

Though we hear much of secularism's influence on our culture, efforts to keep religious sensibilities at bay seem futile. We cannot for long live comfortably with such absence. The human spirit becomes restless when meaning is dispersed and we have no place to stand – homeless – and all the while longing for something more. Ongoing interest today in a wide range of spiritualities makes it clear that the Transcendent – is a compelling reality for human experience.

Many have taken up the subject of art and spirituality and noted the connections between them. I have done so myself and believe that there is considerable overlap in these important expressions of our humanity. It is fair to say that "spirituality" has become a vague and rather amorphous term which is employed to cover a wide range of meanings. When ideas like this become diluted their usefulness also diminishes.

This year is the 500th anniversary of the launch of the Reformation based on the activities of Martin Luther. Luther was an Augustinian friar deeply dissatisfied with the church and many of its practices. He was someone who had great boldness and the courage to take on the institutional

church. I want to take up a theme at the heart of Luther's theological thinking that may be provocative and valuable for reflecting on art and spirituality.

Luther make an important distinction between

a theology of glory (*theologia gloriae*) and a theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*). These two options compete and are at odds with one another in Luther's thought. A

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Songs of the Sea
Monique Sliedrecht

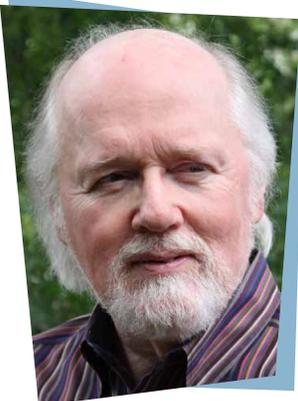
Monique Sliedrecht is a painter who has a long association with Imago. She was born in Toronto and grew up in Niagara. She began her career as an artist in Canada.

An Imago talk played a crucial role in her life, when playwright and screenwriter Murray Watts spoke (1999) about his life and work at Freswick Castle (www.freswickcastle.com) in the far north of Scotland. The Castle is a haven for artists of all kinds and is also the base for the work of The Wayfarer Trust (www.wayfarertrust.org), a charity offering encouragement and inspiration to many in the world of arts and media. Monique came for a residency of several weeks – but stayed for several years, painting and also working for the charity.

Her painting is often inspired by the seascapes of the far north of Scotland. She has exhibited in the UK, the Netherlands and France. Now returning to Paris with another solo show, and is planning for her first solo exhibition in Canada in 2018. This is her second exhibition at the beautiful Pave d'Orsay gallery in the heart of Paris. The margins of the world, sea and cliffs, boats and the wild coastlands of the north, continue to delight and inspire.

'Seafarer' is an ancient word that expresses the loneliness and courage of outer and inner journeys, travels of self-discovery and bright illumination. Monique was also influenced by the recent exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario, 'Mystical Landscapes', which has now transferred to the Musee d'Orsay as 'Beyond the Stars'.

Her work is a response to the theme of finding peace in nature, in the midst of a world dominated by technology, and a place of healing power in the chaos of elemental forces. Her boats are fragile vessels seeking a haven – icons of the human spirit. www.moniquesliedrecht.com

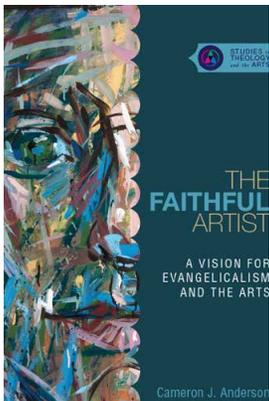


Book Notes

It is difficult to keep up with the flow of new books and it's always worthwhile to revisit some old books. I have cobbled together a list of works that I trust will be of interest to those of you who read this newsletter. In each case I offer only a glimpse into the work which I hope will entice you look further.

Cam Anderson, *The Faithful Artist: A Vision for Evangelicalism and the Arts*, Inter Varsity Press, 2016. pp. 256

The relationship between art and conservative protestant faith has been one of regular dispute characterized by warnings about the risks and dangers of contemporary artist expression. Anderson the Executive Director of CIVA (Christians in the Visual Arts) and himself an artist, speaks into those vexed

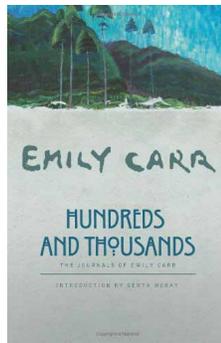


issues of tension between art and faith out of his personal experience. At the heart of his book is the claim that the dichotomy between (modern) art and faith is unnecessary and one might go further and say

unbiblical. He takes up some of the standard arguments against the arts and provides fresh perspective that offers a more holistic account of how the bible addresses the matter of art-making and our engagement with art. He draws on his extensive knowledge of contemporary art and opens the reader to valuable insights into the world of modern art. This will be an informative read for non-artists and an encouraging read for those who practice art.

Emily Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of Emily Carr*, Douglas and McIntyre, 2006. pp. 440

One gets the impression – at least I do – that there is a revival of interest in Canadian artist Emily Carr (1871-1945). The Mystical Landscapes exhibition now in Paris at Musee D'Orsay features some of her work and it is getting a lot of attention. Not only is there special attention in her art but also an

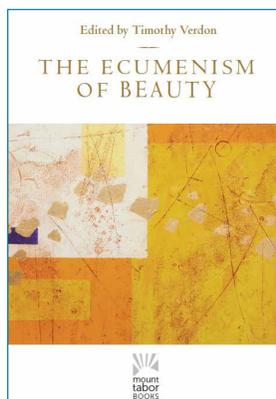


interest concerning the person she was. Her books have been republished and are generating a considerable audience of readers. The book noted here was first published in 1933. It is one of six that are currently available – other titles include

Klee Wyck, Book of Small, and Growing Pains. It is not well known that she was a person of faith – Presbyterian having grown up in Victoria Canada. Influenced by Group of Seven leader Lawren Harris on her 1927 visit to Toronto– she was for a time caught up with Theosophy a mixture of philosophy and Eastern religion which advocated for peace and harmony in the world. Her deep concern was about religious values and though a consistently Christian in her faith she kept an open mind and heart wanting to deepen her understanding. Her fascination with Theosophy soon waned and she returned to the faith of her childhood – affirming that it was “good to feel a real God, not the distant, mechanical, theosophical one.” Perhaps noting this book will encourage some to get to know Emily Carr a bit better.

The Ecumenism of Beauty, edited by Timothy Verdon, Mount Tabor Books, 2017. pp. 113

This beautifully illustrated book is a part of a larger project commemorating the Reformation. It includes artists, clergy and scholars from Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant traditions. Meetings will be held in Paris, Strasburg, Florence, and New Haven (CT) concluding October 2017 in Orleans (MA). Editor Timothy Verdon in



his Introduction draws on the doctrine of the incarnation where Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15) to support art making and contends that human creativity is the most natural

response to an encounter with the Creator God. (p.xiv) Quoting St. Augustine he notes

the “The presentation of truth through signs has great power to feed and fan that ardent love, by which . . . we flicker upward or inward to our place of rest.” (p.xvi)

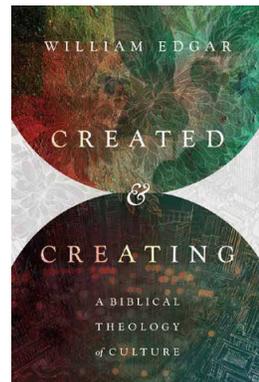
The book includes chapters on Calvin and the visual arts, Protestantism and beauty, chapters by artists who discuss works done for the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans (MA) and a final chapter on art and liturgy by the editor. The articles are rich with thoughtful reflection on art in the church and the text well complemented by images.

William Edgar, *Created & Creating: A Biblical Theology of Culture*, Inter Varsity Press, 2017. pp. 232

There is a rich history of exploring the vexed problem of how people of faith relate to the culture around them. Two names come quickly to mind Abraham Kuyper and H. Richard Niebuhr both of whom have influenced the ongoing discussion. This work stands firmly in the reformed tradition. Part 1 of the book includes a well-informed historical survey of

19th and 20th century accounts of what is meant by culture. This is followed by a reflections on the relationship between culture and biblical interpretation, where the author draws on such figures as T.S. Eliot and C.S. Lewis and Abraham Kuyper.

Part 2 attends to “challenges from scripture”, those passages which seem to call us away from culture to embrace an alternate community. The final section focuses on “the cultural mandate” that invitation found in Genesis. Discussion includes, culture after the fall, being image bearers and the reformed idea of “common grace”. This is an informative work, gently provocative in its account and offers much food for thought. The author is professor of apologetics at Westminster Seminary and that approach can be discerned if only implicitly in the argument of the book.



Marilynne Robinson, *The Givenness of Things: Essays*, Harper Collins 2015. pp. 286

Best known for her novels, Marilynne Robinson is also an accomplished writer of non-fiction. A recurrent theme in her work has to do with the tension between – mind

and matter – or consciousness and things. (Absence of Mind 2010) The book is a buffet of seventeen topics that engage the author's extensive knowledge of literature and theology. Memory, Humanism, Reformation, Grace, Fear, Limitation, Servanthood and Decline are among the topics explored. The author's theology is clearly Calvinist and her cultural context is America. But neither of these elements inhibit the reader benefiting from the insights of this perceptive writer.

William Dyrness and Keith Call, eds. *The Arts and the Christian Imagination: Essays on Art, Literature and Aesthetics*, Clyde S. Kilby, Mount Tabor Books, 2016. pp. 303

Clyde S. Kilby (1902-1986) was Professor of English at Wheaton College. Much of his interest focused on that group of seven, Barfield, Chesterton, Lewis, MacDonald, Sayers, Tolkien and Williams. He was a

pioneer in contributing to the conversation on arts and faith. His teaching and the essays collected in this book were formative for many who were seeking ways to bring together spiritual life and the imagination.

The book has four sections: the first on arts and the

aesthetic, the second on the vocation of the artist, then faith and the role of imagination and finally poetry, literature and the imagination. There is much to be gleaned from these essays – though some show their age – the careful reflection of the author will both inform and instruct the reader.

Steve Turner, *Imagine: A Vision for Christian in the Arts*, Inter Varsity Press 2017. pp. 163

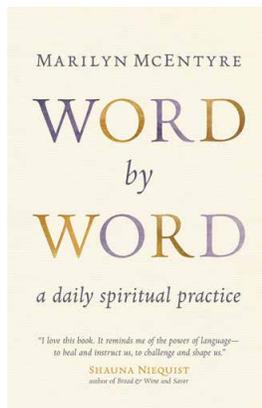
First published in 2001 this revised and expanded edition maintains the perceptive account of the original and adds questions for discussion at the end of each chapter

and an updated bibliography though not as up to date as it might be. This is a basic book – one might call it a “primer” for those inquiring about the links between faith and art. This British author is well experienced in the world of popular music and is a practicing poet. His writing is measured and has nothing of the adversarial or defensive approach found in some discussions. It is especially valuable for those who are seeking to sort out the how and why of connections between art and faith.



Marilyn McEntyre, *Word by Word: A Daily Spiritual Practice*, Eerdmans 2016. pp. 222

Some may recall another book by this author noted in the Newsletter some time ago –

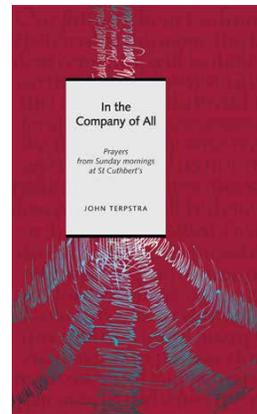


Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies. This work extends the conversation about words noting their power for influencing both thought and action. There are fifteen words and each one becomes a focus for a week of meditations.

The words include; Listen, Receive, Let Go, Resist, Be Still, Rejoice and Welcome. Each meditation is about two pages in length. The writing is well crafted and the meditations are vignettes of thoughtful exploration of important ideas that can nurture the spirit and motivate the heart.

John Terpstra, *In the Company of All: Prayers from Sunday mornings at St. Cuthbert's*, St. Thomas Poetry Series, 2016. pp. 88

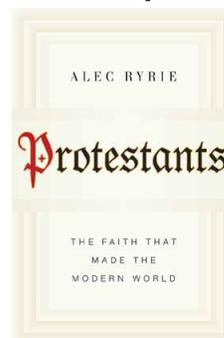
This slim volume brings the reader a fine collection of poetically crafted prayers of the people which reach into the ordinariness of life. They touch on life and death, presence and absence, celebration and lament, uncertainty and hope. Some are tied to specific events in the liturgical calendar such as Advent while others fit what we call “ordinary time”. All are crafted to express



the heart of those gathered and speak with open transparency to the One we worship. The language of these prayers may be arresting, deeply moving, inspiring or all three together. This is a volume to keep handy for regular visits.

Alec Ryrie, *Protestants: The Faith That Made the Modern World*, Viking, 2017. pp. 467

The author of this work is professor of History of Christianity at Durham University. He grew up in Washington D.C and is well acquainted with Protestant presence in that country though he studied at Oxford and Cambridge. 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation an occasion where those of us who are part of what came to be known as Protestantism may want to explore something of its long history. This volume assumes some modicum of acquaintance with the Protestant



faith and a bit of knowledge of history. The book is divided into three sections. The first addresses a number of threads in the Reformation age. The author takes us from Luther's Germany to Puritan America and the New England

Baptists lead by Roger Williams. The second section looks at the Pietist movement the religious left and right and a host of other expressions of Protestantism which carried an influence in the shaping of the Modern Age up to the 20th century. The final section provides discussions of global Protestantism, China, Korea, South Africa and Pentecostalism.

It is easy for any of us to fail to look beyond our local or national boundaries. A book like this opens a window to give us glimpses of the breadth and depth of the tradition of which we are a part and to gain fresh perspective on its strengths and weaknesses and for good or ill, its profound influence in the shaping of the modern world.

Mystical Landscapes: From Vincent van Gogh to Emily Carr

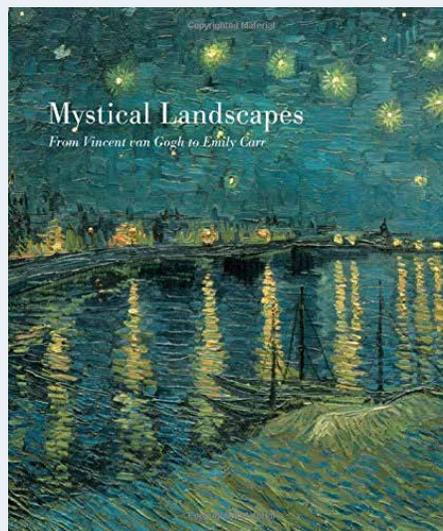
Edited by Katharine Lochnan with Roald Nasgaard & Bogomila Welsch-Ovcharov, New York: DelMonico Books, Prestel, 2016

There has been a regrettable tendency to falsely and naively assume the right wing of the Enlightenment project (with its excessive focus on the empirical, rationalistic and secular ideology) defines the modern ethos. Such an approach negates the ongoing interest in spirituality, religion and a contemplative way of knowing and being that have played a significant role in the romantic and humanist commitments of the Enlightenment. The sheer beauty and bounty of *Mystical Landscapes: From Vincent van Gogh to Emily Carr* is the way this visual and literary text amply illustrates how many of the finest artists of the 19th and 20th centuries expressed their spiritual longings on canvass as they drew inspiration and deeper insight from the vast landscape of Nature.

The intricate and delicate interplay in this packed tome between multiple essays and classical paintings drawn, mostly, from the European and North American context make for a comprehensive read and visual tour. The fact that Evelyn Underhill is often

cited as a guiding visionary of the mystical grounds *Mystical Landscapes* in a solid and sustained manner. The equally important fact that the paintings included in the text were housed at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) from October 2016 to February of 2017 make this collection an unusual and rare coup of sorts for the AGO. Over 288,000 attended the exhibition.

The wide ranging nature of the topics included in the essays, the depth explored,



at both a theoretical and applied level and the constant return to the actual paintings makes *Mystical Landscapes* an evocative and illuminating read – the sheer synthesis is admirable. It might have been valuable, by way of conclusion, to draw in more of the Canadian mountain painters beyond the Group of Seven and Emily Carr (such as Peter/Catherine Whyte – Whyte Museum in Banff) and ponder how Underhill's journey from her earlier *Mysticism* (1911) to her more mature *Worship* (1936) might redefine the relationship between mysticism and landscapes, spirituality and nature but these are minor quibbles.

There can be no doubt that *Mystical Landscapes: From Vincent van Gogh to Emily Carr* is a pioneering book of the highest quality and, as such, presents, through the eyes and souls of artists and writers, a more nuanced and balanced notion and understanding of the modern enlightenment ethos. Do meditatively read and inwardly digest this beauty – soul, mind and imagination will never be the same.

Ron Dart, Abbotsford B.C.,
University of the Fraser Valley

Secularism's influence

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theology of glory attends to that human inclination to offer a complete account of reality and is seen as triumphalistic believing it has escaped ignorance and dissolved mystery. The error here is that humanity becomes enamoured with its own brilliance and successes in knowing the world and knowing God. Theology of the cross by contrast is a coming to know God through suffering – the place where God is hidden. As one author puts it* a theology of the cross is faith (not sight) hope (not consummation) love (not power). Human self – sufficiency is set aside and human moral achievement is not the point.

*Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context*

In matters of art I wonder if the turn to beauty is a theology of glory where we cover our frailty, finitude and weakness and bask in beauty's radiance. Does our spirituality seek to ascend the ladder of moral achievement rather than bend under the truth of the darkness within us? The theology of the cross embraces mystery, acknowledges ignorance and accepts that suffering will be present. It embraces the truth that we are in a material world – and accepts that we must live with ambiguity and incompleteness.

It would I think be a valuable exercise to look at art through the lens of this theological difference and discern which narrative is shaping our understanding of the world and of ourselves. One result might be a greater appreciation for some of the darkness that shows up in contemporary art. Darkness that expresses the reality of the human condition exposed by transparency rather than covered by pretense.

Imago is in its forty-fifth year continues its work to support artists of faith and to engage the conversation about art and its place in culture and faith. We were able to collaborate with others to host a successful dialogue on film and transcendence at the TIFF headquarters in Toronto. And plans for another gathering is in the works. We are grateful to all who support this work in one way or another and we will aim to keep you posted about events in the fall of 2017.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'John.' with a period at the end. The signature is fluid and cursive.

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