especially when a word goes flat through repetition and familiarity, image brings the imagination into play and sharpens our awareness of the participation in the word and the Word-made-flesh".

In *Subversive Orthodoxy: Outlaws, Revolutionaries, and other Christians in Disguise* (Brazos Press 2005) Robert Inchausti explores the ideas of a number of literary figures whose thinking has been shaped in one way or another by Christian assumptions. He chooses these authors that he refers to as savvy Christian humanists because they share a suspicion of worldly power, while actively seeking a more just world. The postmodern turn has fostered a perspective that politicizes thought so that we are constantly at work trying to unmask the power moves that others are making. The authors discussed in this book favour the "depoliticizing" of thought. For them all human thought needs to be assessed



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through the grid of "an eschatological perspective on human existence".

Blake, Goethe, Kierkegaard, Chesterton, Dostoyevsky, Solzhenitsyn, Jack Kerouac, Walker Percy, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Wendell Berry, Marshall McLuhan, Jacques Ellul and a number of others are discussed in this insightful book. These are members of what Inchausti calls the "prophetic tradition". What they hold in common is their dissatisfaction with modernity. But, "each ... does far more than simply say no to modernism, they bridge the chasm between our longings for spiritual completion and the technoscientific world in which we live" (p13). Unlike many who profess Christian faith they are less concerned with certainty and more concerned with discerning a transformational revelation. They are the "subversives" articulating insights drawn from a Christian understanding of the world and setting forth prophetic alternatives to the status quo of modernity. These are not theologians but literary figures steeped in the Christian tradition whose writing opens the way for fresh understanding. There is much to be gained from this book and from the writings of those the author engages.



Toucan by Paul Cox, 2006
(oil and gold leaf)

News & Events

IFES World Assembly comes to Canada.

For its 60th anniversary the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) holds its World Assembly at Redeemer College in Ancaster, July 11 to 18, 2007. Nearly 700 delegates from student organizations around the world will attend this event. IFES is an umbrella organization for student ministries from 150 countries and is celebrating its 60th anniversary. Imago was invited to be a resource for providing an artistic presence at the World Assembly. We joined in collaboration with Alison Siewert who oversees the Varsity Arts program for InterVarsity Canada. A visual art show including work by 16 Canadian artists and a number of drama presentations will serve to enrich the experience of the delegates to the seven day conference event.

Steve Bell and Mike Janzen with the Winnipeg Symphony

It was in November 2006 that the Winnipeg Symphony hosted local singer/songwriter Steve Bell and Toronto composer/pianist Mike Janzen. This was an unusual venture for both the orchestra and the guest artists. However it was a collaboration that has had extraordinary results. Good news for those who missed this performance. Steve and Mike will join with the Winnipeg Symphony this fall for performances in Calgary, Edmonton and Thunder Bay and there will be two nights with the Hamilton Symphony. Concerts are planned in other centres as well as three Christmas concert performances with the symphony in Winnipeg. It is good to see these fine musicians getting opportunity to perform to a wider audience and receiving some well deserved recognition for their exceptional artistry. A new CD will be released in September titled *Steve Bell Symphony Sessions*. The Mike Janzen Trio launched a new jazz CD last fall called *Beginnings*. See www.signpostmusic.com

Jason Carter, Guitarist

returns to Toronto Friday November 9, 2007. Details will be posted on the Imago website in September.

Art Event: Invisible Dignity Project

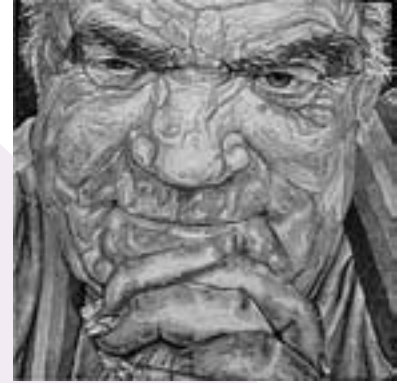
September to November, 2007, Winnipeg. Is dignity most visible in the invisible? What gives dignity to human life? Where is it visible and how is it attained? Can dignity be found in those living in the margins? Do we see dignity in children, the elderly, the sick, those in prison, the poor, the unemployed? What about the hookers, or those victimized by abuse or terror: those enslaved in the sex trade or in mines or factories, those with different skin color? Participating Artists: Yisa Akinbolaji, *Manitoba/Nigeria*; Jo Cooper, *Quebec*; Ray Dirks, *Manitoba*; Gerald Folkerts, *Manitoba*; Steve Prince, *Virginia*. Featured Guests: Steve Bell, Calvin Seerveld, Hannah Taylor, Jamie McIntosh. Related Events: Steve Bell Concert, FilmFest at Canadian Mennonite University, **ArtTalk** with Dr. Calvin Seerveld (Thursday September 28), Prayer focus on behalf of victims of human trafficking, Human Dignity Juried Art Exhibition at MHC Gallery (November 2007 to January 2008). Contact Cornelius Buller at cbuller@uya.ca or 204-338-4647. www.invisibledignity.org



Steve Bell, guaranteed to offend purists and baffle guitarists.



"Jason Carter builds extraordinary bridges between cultures. He brings the best of Western musical art to the East, but does so in ways which are aesthetically and culturally sensitive." Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, *British Ambassador, Kabul, Afghanistan*



Painting by Gerald Folkerts



Tree Fort by Phil Irish, 2007 (oil on panel)

Phil Irish, Visual Artist

August 2 to August 25. Opening reception, Thursday August 2, 6 to 9pm. The Angell Gallery, 890 Queen Street West, Toronto, 416-530-0444. Gallery hours: Wed to Sat, 12 to 5pm.

Watch for *The Prodigal Son*

DVD featuring Jason Hildebrand
Launch Event October 2007

Normally what I undertake

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to be. In her recently republished book *The Mind of the Maker* we have Sayers' theology of creativity where she speaks of God as divine artist and notes the importance of "incarnation" as a key notion for thinking theologically about the arts.

Art's Humanizing Power

Recently I was asked to comment on three questions related to art and its capacity for nurturing the human spirit and moving us to deeper self awareness and I offer here a revised version of my responses.

What is it about the process of creating art that allows people to open up spiritually?

Creating or making is a spiritual activity, it is not mechanical and predictable, it is not reducible to cause and effect, but rather it is imaginative. It makes connections that may break normal patterns, it sees possibilities. If we compare this to how we often feel, trapped by time and circumstance and unable to escape, then we can see how the creative process enables us to transcend time and circumstance, to have if only for a short time, a sense of freedom. If we can see how art is able to offer us an encounter with newness and perhaps even an experience of hope then we can see the spiritual nature of the creative act. Spirituality says there is more, more than just the material world, more than cause and effect, more than the machine. The creative process resonates with this sense that there is more. Art, whether what we create or what we experience, can nurture the human spirit and open us to see things in a fresh way. *How is it that art helps a person find a sense of place?* Creating a work of art is an exercise in self discovery. The art is often able to speak back to the artist. A work of art, whether a poem or painting or drama, is unique and it can speak to the artist of their own uniqueness. When feeling you have nothing to offer, nothing meaningful to say nothing worthwhile to give, the art work you create says that you have done something no one else has done, you have made a unique object which others can enjoy. When someone reads your poem, looks at your painting or hears your music, they are in a sense attending to you the artist, giving time and attention to what you have done and you feel you belong. You feel you have made a contribution, you are part of some-

thing bigger, that your world has expanded and that you have a place. *What is it about art creation that permits people to experience spiritual growth and healing through that process?* Making a work of art is a way of bringing your own experience, whether joy or pain to expression. If woundedness looms large in your life art allows you to put that woundedness out there in the creative piece and so in some small but significant way bring healing to the pain you have carried. It is a letting go that is able to dissolve some of the pain. The creative process is not always a clear process, it is often fuzzy and yet once the work is created it speaks back to the artist as well as to the viewer or listener. Art calls us to attentiveness which is a spiritual quality. What we call the spiritual has a lot in common with the aesthetic,

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and the aesthetic has more appeal in our postmodern culture than the rational. The aesthetic is not the same as the spiritual but they are alike and we perceive them in a similar way.

Theology and Beauty

For this past year I have had the honour of serving as President of the Canadian Theological Society. This meant a Presidential address to be given at the annual meetings held at the end of May in Saskatoon. The topic for my lecture was *Exploring the Threshold: Theology and the Aesthetic*. Clearly my work with Imago shaped this theme for me. Let me offer just a couple of observations made in that lecture. There is renewed interest in the subject of beauty among theologians. The very extensive writings of the Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Urs Von Balthasar have sig-

nificantly influenced the current conversations about beauty. Von Balthasar discerned a failure in 19th and 20th century Catholic thought. The theology of this era had chosen to draw on the work of St. Thomas Aquinas, calling for rational and philosophical demonstration to support its theology in the face of encroaching secularism. It appears that if one starts with truth the determinate outcome is never attaining it. What is needed according to Balthasar is not arguing but showing. And what is it we are to show, but beauty in all of its drawing power. Beauty is at the heart of Balthasar's theological aesthetics. Proofs for the existence of God he argues will be of little value if we don't see the beauty of revelation first. It is the goal of his seven volume work *Herrlichkeit – or The Glory of the Lord* – to recover a place for beauty in theological reflection and to provide an apologetic for its priority. Beauty has become very popular not just in theological circles but in many other places as well. I can't say much about this here – but I would caution against taking a Greek view of idealized beauty and deeming it to be consistent with a Christian understanding of beauty. The Christian faith understands the impact of human fallenness and so draws back from idealizing what are essentially temporal realities.

I trust you will find grist for the mill in these brief remarks on topics related to faith and the arts. Please note elsewhere in the newsletter information about events past and upcoming. There is a wealth of artistic activity taking place in Canada generated out of Christian faith communities. The signs are positive, the momentum is growing and Imago is privileged to have a small part in providing profile and presence for artists of faith. I am ever grateful for your interest and support of Imago which makes this work possible. There is much promise for the days ahead.



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