

**A**dvent is easily missed, lost in the fog of our consumerist culture that draws us to focus on Christmas and hurry our way to celebration. Feasting, celebration and gifts are fitting human expressions in response to the good news of the infant born in Bethlehem, destined to redeem the world. That divine in-breaking into history, that promise-filled moment of God-with-us is ample cause for rejoicing. In the days before Christmas Advent calls us to a different awareness and response.

In one of his Christmas Sermons theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes:

*The celebration of Advent is possible only to those who are troubled in soul, who know themselves to be poor and imperfect, and who look forward to something greater to come. He is, and always will be now, with us in our sin, in our suffering, and at our death.*

Advent is a time for us to face the darkness, to acknowledge humanity's moral and spiritual failures and the bleak consequences of those failures. One ever-present temptation of the season is to slip to sentimentality and to embrace a hope that sits on the surface, having failed to discern

the extent of what has been promised. Note the poetic words of the prophet:

*Comfort, O comfort my people says your God, ... A voice cries out in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. (Isaiah 40: 1, 3)*

These words come in the wake of a long captivity in Babylon, which was a time of judgment and restraint. They are words



Pier Francesco Mola (1612–1666)  
*John the Baptist Preaching in the Wilderness*,  
1640 (57 cm x 70 cm)

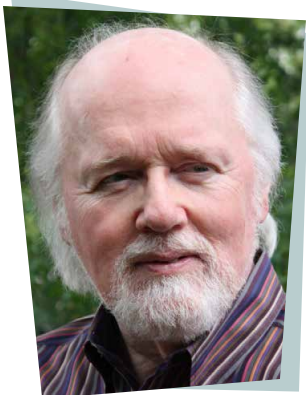
echoing across the centuries and directing us to two divine arrivals, one in Bethlehem and one yet to come when all things will be made new. They also allude to the Forerunner, John the Baptist whose voice cried in the wilderness, whose finger consistently pointed to Jesus and whose preaching called us to “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand”. We do well to reflect on what the cry “to prepare...” might mean for us.

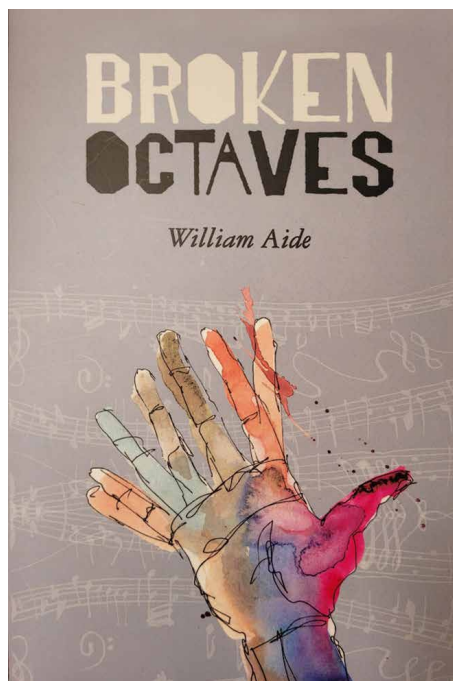
Cheerfulness is not the mood for Advent. It calls for a more somber disposition that comes with the acknowledgement of the dark realities of our world: social and political unrest, an unsettled natural order, destructive patterns of human behaviour, illness, suffering and death and the pervasive uncertainty that characterizes

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This small painting captures a moment where that voice we read about in Isaiah 40, the one crying in the wilderness, is actively engaged in his calling of proclamation. The listeners are few, well dressed and likely have come from afar. They are attentive, perhaps fascinated by this idiosyncratic wilderness figure or perhaps more by what he has to say. The painting emphasizes the preaching of the Baptist and the disruptive call to “repent”. It also depicts the pointing gesture of this prophet who in word and in body directs our attention to Messiah. He points to the Christ figure in the background. Though at times he was asked if he was Messiah, the Baptist was true to his calling to announce the arrival of the kingdom and the presence of the Promised One.

The artist seems to understand that John the Baptist stood on the threshold of a new time and that he was commissioned “as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him...the true light which enlightens everyone.” (John 1:6-9)





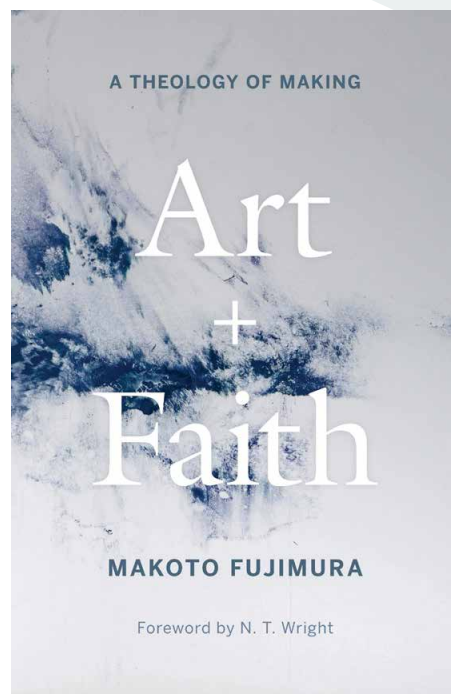
William Aide, *Broken Octaves* 2021

Those of you who know Bill Aide are likely to know him as an accomplished pianist. A few may know that he also has published collections of his poetry. His latest publication *Broken Octaves* is a volume where his writing is filled with the same energy and intelligence found in his piano playing.

His poem titled *Intermezzo in A major Op 118* speaks to the passage of time and the world of nature and drew me to listen to that gentle and reassuring piece by Brahms. His brief series called the De Pres Poems contains reflections on cellist Jacqueline De Pres and her marriage to the famous conductor and pianist Daniel Barenboim. It brought to mind a performance Marion and I attended in London where De Pres played the Haydn cello concerto and Barenboim conducted. They were not yet married. Her career was cut short by MS. His poems on Liszt's B minor Sonata and those on Chopin's Etudes make clear the intimate relationship the author has with the music and with the composer. Eight poems by Rainer Maria Rilke are included all translated by Haide Aide, Bill's wife. All of the poems reach deeply into human experience and speak from the heart. The collection includes a poem for the late Allan King the visual artist who painted the cover image and the exquisite portrait of the author on the back cover.

Since I wrote this brief note on his book Bill has let me know that with this book he was thinking of his dear friend Wilber Sutherland, the visionary founder of IMAGO and of its ongoing legacy that advocates for "the artistic aspirations and achievements of Christian people to say in their own languages something beautiful for God."

In a generous gesture of support for the work of IMAGO he has provided copies for us to sell to any who may wish to purchase the book. You may buy a copy for \$25 which includes mailing. For those who may wish to make a donation to IMAGO beyond that amount you will receive a tax receipt for the difference. Send your request and a cheque to IMAGO, 630 Indian Road, Toronto, ON M6P 2C6.



Makoto Fujimura, *Art + Faith: A Theology of Making*, Yale University Press, 2021

This book draws on thirty years of art making by author and artist Makoto Fujimura. It asks what it means to create and how that practice finds a place in the Christian journey.

Affirming the activity of creating as a "sacred art" the author makes clear that creating is more than a process to produce a product, it is a sacred trust and a means for us to "know the depth of God's being and God's grace permeating our lives." In short "making is a form of knowing."

## Broken Octaves

*heroic polonaise*

Search among the staves  
the bars of notes black with speed  
these were not difficult readings  
eye-swallowing swatches of them  
fingerpads serene in fortissimo roar.

Old warhorse, E major cavalry charge  
full-throttle octave-noise  
leaving every audience limp  
gravels the finger bones  
So soon the astonishments are over

You never performed it  
Now the score refuses you  
The passing of thumbs,  
Joints of arthritic heart  
Give freeway to the pain.

It is almost a relief, stopping  
the freedoms of translating hands,  
it is almost a signal  
that the levelling nerves of  
your calling have changed.

He references the Japanese practice of "kintsugi" in which a broken tea ware is reassembled adding gold in the work of repair to become more beautiful than the original, a process with a theological and redemptive ring to it.

Throughout the book there are references to the "new" a theme characteristic of both faith and art. The newness found in art making echoes the call to newness in the faith journey. And in both cases imagination is required. When discussing imagination and faith he asks the question "Can artists lead us to reconsidering and reframing and developing our moral imaginations?" He thinks they can.

Toward the end of the book he offers a visionary invitation: "Let us reclaim creativity and imagination as essential, central and necessary parts of the faith journey."

This book is a sustained and thoughtful reflection on the subject of "making" in which the author notes deep connections with a theological understanding of the world. There is a gentleness in the writing coupled with a passion for the subject. An informative and encouraging read for all who value faith and art.



Cameron J. Anderson and G Walter Hansen, eds. *God in the Modern Wing: Viewing Art with the Eyes of Faith*, InterVarsity Press 2021 (173 pp)

Many within the Christian community have been sceptical of modern art seeing it as opposing or threatening to Christian belief. Both style and subject-matter have been an issue. The early 20th century shift to abstraction away from representation brought discomfort to many, while the inclination to embrace the “shock of the new” was unsettling for others. Recently fresh dialogue has emerged from Christian writers well versed in art and art criticism. These authors not only reduce former anxieties around modern art but are able to point to ways in which divine presence shows up in the “modern wing.”

The most recent of these conversations can be found in this collection of essays that explore work found in the Modern Wing of the Art Institute of Chicago. The collection consists of lectures given at Fourth Presbyterian Church about a mile from the Art Institute.

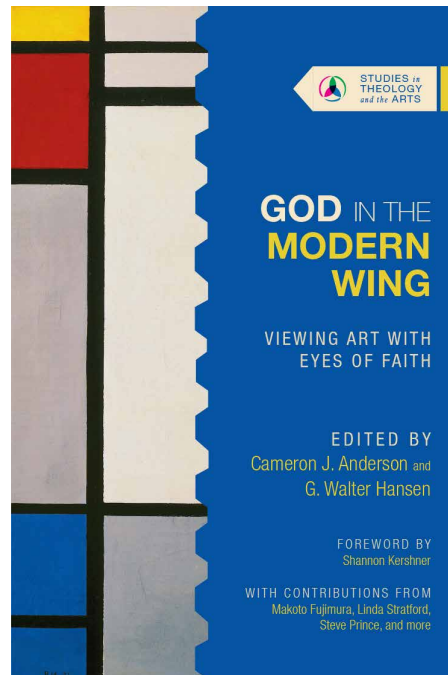
The names are familiar if you indulge in modern art, Chagall, Brancusi, Giacometti, Pollock, Newman, Rothko and Warhol but the commentary is not so familiar.

### Come, Thou long expected Jesus

Born to set Thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us,  
Let us find our rest in Thee.  
Israel's strength and consolation,  
Hope of all the earth Thou art;  
Dear desire of every nation,  
Joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver,  
Born a child and yet a King,  
Born to reign in us forever,  
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.  
By Thine own eternal Spirit  
Rule in all our hearts alone;  
By Thine all sufficient merit,  
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

~ Charles Wesley

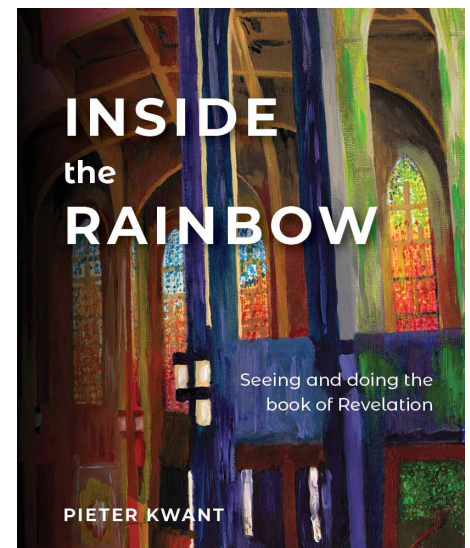


Matthew Milliner finds religious sensibility in works by Chagall, Magritte and Dali. He speaks of Chagall's *White Crucifixion*, a symbol for all who suffer and a reminder to Christians to love their Jewish brothers and sisters. In a chapter on Transcendence and Immanence Cameron Anderson observes that if “Brancusi's birds and columns direct our gaze heavenward then Giacometti's figures interrogate the ground of our being.” He goes on to note that these artists (sculptors) were “familiar with the rituals and traditions of Christianity’ and though their works are not obviously religious they express the human experience of both the spiritual and material in life.

The work of abstract artists Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman is taken up by Linda Stratford. She suggests that representational images may fall short in expressing the “immense realities” of the biblical story and sees abstract art as a potential setting for increasing the “resonance and relevance of the Christian gospel.” Her discussion of Newman's Stations of the Cross is insightful. His work is minimalist and focused on the cry of dereliction from the cross – “why have you forsaken me” a cry that echoes with the cries of suffering humanity. Pop Artist Andy Warhol is deeply indebted to his religious upbringing as a shaping influence on his art, though little was known publically about his religious beliefs or practices. He grew up as a Byzantine Catholic where the liturgy of the Eastern Orthodox Church was

practiced. Icons are an integral component of Orthodox worship. His first exposure to art would have been in the context of the church. David McNutt offers a measured and informed account of Warhol and his work drawing out hidden religious threads of his life that found their way into his art.

There is a wealth of material in this book that will reward the careful reader. The essays are a valuable resource that will go a long way in helping to adjust the narrative that has sought to exclude religion from the story of modern art. To be clear there is no effort to force a religious presence on the narrative only to discern where it has been present and for whatever reason, ignored.



### Pieter Kwant, *Inside the Rainbow: Seeing and Doing the Book of Revelation*, Piquant Editions (50 pp)

A long-time publisher of books on art and faith has turned his hand to painting. He has coupled that with his fascination for the book of revelation. This little book surprised Pieter as he had no intention to publish. But as often happens one creative idea sparks another. The book of Revelation is a work that requires imaginative engagement and that is what happened here – reading led to painting and the result is a delightful first volume. This is not a scholarly work nor is the art done by a seasoned artist. It is a book that is very personal and a delight to look at and to read. In this first volume the text and images focus on the Seven Churches in Revelation. He draws on the work of a few artist friends and includes images from the Beatus Illuminated manuscripts from the Middle Ages.

## Final Words

Another year without IMAGO public events as the pandemic continues to disrupt the patterns of life and push us to a new normal. Conversations with artists continue and new projects waiting to come under IMAGO are in the wings. IMAGO partnered with Intriciti for a Spring and Fall series of conversations; *Broken Beauty* in the Spring and *Arrivals and Departures* in the Fall. These conversations may be found on the IMAGO website and the Intriciti website.

The plans for podcasts we had hoped to begin earlier this year have not unfolded as expected. Technological challenges intruded and other commitments took precedent. We have done a number of brief interviews and they will soon become available. They are related to the Crossings project that is taking most of my time these days. An update on Crossings can be found to the right.

We are now near the end of another unusual year where normal patterns have been replaced by restrictions of one kind or another. We have all been impacted by the pandemic some more seriously than others. It seems that some worthwhile discoveries have been made and even a few life-changing insights have emerged.

## Advent is easily missed

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contemporary life. Advent is the time to resist our inclination to avert our eyes and our thoughts from these threatening undercurrents and instead to have the courage to face the sobering realities that surround us and those that reside within us. For many, Advent may bring about an experience of divine absence not unlike what the exiles in Babylon may have felt.

The Christmas story is a story of a divine gesture of engagement in and with our dark and sinful world; it is a story of God-with-us as a participant in that world in order to redeem it.

However Advent reaches beyond that first arrival to the not-yet of another coming. Advent is a season to attend to the Second Coming. This is a topic that has created discomfort and even embarrassment in some faith communities. But we should not settle

As we come to the final days of 2021 I want to thank you for your ongoing interest in and support for the work of IMAGO. One could say that now more than ever there is need for the arts and for the threads of hope that art provides. Art is an ever present reminder of our humanity and that the spiritual in life should not be neglected. Art tells us too of our capacity to find a way

through the tyranny of circumstances as we allow imagination to do its work.

Your support keeps us going and IMAGO will be 50 in 2022. May we encourage you to consider a donation to IMAGO to give us a strong start to our 50th year. You may donate on line at Canada Helps or mail your gift to IMAGO, 630 Indian Road, Toronto, ON M6P 2C6.

## Crossings: An IMAGO Initiative

The plans for Crossings are moving along well. Planning an event months in advance is a particular challenge when the future is so uncertain. In the midst of that uncertainty we will bring to the heart of the city an exhibition that tells a story of hope and redemption. This all-outdoor exhibition of artwork engages the Scriptural Stations of the Cross. Eleven of the Stations will be on or near the University of Toronto campus and five will be located outside of Churches in the Yonge and St. Clair area.

We have received good support toward reaching our funding goal but more is needed. We are deeply grateful for those individuals and Foundations that have shared the vision and provided financial support.

To find out more visit our Crossings website at [www.crossingstoronto.com](http://www.crossingstoronto.com) where you can sign up to receive updates on the exhibition or donate to the project.



IMAGO's Executive Director is pleased to be offering a course in relation to the Crossings Exhibition – *Sacred Art and the Passion Narratives* at Trinity College Divinity Faculty in the winter semester.

for a story half told. What was launched in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is an unfinished project destined to be completed. Herein rests the hope of the believer.

It is not a thin hope that things will get better or that we simply live in quiet expectation. Rather it is a deep hope that touches all aspects of life, it impacts what we think, what we do and what we value. It informs how we see the world and what might be possible in it. "Thy kingdom come thy will be done" is a prayer uttered daily around the world reminding us that our hope is grounded not in what humanity can do for itself but in what God has promised to do for us. Advent has an eschatological orientation in that it attends to a promise of what is yet to come and has an eye on the culmination of history when all things will be made new. The faith community is called to manifest that promise in how it lives.

I have on occasions past noted that the arts speak to this Advent focus. The arts provide

glimpses, hints, signs that there is something more than meets the eye. The arts are expressions of hope born of imagination and longing and at their best they nurture a hopeful spirit and sustain us when current circumstances seem only to foster despair. They provide a portal through which we catch a glimpse of what a world made new might be like. Art that has integrity does not ignore the darkness but tells the truth about the way things are and in so doing may awaken the receiver to transforming discoveries.

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