



imago

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The idea of narrative has in recent years found its way into contemporary conversations whether the academic sort or the ordinary type around the dinner table. We are always on the lookout for that which will help us to order our lives. In our western culture reason has played this role for some time. The ability of reason to link things together such as events, ideas or cases of cause and effect, is a valuable exercise to be sure. What is more difficult to get at however is underlying meaning. It is here that narrative comes to the rescue and seeks to provide some of that meaning. Narrative does not replace reason, but serves as a compliment to it. Narrative is more organic, reason more mechanical.

This attention to narrative is to be welcomed. Those of us within a faith tradition readily recognize the importance of story in communicating our tradition. Nonetheless from a faith perspective there are two ways in which the current interest in narrative can come up short. First is the tendency to let our own constructions serve as reality. Here we are likely to forget the past and to live under the illusion that we alone shape the world. The second risk is that under the downpour of stories found in media, politics, and the excesses of a consumer culture, the faith story gets washed away, or at the very least watered down.

One of the values of following the Christian calendar is the ongoing reminder of the story in which we are called to situate ourselves. In that story we soon discern

the importance of acknowledging the divine initiative. Humanity is on the receiving end. We do not determine our own destiny nor are we architects of our own salvation. This is not to say we have no influence in the time-



Georges De La Tour, *The New-born Child*, c.1648

bound matters of life, but only that whatever we may do is finally only part of a much larger story.

Advent and Christmas centre on a story of divine initiative. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us”. This is not a story conjured up by human ingenuity, it is a record of the divine breaking into history with a narrative that will provide clues to the underlying meaning of the bits and pieces of history and of our lives. It is a narrative of a vulnerable God – who has come to humanity as human and in all of the frailty of an infant in order to invite us into a bigger story than anything we can construct for ourselves.

The second risk is that we would lose the story which we call the *evangel*. Many a myth is there for the taking, as they cross the silver screen, visit us in our living room, seduce us through the media or are found on the shelves of our bookstores. (By myth I

mean truth bearing stories by which we are guided.) Moreover the biblical story can be morphed into entertainment or be swamped by personal experiences or the rhetoric of the end times. We can easily exchange the radical *evangel* for a more comfortable domesticated version which suits the world we live in – or is it – the world we have constructed.

There is something here for the artist as well. Artistry that is exercised in the context of faith is never to be simply – self expression. It always involves a gesture toward a bigger narrative than one’s personal story. Art is always indebted to what is given – to what is already present – to the divine initiative. The artist draws upon what is given in the world both for inspiration and for the means of carrying out the artistry. Art plays off gift and to a degree is shaped by that gift.

And what about preserving the story? What

continued on page 2

Arts Events

The arts scene in Canada has recently been witnessing an increasing presence of Christian artists. I am pleased to say that the work of Imago is providing a significant contribution to that presence. In what follows I want to provide a glimpse into some of what has transpired this fall and tell you something of what is ahead for 2004. Not all of these events are Imago initiatives but loosely speaking most are part of the Imago network.

In late September a workshop performance of *Pilgrim the Musical* took place at the theatre in Port Dover, Ontario. **Suzanne Rutherford**, composer and lyricist for this Imago project got rave reviews from the enthusiastic audience of about 120.

Visual artist **Maria Gabankova** had a show at the Loop gallery featuring some of her recent work beginning a series on the Book of Revelation (see www.paintinggalleries.net).

Three recent CD releases all Imago projects include; jazz pianist and arranger **Paul Neufeld's** new album *Walk Together* offers a unique rendition of some Afro-American spirituals. **Rodger Champagne's** *Get it and Live* is being aired on many radio stations and is the theme for a number of concerts to be held in various parts of Canada. Rodger's light rock style combined with lyrics born out of his personal story connects well with a wide audience. **Glen Soderholm** launched his new CD *Rest* in November. Glen is a singer/songwriter as well as a Presbyterian minister. His lyrics are crafted by informed theological understanding. See notes on page 4.

The new CD by Fergus Marsh will be ready by February 1, 2004. (fergus@bellnet.ca 416-465-4786)

David Robinson's most recent show was held at Tracy Lawrence Gallery in Vancouver until November 29. Winnipeg visual artist **Gerald Folkerts** had a show titled *Restless Slumber* at Regent College till November 8,



this Imago project also traveled to Dort College in the Iowa. Calgary visual artist **Amy Dryer** held a show at Toronto's 401 Gallery till November 22. Her work can be seen at www.fragmentsofsoul.com

An evening event on October 23rd brought together eight Imago projects in celebration of the creative gift. The overflow crowd at Enoch Turner Schoolhouse enthusiastically received the great diversity of offerings including, film, classical and popular music and creative writing.

Oratorio Terezin, an Imago project, held its world premier performances on November 1 and 2, at the Ford Centre in Toronto to great acclaim. Both performances were to a full house and composer **Ruth Fazal** joined the orchestra as first violin. This work will be performed in Europe in 2004. The CD will be available early in the New Year (www.oratorioterezin.com).

Imago's **Vancouver Arts Network (VAN)** has been especially busy in recent months. Services incorporating arts with liturgy have been a special focus as has been the very successful venture of the **Manifest Arts Festival** held November 7 to 9 under the title *Thou Art with Me*. In addition to the work of 30 visual artists the weekend included interactive workshops, a film festival, performing arts showcase and a closing celebration of the arts in worship.

The Word Guild another Imago project, geared to providing resources and forums for writers, has grown to 250 members. *Write Montreal*, a bi-lingual event for writers was held in mid-October with



The idea of narrative

Continued from page 1

can the artist do about that? I have no wish to advocate for the necessity of explicit faith content in the work of artists for whom religious faith is important. However it does seem right to say that all work done by such artists will have within it some thread of that bigger narrative which is to be the light in which all of life is viewed. I would also like to think that the arts bring to us not only the wonders of the natural order, the splendor of ordinary life, and the truth of human glory and wretchedness, but will in important ways offer a prophetic voice amidst the chorus of options common in our culture.

If we take the biblical narrative seriously we must grant that making over the world is not ultimately in our hands. That babe of Bethlehem is also the One who followed a path of vulnerability and by what appeared to be weakness overcame the powers and now promises to make all things new.

As we come to the final days of another year memory does its work. It has been another good year for Imago. Links with artists from coast to coast have extended the growing

network of Christians in the arts across this country. Five public events, innumerable meetings with artists, and the planning and preparation for initiatives ahead have made it a busy year. Add to this a roster of 28 projects, several of those new this year, and the fruitful outcome of some of those projects mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, all suggest, that Imago is engaged in important work and is having a growing influence on the arts in Canada.

To carry out our mandate we need the support of those who believe in what we are doing. Imago needs to expand its funding base. If you have not given to Imago this past year we would ask you to consider a gift to help us at this year end and that you consider joining with others to help us in 2004. For all who have supported us this year we are very grateful. We look forward to the promise of the year ahead.

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Glenn Smith as the featured speaker. *Write Toronto*, took place on November 8, 175 attended, Margaret Avison and Rosemary Aubert were among the speakers. *Write Vancouver Island* was held in Victoria in March. These locations will have events again in 2004 and plans are underway to include the Maritimes and Windsor Ontario (www.thewordguild.com).


Imago is pleased to be bringing British guitarist **Jason Carter** to perform in Toronto on Thursday February 5, 2004. Jason travels the world engaging his musicianship with musicians from other cultures. His style is an eclectic mix of Flamenco, Jazz and Classical guitar. His collaborations have led him to perform with artists from China, Ireland, India, Pakistan, Iraq, Africa and Lapland. We plan to have him perform with some local artists with a world music flavour. This will be Jason's first visit to Toronto. Watch for details on the Imago website (www.imago-arts.on.ca) and see: www.jasoncarter.net

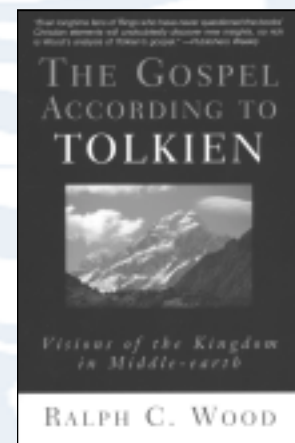


promises to be a full weekend engaging themes on faith and the arts especially music. A lecture/performance on Bach will be held at the Museum of Civilization on Saturday March 20 (www.SoundHope.ca).

Once again Imago will join with the Institute for Christian Studies for the annual **Art Talks** on the weekend of March 26 to 27, 2004. **Ron Reed**, Founding Artistic Director of Pacific Theatre Vancouver will be our lecturer on Friday evening and participate in the symposium on Saturday morning (www.ics.edu.ca or www.imago-arts.on.ca).

Imago and Good Shepherd Community Church in Toronto will host a lecture and seminar on **Tolkien and Lord of the Rings**. Professor **Ralph Wood** of Baylor University will be the speaker for this weekend event on May 8 and 9, 2004. Tolkien fans

will be interested in his recently published book *The Gospel According to Tolkien*. 



The Christmas Story

By *Nicholas Short*

For the past 66 years, thousands of people from communities across the GTA have escaped the pressures of the busiest shopping season of the year to enjoy a wonderful portrayal of the Christmas Story performed in the sanctity of the little church tucked behind the Eaton Centre, the Church of The Holy Trinity.

Two casts, involving more than one hundred volunteers, including a live baby Jesus, angels and shepherds, Marys, Josephs, kings and their pages of all ages and cultures, rehearse for weeks to get their roles down pat.

Patricia Frank brought the Christmas Story from England in 1938 and directed and produced it for 25 years. Her father, the rector at St. Martin-in-the-Fields in Trafalgar Square in London, started the pageant

during the depression, finding roles for many unemployed people.

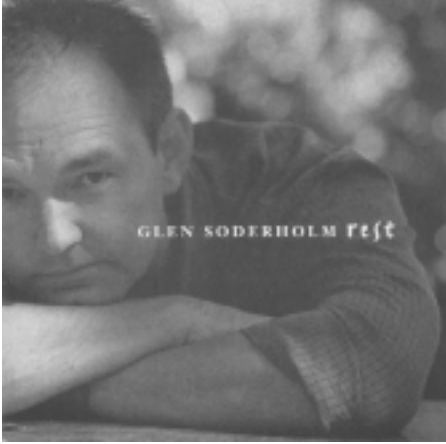
Many of the Toronto cast, like the audience, returns year after year. They came as children and now come with their children and grandchildren. Susan Watson, the

director, has been involved with Christmas Story for twenty years and directing for fourteen.

The show, which attracts more than 2,500 people a year, is a series of narrated scenes linked with wonderful choral music. Professional musicians and lighting technicians bring their special talents and magic to this not-to-be-missed nativity experience. The setting, the Church of the Holy Trinity a 156-year-old architectural treasure, adds to the allure of the show.

Performances are Friday and Saturday evenings at 7:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday matinees at 4.30 p.m. Friday evenings and Saturday matinees have American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation. The church is fully wheelchair accessible. Tickets are pay-what-you-can. A collection is taken. The Church of the Holy Trinity is located beside the Toronto Eaton Centre. Seating can be reserved by calling 416-598-8979, or online at www.holytrinitytoronto.org 





Glen Soderholm – *Rest* CD

Rest is an acoustic worship/contemplative recording. It explores the theme of rest as critical to understanding the nature of worship. Jesus' famous invitation to come to him and rest (Matt.11) is the touchstone of this project, and it explores a decidedly trinitarian/incarnational understanding of the worship experience. Musically it is spare and tasteful, with mainly acoustic instruments supporting Glen's voice. Many of these songs could be used in a variety of worship settings.

(www.glensoderholm.com)

Marya Fiamengo, Canadian Red Tory Poet

By Ron Dart, Professor, Political Science, Fraser Valley University College

Many in the faith community were delighted on hearing that Margaret Avison won the Griffin Prize for Poetry in 2003. Avison's poetry emerges from a deep rooted faith and it speaks with incisive insight and metaphorical clarity.

Marya Fiamengo is not as well known as Margaret Avison, but her poetry has a charm, drawing power, religious breadth and poetic depth equal to that of Avison. Fiamengo dips her poetic bucket deep in the Jewish, Orthodox and Anglican wells, and the life giving waters she offers refresh mind and soul. Marya's first book of poetry, *The Quality of Halves* (1958) is now a collector's item (as the first book of poetry by BC's Klanak Press).

Rodger Champagne – *Get It and Live* CD

Langley, BC, singer/songwriter Rodger Champagne offers a good mixture of songs in a soft rock sort of style. His work explores the threshold between hope and despair, joy and pain, and the virtue of perseverance to carry on sometimes against the odds. They are songs of encouragement and hope sung by someone who knows how important these are in the journey of life. (www.champagnemusic.ca)



Marya did her MA with Earle Birney at UBC and her second book of poetry, *Overheard the Oracle* (1969) expressed her probes and spiritual longings. *Silt of Iron* (1971) and *In Praise of Older Women* (1976) integrated such hunger and longings with a grounding in the Orthodox way and a passion for justice. *In Praise of Older Women* was dedicated to "Robin Matthews and all those who struggle against the Americanization of Canada". Marya, in short, is not a poet who flinches or turns her back on the hard political questions.

North of Cold Star (1978) and *Patience After Compline* (1989) further demonstrate Marya poetic commitment to a vision of life that integrated, in a suggestive and evocative way, the longing of the human soul, a subtle synthesis of the Jewish/Orthodox/Anglican way and a prophetic-like passion for justice in both the Canadian and Global context.

White Linen Remembered (1996), true to Marya's poetic form, welcomed the reader into the gifts and speech of nature, re-



Paul Neufeld releases *Walk Together* CD

Imago celebrated a special event with Paul Neufeld on September 25th at Toronto's Enoch Turner Schoolhouse. It was the official release of Paul's new jazz CD of Spirituals, *Walk Together*, on True North Records. The best-known pieces here include: "Go Down Moses", "Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child" and "Steal Away To Jesus". Geoff Chapman of the *Toronto Star* said Paul "does a great job of casting these melodies in a jazz vein"; and he does. The band for the occasion was Paul Neufeld on piano and Rob Clutton on acoustic bass, plus two percussionists who were not those on the CD: Jesse Baird on drums and Muhtadi on congas and such. They played every song from the CD – with plenty of jamming – as well as some Neufeld originals. One highlight was the great interplay between the percussionists on "My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord". Paul concluded the evening with another Spiritual not from the CD – "It's Me, O Lord (Standing In The Need Of Prayer)". It just reminded me of how *Walk Together* leaves you hungry for more. (See both Spring and Autumn 2003 Imago newsletters for further information.) By D.S. Martin, a Canadian poet, and the music critic for *Christian Week*. (www.paulneufeld.ca)

flected on the age and aging and spoke the language of liberation theology and a longing for justice. Marya Fiamengo is a poet that few Canadians know, yet she is a poet that all Canadians should know and know well. ♡