

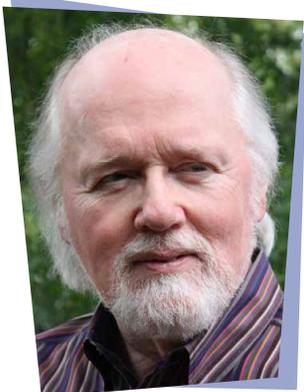
**S**pace or place? This question has come to my attention in a fresh way recently through three books\* two of which have been resting comfortably in my library for some time. The third is a new work on theology and architecture. (And I have just come across a fourth book addressing place-making and the arts.\*) An important expression of human creativity is found in our “built environment”. Offices, factories and other locations in which we work, temples, synagogues and churches where we worship, train stations and airports to accommodate our movement, libraries, museums and galleries to house our cultural resources and that most personal and primary of locations – home. There is a large and growing literature on built environment and theology, often but not always focusing on sacred spaces. What our built environment says about us as human beings is commonly overlooked. It can be a concrete expression of what we believe about the world, ourselves, relationships, values, meaning and perhaps most interesting what we hope for. I won’t detail this here but think for a moment about modern bank towers, sports arenas, educational institutions and medieval cathedrals.

Place can also be somewhere in nature a location not built with human hands.

So what of space and place? This has been a noted theme in the history of Western thought

but for my limited purpose I will offer a simple distinction. Space is commonly thought of as abstract, expansive, infinite and ultimately impersonal. Place is local, personal, particular and deeply connected to

*continued on page 4*



Psalm 1:3

## Trees of the Book

Using contemporary, visual language as a way to tell the story of divine providence through biblical references to trees, these paintings are part of a body of work called *Trees of the Book*. Trees are mentioned often in scripture and I was intrigued and challenged to look at them metaphorically, illustratively, and tangibly.

Living primarily in cities, we forget that there was a time when trees held a more significant role in our existence. We still rely on trees. Trees supply food, mark seasons, clean the air, provide oxygen, cool streets and cities, and help prevent water pollution and soil erosion. Studies have shown that the presence of trees can reduce violence. Trees are such powerful visual images of growth, decay, and resurrection that most cultures have endowed them with symbolic meaning and otherworldly significance.

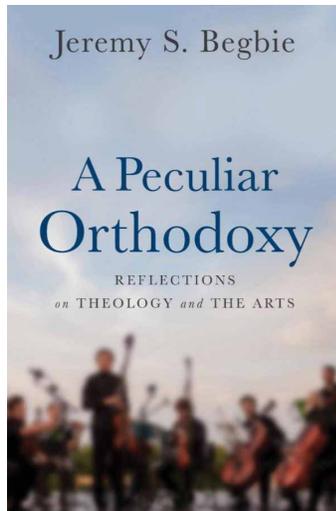
My love for trees remains a persistent presence in my work that has evolved from studies and true representation to flourishes and subtle illusions of trees. Relying on the fragile and mysterious relationship between water and pigment, the process itself requires patient manipulation. As the water evaporates, the inks and pigments form into curious and detailed shapes.

*Trees of the Book* retells the narrative of salvation through fifty-two paintings accompanied by written responses from writers, theologians, clergy, scientists, activists, and educators with the intention of publishing a book. The paintings seek to encourage prayerful meditation on God’s providence, while the textual components provide complementary interpretations of these passages.

Petra Zantingh ([www.petrazantingh.ca](http://www.petrazantingh.ca))

It was eighteen years ago I had the opportunity to attend a gathering at Cambridge University on the theme of Theology Through the Arts. It was a significant event for me and I believe for all who attended. A rich feast of artistic fare including music, drama, poetry and film. A key figure in shaping this event was the indefatigable Jeremy Begbie. Well qualified as a musician and as a theologian Begbie has been in the forefront of conversations on art and theology for nearly two decades. As well as his leadership at Cambridge he helped to establish the Institute for Theology Imagination and the Arts (ITIA) at St. Andrews University in Scotland. Since 2009 he has served as Director of Duke Initiatives in Theology and the Arts (DITA) at Duke Divinity School.

It is our good fortune that amidst his busy schedule he consistently finds time to write. Two new publications appeared in 2018: *Redeeming Transcendence in the Arts: Bearing Witness to the Triune God*, Eerdmans and *A Peculiar Orthodoxy: Reflections on Theology and the Arts*, Baker Academic. Here we offer a brief review of the second.

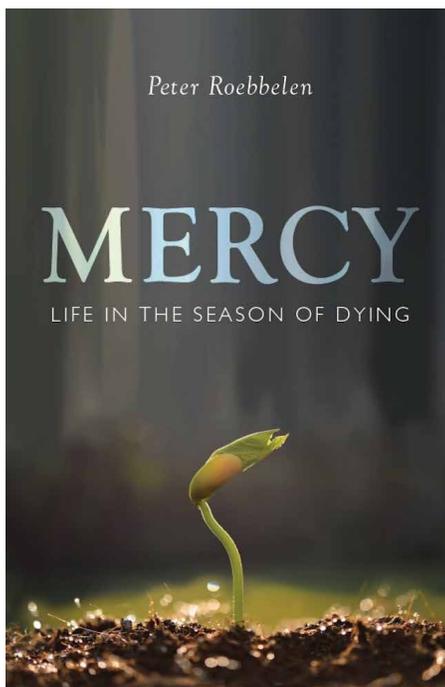
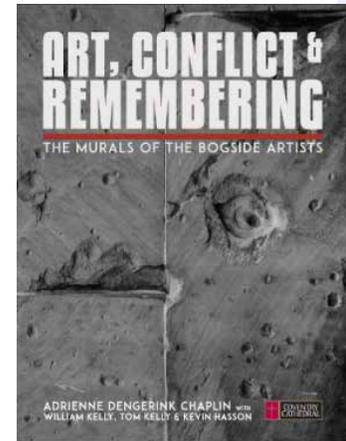


In this book Begbie is probing the borderlands between art and theology. *A Peculiar Orthodoxy* consists of a collection of nine previously published essays many of which have been revised. Not surprisingly a number of the essays focus on music.

The opening chapter *Created Beauty: The Witness of Bach* explores the links between the beauty of God and created beauty. Created beauty can refer to the

beauty of creation or nature and it can refer to the beauty of that which we create. The second essay keeps to the theme of beauty this time addressing how it can deteriorate into sentimentality. Sentimentality is a great risk for art including that done in the context of faith. At the heart of this essay is a critique of our propensity to cover evil and darkness and choose instead the warmth of the sentimental. There is an insightful chapter on music and emotion in worship noting the power of music to capture as well as generate human emotion. One chapter not on music explores the important theme of the Holy Spirit at work in the arts. For this topic he turns to the seventeenth century Anglican poet George Herbert specifically a

portion of his collection *The Temple* focusing on Ephesians 4:30. In that text we are called upon not to grieve the Holy Spirit. Herbert drew liberally from scripture and his work is richly theological. Begbie wants us to appreciate the poet's love of scripture and his artistic gift to fashion great poetry. The final chapter asks about the future of theology amid the arts. Here he affirms the value of sacramentality with a reformed twist. He follows Calvin. It is a sacramentality that "turns on the ascended and human Christ's transformative action among us by way of and through our action with material things". These essays are informative and insightful and will reward careful reading.



## Mercy: Life in the Season of Dying

Peter Roebbelen, Paraclete Press 2018

The uncomfortable theme of death is getting more attention these days. Perhaps its because that demographic wave of baby-boomers has entered an end-of-life time frame. Or maybe in our conflicted world we are discovering the link between living well and dying well. David Brooks in his book *The Road to Character* notes the difference between "resume virtues" and "eulogy virtues". The first are those that bring external success while the second are those that are at the core of your being – your character. Our encounters with death provide reminders of our mortality and give us moments to consider how we are spending the gift of life. They may be occasions that generate memories of our own history and engage emotions that we so readily conceal and protect.

In the course of thirty years of pastoral ministry Peter Roebbelen had perhaps more than his fair share of calls to provide support for those who had been impacted by death. In his compelling book *Mercy: Life in the Season of Dying* he recounts stories of friends, family and others who came within his care and were suffering the intrusion of death into their lives. And in so many cases it was not those were who ripe in years when death is expected. Rather it was those in mid-life, with family and career as well as youth and children who's death leaves us asking what does it mean? Why did this happen? How can we make sense of this?

Through these stories of death and dying the author draws attention to some vital life-giving themes: community, surrender,

## Art, Conflict and Remembering – The Murals of the Bogside Artists

Addressing the realities of broken and wounded society is never easy. When conflict is raging civility is an early casualty. The passage of time is somehow able to open the way to constructive dialogue and provide perspective on our social and moral failures. Many of us will have memories of the social upheaval and ensuing violence that took place in Ireland from 1968-1998 – the Troubles – as they called it. A key location of the troubles was in Londonderry in an area called the Bogside. Three artists; William Kelly (d. 2017), brother Tom Kelly and their friend Kevin Hasson, took on a project to create twelve murals that address the unsettling history of the Troubles. All three were born and raised in the Bogside



and lived through the Troubles. Each lost family and friends.

The murals were to appear on several buildings that witnessed the warfare that served to generate fear and hostility in the neighbourhood. In order to do the murals permission was needed from the owners of the buildings and the current residents. Full permission was provided and the owners prepared the walls so that they would be better for the artists' work. The murals were painted between 1994 with the most recent done in 2008.

Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin – a name that will be familiar to many for her years at the Institute for Christian Studies – became interested in this project and eventually curated an exhibition at Coventry Cathedral in 2017. Now living near Cambridge England Adrienne took time to do research and travel and so deepened her involvement with the project eventually writing the catalogue for the exhibition at Coventry which she initiated. She has done a great service to get these murals and the story behind them to a wider public. In writing about the project she notes that the murals – known as The People's Gallery – were not supported by some politicians who saw them as “unwelcome reminders of the past”. They wished instead for images that were more attractive and that would address current

social issues. Typically in Northern Ireland she writes, political murals express the division that has been so pervasive – “Catholic/nationalist/Republican and Protestant/unionist/Loyalist – either green or orange.” (p.10) In so doing they keep the divisions alive and the wounds open. The Bogside artists refused to participate in such a binary approach and “reject this toxic identity politics”. Their's is a human story of a people in conflict – neighbour against neighbour. The Bogside murals are a stark reminder of what we are capable of when ideology and prejudice take priority. It is clearly noted in the catalogue that “These murals do not glorify violence: they are a lament.”

It was informative to read some of the history of the Troubles and to discover that they began as a civil rights movement – inspired by Martin Luther King and others to bring justice to the way the Catholic population was treated. The discontent has had a long history and has not entirely subsided as yet for either Catholics or Protestants. The Bogside murals will not usher in a utopia nor will they guarantee peace. What they can do is open a space for civil conversation as they don't take sides. They may also serve to encourage restraint and healing, and keep the current generation from taking the path that was trod by those past perpetrators of the Troubles on both sides.

reverence, love, simplicity, gratitude and sadness. The narratives are poignant drawing the reader into the uncertainty, loss, pain and peace – that show up in our shared experience of death. These are personal stories in two ways first because they deal with the intimate reality of friends and family at the time of the death of a loved one and second because they recount first hand experiences of the author. There is an autobiographical thread in the book in which the author opens to us his own journey – vulnerable, transparent, insightful and at times very moving.

In the story of Andrew a survivor of childhood brain cancer we are told of his generous spirit and care for others. “Encounters with Andrew always left me feeling in a

better state, more encouraged, inspired, humbled, redirected...” (p.33). He got through college worked as an entrepreneur and died shortly after his fifteenth wedding anniversary. In reflecting about his friend Roebbelen observes; “communion is more personal, more intimate, more mysterious than community.” “Communion comes as a gift in the midst of death.” (p.35)

One of the brief chapters speaks of the difficult experience of the death of a child. It includes a story of the loss of a three year old in accidental drowning. But there is also the profoundly moving story of the loss of two adult children within six weeks through unrelated circumstances. With these stories the effort to try and make sense of things seems to utterly fail.

This book is instructive and warns us that ignoring death in the course of our lives is an unwise strategy. Paradoxically embracing the reality of death including our own death deepens and matures our understanding of life. In scripture we read of how death is required for life. At the end of the book Roebbelen reflects on the death of a dear long-time friend. Devastated by this loss he wrestles with his grief and asks why. He is reassured by the divine response that the death of a friend, a loved one can be a source of nurture for the shaping of life on into the future.

Full of insight and honesty his book is characterized by a hopefulness that embraces the reality of death without giving it final say.

## Space or place?

*continued from page 1*

human experience. Our built environment is one of the ways we order our world. It is an expressed effort to make sense of the world and inhabit it in a meaningful way. One thinks of the neighbourhood, Main Street in our home town or the environs of where we work all familiar and reassuring, but none more so than the place we call home.

Increased mobility, shrinking time and distance, electronic technology, globalism that dissolves boundaries, homogenization of spaces (e.g., the mall and certain eating establishments) and our embrace of the merely functional – all contribute to the eclipse of “place”. We are losing or indeed have lost touch with those intimate, meaningful settings where we have a deep sense of belonging. The patterns of modern life are such that we pass through spaces, and even where we live may be more a matter of function and convenience than of meaningful dwelling. One outcome of this modern reality is a sense of “homelessness” and as we participate in diverse social settings we experience *displacement* and the anxieties that accompany the absence of place.

The biblical narrative provides many examples of storied locations charged with meaning not least because of human encounter with God, all with significant connection to the created order. This suggests a sacramental view of place, a perspective that allows ordinary place to become a location of discovery, of revelation. Place is characterized by relationship, human relationships and from time to time encounters with God. It has been suggested that “place is a fundamental category of human and spiritual experience”. Our culture of consumption and electronic connection is effective in luring us to those locations where there is no sense of belonging. It may be that our current cultural longing for the spiritual is at the same time a longing for meaningful place in our contemporary wasteland.

Place is a gathering point for our stories and relationships, it nurtures memory and hope. One way this happens is through art. Murray Rae notes “Architecture is a poetic activity concerned with meaning and value. ... all the arts that contribute to the shaping of our built environment... share... the capacity to open up new ways of seeing the

## News

### IMAGO takes to Twitter

With the help of a tech-savvy assistant Conor Sweetman, Imago will join the world of twitter beginning January 15, 2019. Our hope is that this venture will generate engaging, thought-provoking and fruitful conversation. We hope many of you will join us. @artsimago

### New Projects

One of the ways we work to support artists is to take on projects that we oversee allowing them enjoy the benefit of charitable status. Here are four projects approved this fall.

**Mike Janzen** – three new albums in the works under the title *Manna Sessions*.

**Doug Koop** – a book – *Spirit Attune* – providing meditations both material and mystic on the deep issues of life and death.

**Betty Spackman** – an installation work – *A Creature Chronicle* – that frames a conversation about science and religion.

**Petra Zantingh** – *Trees of the Book* – providing fifty-two reflections on biblical texts that reference trees, each with accompanying image by the artist.

world.” (p.2) This possibility of new ways to see the world is often missed because of the fog of daily life. There is much that hampers our capacity to see. More intentional effort is needed if we are to enjoy the benefits of what is offered through the arts as they relate to place. Wendell Berry has said “To preserve our places and to be at home in them, it is necessary to fill them with imagination.” (Standing by Words p.90-91) One way to do this is through art which is able to generate meaningful conversation, or provide icons of memory and a resource to deepen our self understanding. I am thinking of art that is robust with meaning with perhaps a hint of divine presence, a “thin place” where this world meets the eternal world.

Advent is a reminder of the power and importance of place in the story of divine disclosure. “The Word became flesh and dwelt

## Recent Events

On June 27th we held an IMAGO evening – at Cameron Hall – Yorkminster Park Baptist. It was a evening of celebration of art as well as a celebration of twenty years of service of the Executive Director. Liz Downie spoke on behalf of the Board, and William Aide a distinguished pianist and a close friend of Wilber Sutherland spoke and performed. Dwane Forrest, Dennis Hassel, Ins Choi, Maria Gabankova and Jeanine Noyes participated as well. A video was done of the evening and some of that will appear on the Imago website.

**Jason Carter** – guitarist and now film maker was hosted by Imago for a screening of his new film *Grain of Sand*. The film explores the music of the pearl-fishers of Bahrain reaching back two millennia. Jason is an international artist originally from Great Britain and has had an association with Imago for nearly two decades.

**Bruce Kuhn** – an actor known for his “performance” of scripture was in Toronto at the end of October to do three performances of *The Gospel of Luke*, Hamilton, Toronto and Guelph. We are grateful to the churches that hosted the events, Philpott Memorial, Knox Presbyterian, and Lakeside Downtown – and to the Canadian Bible Society for co-sponsoring these performances. Bruce has a project under Imago.

among us.” The theme of embodiment and the material is a vital element in this central belief of the Christian faith combined with the notion of “dwelling”. The One who has created all things now comes to dwell in that creation. Through the incarnation Christ makes a place for himself in the created order. This redemptive gesture holds the promise of transformed place expressed in the hope of a new heaven and a new earth. It’s worth asking where are my places in life.



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\*Craig Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today*, Baker: 2011  
John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, Ashgate: 2003  
Murray Rae, *Architecture and Theology: The Art of Place*, Baylor: 2017  
Jennifer Allen Craft, *Placemaking and the Arts: Cultivating the Christian Life*, IVP: 2018