



MARCH 2017

RUPERT'S LAND NEWS

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CONNECTING CHURCH & COMMUNITY

 **rupert'slandnews**

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RLN exists to explore issues at the intersections of faith and life. In doing so we solicit and publish a range of opinions, not all of which reflect the official positions of the Diocese.

We acknowledge that we meet and work in the Treaty 1 Land, the traditional land of the Anishinaabe, Cree, and Dakota people and the homeland of the Metis Nation. We are grateful for their stewardship of this land and their hospitality which allows us to live, work, and serve God the Creator here.

RLN welcomes story ideas, news items, and other input. If you want to be involved in this media ministry, please email the editor at: rlnews@rupertsland.ca.

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RUPERT'S LAND NEWS

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My church, saint benedict's table, meets in the parish of All Saints' Anglican on Sunday evenings. Last June, when we gathered for worship one evening, we discovered that a large chunk of one of the front pews was missing right off the aisle. During the service, Jamie Howison, our priest, told us about how he, Brent Neumann, the incumbent of All Saints', and two carpenters got together to disassemble the pew so that there would be room for a wheelchair. Now, people who need a wheelchair can join worship front and centre, where previously they were relegated to the outside edge of the sanctuary. It is little changes like this – pulling apart a few planks of wood


and some nails – that can make a big difference.

This issue of *Rupert's Land News* is about disability. I think, for those of us who are able-bodied, it's easy to forget that it is a privilege to not have to go through life adapting to a world that is not built for us. I've needed to wear glasses since I was 8. My eyesight is incredibly poor and I know that, under different circumstances, my life would be very different. Without glasses, I wouldn't be able to drive, see a movie (or watch any TV, really), read a book without holding it up to my nose – small comforts that I take for granted everyday. I'd also have more trouble taking care of my daughter, or even doing my job as editor. But, because I can afford glasses, none of these things is a problem for me.

In January, the CBC ran a story about people who needed wheelchairs not being able to leave their homes. This was after the big snowfalls we had and the sidewalks hadn't

been cleared yet. So, for days, they were stranded, unable to venture out to get groceries or go to work, all because they couldn't get down the sidewalk. It's a mandate of the Church to invite all to worship, but the doors need to be accessible to everyone first.

This issue explores different facets of disability. We'll hear from someone who doesn't have a noticeable disability; she talks about her experience of the failures she faces everyday because of, and in spite of, it. We also have an article on helping people with dementia and we'll see what one parish, St. Paul's Fort Gary, is doing to be more accessible. And, be on the lookout for some artwork by Noah Falk, a young artist with autism.

God's heart is for the vulnerable. It is my hope that, if we are to follow God's example, we will make room for everyone at the table, and make sure they are able to meet us there. 

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LENT: AN OPPORTUNITY TO EMBRACE OUR LIMITATIONS

Donald Phillips

March 1, 2017 was Ash Wednesday, which marked the beginning of the 40-day observance of Lent. If you attended an Ash Wednesday worship service you may have been challenged by Scripture readings that portrayed God's people falling short of what God expects of them. The difficulty with these readings is that they often evoke

a sense of unfocused guilt in us, knowing that we should be doing more and doing things differently.

These thoughts and feelings can be constructive in helping us to ask God for grace and mercy but they don't necessarily immerse us in the reality of our human condition that is supposed to be the basis for our Lenten observance. If we receive the mark of ashes on our forehead, we will hear the words said: "Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return." This thrust comes closer to the essence of Lent. It is not just that we will all die at some point, but rather the stark reality that we are finite. Most of us

struggle to admit, let alone own, our *limitations*. Lent is a time to come to terms with those limitations – and even to embrace them. I probably have more cardiovascular endurance than many men my age, but when I run a mile at the YMCA with my

with disabilities have done a much better job at accepting them.


It takes humility to embrace our limitations but when we do we become more deeply conscious of our need for God's mercy and grace; and it makes

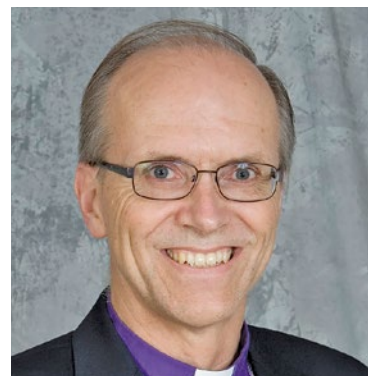
us deeply conscious of our need of support from people who are around us

We all have limitations, but those of us who are able-bodied are often more tempted to pretend that we don't.

son, who is half my age, I become acutely aware of my age-related limitations.

This month, RLN is focusing on disabilities. For most of us, those we label as having disabilities are people who cannot carry out the same functions as those of us who are able-bodied. People with disabilities are more keenly aware of this reality than able-bodied folks. They know that life is very much an interdependent journey – sometimes helping others – sometimes being desperately in need of help themselves. We all have limitations, but those of us who are able-bodied are often more tempted to pretend that we don't, while people

every day. Most importantly, it helps us come to terms with the fact that our lovability to God has nothing to do with what we are able to do. It is entirely based on God's grace and mercy and on who God has made each one of us to be. 



△ *Donald Phillips,
Bishop of Rupert's
Land*

A PLACE FOR EVERYONE

Stacy Stanley Young

*When you give a feast,
invite the poor, the crippled,
the lame, the blind.*
- Luke 14:13

I have always found that our parish, St. Paul's Fort Gary, Winnipeg, is welcoming to all. This is especially evident where our most vulnerable are concerned. Here are just a few examples of how we have invited the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind to our banquet table.

We have a pre-teen boy in our parish, Kieran, who has ADHD. He enjoyed Sunday School very much, but because of his busyness, he was causing his teachers trouble as they tried to keep him and the other students busy. It was suggested that maybe Sunday School was not his best option. So, we made him a server, just like his dad. Kieran takes his new role quite seriously and is very proud of his job. We make adaptations to compensate for his size — our


cross is too heavy for him to handle, for example — but with this change of setting, he is still able to learn about what it means to be a disciple.

Another example is a young lady who is autistic. She was born with a beautiful gift of a pure and perfect singing voice. Sometimes during service, she will loudly ask "Where is Geoff [our incumbent]?" Geoff will always respond, "I am here, I am glad you are here too." Sometimes the banter ends there and sometimes it goes on, but in each case, our parish priest makes it okay for her to communicate in the way she knows how.

Disabilities are not only found in people who were born with them, but also in our aging population. As our congregation changes, we have adjusted the ceremonies and the building to accommodate. We bring the communion down the chancel steps for those who can't climb stairs, and bring

communion to those who find it too difficult to move from the pews.

For those who have hearing loss, there is a hearing assist device: a small, portable, personal headphone that connects directly to the sound system.

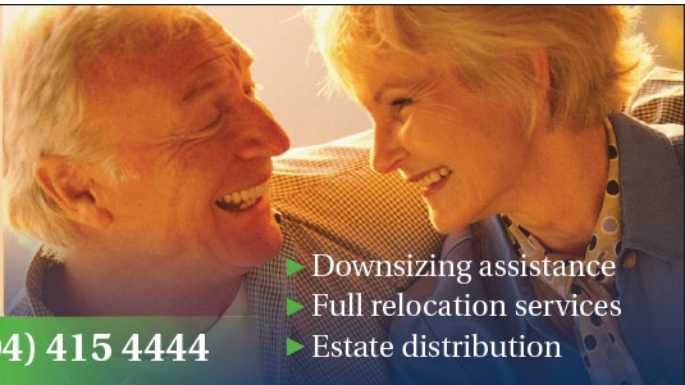
We are nowhere near perfection, but we are open to listening and adapting. Every week we set banquet, and we invite all the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. 



△ *Stacy Stanley Young is a member of St. Paul's Fort Garry and has her own bookkeeping business. She is married and the mother of two energetic kids.*



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ADAPTING TO FAILURE

Hannah Foulger

Failure hangs over me constantly. In the past seven years, it's been a daily, if not hourly hurdle. Sometimes it's the small things, like forgetting a word. Sometimes it's the medium things, like walking into a tree. Sometimes, it is a series of slights or omissions that end up hurting or disappointing people I care about.

Some people might call this adulthood, or the human condition. For others like me, it's the constant adaptation required of those with disabilities.

I'm 27 years old. I'm fairly young and healthy. Most people are surprised when I tell them that I had a stroke when I was 20. At the time, it was shocking to me too. Now, it's the banal reality of every day.

There are no clues in my face as to the nature of my disability. In fact, you would probably not pinpoint me as disabled at all if I did not self-identify. You may think me clumsy, spaced out, easily distracted, or possibly slightly daft, in a nutty professor kind of way. That is, unless I keel over in front of you in an atonic seizure.

When I mess up or make embarrassing mistakes — especially when I thought I was doing it right, and other people have to clean up after me — I forget that these

are not all personal failures or lapses in judgment.

As a writer, I've spent much of my life building up a robust vocabulary in order to best express myself, but I fight with my aphasia every day, searching for words as insignificant as "ambitious." It's not that I don't have the knowledge in my brain, or even in my body, it is just inaccessible.

On better days, I can set these small failings aside. I can rationally understand that these mistakes are not a personality flaws and accept that they happen. On worse days, it is too easy to let small mistakes consume my concept of self. I come to a crisis: either adapt or accept

it will happen again.

There are a few behavioural modifications I use to manage day-to-day living. When I lose a word, I sound out other words, or try out vowel sounds until I find the right one. In order to keep safe and avoid the embarrassment of walking into trees, I do my best to keep aware of my surroundings. To keep all of my appointments, I write down everything in my agenda. I meditate and maintain good mental health to keep a handle on seizures triggered by stress.

Sometimes my failures are a clear and direct result of my disability. Other times, it isn't as clear. Last year I



Photo: Noah Falk

disappointed a trusted mentor by failing to adequately prepare for show we were working on. This mentor, who also has a disability, charged me with this:

Having a disability is not an excuse for mediocre work.

It is a reason to work harder.

This came six months after my epilepsy diagnosis. I was barely keeping it together. Suffocating under heavy depression, it was unclear for days or weeks at a time if it was my illness, depression, medication or myself holding me back. I was constantly drowsy and apathetic, and I couldn't account for what I did with my time.

On a certain level, it didn't even matter if it was a personal or bodily flaw. There was no backing out.

The rest of my cast needed me, and no matter how much work I had to do, I had to be up there on stage with the rest of them. In the time of crisis, I had to show up and do my best, in front of a crowd of people. Just like with all of my small mistakes, I couldn't fix what happened, and I had to face the consequences.

My response to failure is the serenity prayer:

*Lord, grant me the serenity
to accept the things
I cannot change,
courage to change
the things I can,
and the wisdom
to know the difference.*

Our past failures or disabilities can handicap us in the present; I cannot express how frustrating this is. The

benefit of a loving God is the ability to ask for serenity. Admitting that is the first step to achieving what is not inherent to me.


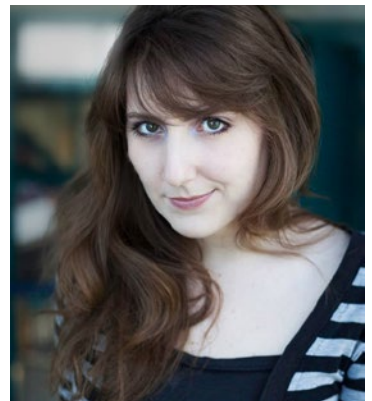
Adaptation can take place in a small step or a large leap, but we can only change if we admit our own deficiencies, even when we don't have clear answers. As paradoxical as life can be, having deficiencies doesn't make you a deficient person. If we look to Darwin, we understand that adaptation is key to survival. If we look to God, we can accept our need for mercy and love. When we look to ourselves, we can see that these are not mutually exclusive, but the axiom of being human with a fallible body in the world. 



Image: Noah Falk



△ *Hannah Foulger is a British Canadian writer of prose, poetry and drama. As a person with a disability, she writes in the tragicomic vein about everything that hurts and heals.*

THE HUMAN SPARK AND ENCOUNTERS WITH DEMENTIA

Allison Courey

I first encountered dementia when my elementary school class went to sing Christmas carols in a personal care home. One woman in particular caught my eye and I begged my mom to let me bring her a Christmas present. It turned out that she was my classmate's grandmother, living with the advanced effects of Alzheimer's Disease.

I remember being confused as the old woman told me the same story over and over again during that 15 minute visit, but simultaneously being drawn to her spirit. It seemed to me that she was a friend, and we understood one another. She smiled at my youth and I marvelled at her age; she held my hand and I held hers.

Twenty-five years later, I did my Clinical Pastoral Education for chaplaincy training in a locked unit for patients with a "special needs" diagnosis of dementia. This means that the men and women were prone to running away, violence, or some other risk to themselves or others. Each day when I visited them, they didn't have a clue who their families were, let alone who I was.

Sometimes, I would hear



△ *Jack Chubb sings hymns with Allison.*

staff and families say things like "she's gone" or "he's not there anymore" and it broke my heart a little. One woman in particular was abandoned by her children, left without her basic needs met, because they were convinced that she was only a shell. She was my favourite patient, with such a beautiful smile and sparkles in her eyes. I suspected she had been a firecracker, once. In a way, she still was.

The trouble with dementia is not that a person is "gone" well before their body dies; it is that the part of them which our culture values most ceases to function. That is, the part of the brain

which creates speech, reason, and learning no longer works, but the emotional and spiritual intelligence remain.

We have become so accustomed to valuing an individual based on the words they say and the work they do that we resign a person to irrelevance if their emotion and spirituality are all they have left to connect with.

When I worked with people who have a diagnosis of dementia, I do not connect with them through words or explanations. Instead, we connect with pictures, prayer, song, and laughter. It is not uncommon for a person who no longer speaks to break out in his favourite old tune



Photo: Noah Falk

because music draws on emotional memory. I cannot count the number of times I've sung the hymn, "I Come to the Garden Alone" or Elvis's "Take My Hand" in an attempt to build connection with someone.

My own grandfather did not know my name or relation to him in the final years of his life, but he knew that I was safe and good. Sometimes, family would try to re-teach him things over and over, frustrating them both because that part of his brain just wasn't working anymore. Instead, I sang the old hymns and read him Psalms while he smiled and sang along all afternoon. It didn't matter what my name was then — he knew that we belonged together.

In Genesis we learn that


humans are created bearing God's image. This means that their lives are sacred, no matter what disease ravages their bodies. I believe that, like small children, people living with dementia may have a closer connection to God than those of us who rely so heavily on our wit and reason.

Without a doubt, it is difficult for families when their loved one develops dementia and begins to forget their names. Nothing can remove that sense of pain. But when we realize that a person who has dementia is still quite "with us" and particularly held by Jesus in their suffering, we can see them in a new light.

On the other hand, dementia is a disease that takes away a person's

sense of boundaries and it is essential that they get the care they need. I have taken several lost neighbours home whose families thought they were okay to be out on their own.

The next time you encounter a person with dementia, remember that what they long for most is the same as any human: a sense of connection. Speak gently and try to carry on a conversation even if it makes no sense to you. Smile, and perhaps touch your friend's hand.

Do not be in a hurry, but be prepared to sit or walk or sing or dance. Remind them of what they love and who they are and try not to treat them like a child. Allow their lack of filters to remind you of what matters most in life and in death: Wisdom is not only found in words. 



△ Allison Courey is an Anglican priest and the Writer and Social Media Coordinator at Canadian Mennonite University.

BECOMING PEOPLE OF THE LAND

Cathy Campbell

The following is the last article in our series on Identity and Land. See Deanna Zantingh's piece, ["Uncovering the Truth: Land is Central"](#) in January's issue and Ellen Cook's piece, ["The Land Restores Identity"](#) in February's.

Both Deanna Zantingh and Ellen Cook's recent articles in the *Rupert's Land News* were food for a set of questions I've been living with this past year. I've been wondering if an urban person of faith, like myself, whose grandparents came to Winnipeg at the turn of the last century, could become a person of this land. By this, I don't mean a citizen, or a property owner, or even just a lover of this land. For me, to be a person of the land means to be defined by, belong to, and consciously take part in this larger reality called "the land" into which I was born and call home. Why does this matter? And finally, how does my faith encourage or distract me from becoming a person of the land?

Our collective patterns of ecological destruction is a symptom of our divorce from the land. Not only are we eroding, polluting, and destroying the very foundations of life as we

know it, I believe that we are harming our souls in the process. For at the heart of the mystery of the incarnation, is the inextricable linking of our physical and spiritual well-being. The "world" that "God so loved, that he gave his only Son..." is, I believe, all of God's creation – all the creatures, all its history, and all its wondrous and intricate workings.

Just as the Copernican revolution required us to shift the earth from the centre of our cosmology into a planet orbiting around the sun, so our science today is challenging us to shift ourselves from the pinnacle of God's creative evolutionary activity into one part or branch of the overall whole. We humans are a node in the interdependent web of life. We are called to tend, mend, and sustain right healthy relations among all God's creation, but we are not at the centre of creation. Creation does not exist to serve our needs. Our "dominion," our power, is to be used as Christ's — in service for abundant life for all. To become a person of the land is inextricably joined to an ever evolving journey of faith.

What might a land-based faith journey look

like? I imagine it would be characterized by the cultivation of practices of respect, gratitude, humility, wonder, joy, restraint. It would have four dimensions in constant dialogue with each other:

1. Learning about the land from naturalists, biologists, ecologists, conservationists, farmers, foresters, fishers (the list is long), but, most importantly, from those who know *Taashikaywin* and the ways of *askiwipimatisiwin*;

2. Walking, running, paddling, gardening, or simply resting in and spending time with the land;

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3. Transforming our eating and consumption patterns, as Wendell Berry observed in "The Gift of Good Land":

We cannot live harmlessly or strictly at our own expense; we depend upon other creatures and survive by their deaths. To live, we must daily break the body and shed the blood of creation. The point is, when we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament; when we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration... in such

desecration, we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness, and others to want.

4. Praying, both for the land and with the land – We must join our voices to those of the land, whether in praise (Psalm 98) or groaning (Romans 8). The land must be an integral part of our collective lives of prayer, reflected not just in our rhetoric and moral encouragement of each other, but also in our symbols and sacramental lives.


Perhaps when these dimensions are woven together, the separation between the outside and inside our church buildings, between our cosmology and our theology, between science and faith will shrink. Perhaps then we will find the path of reconciliation with the land and its original people and draw nearer to a time when we will see God's will done on earth as in heaven. 



Image: Noah Falk

△ *An artist and an autistic, Noah Falk, 18, communicates visually rather than verbally. He has a love for vibrant shapes and colours and uses art to express himself and work through trauma. He builds pictures on his iPad and enjoys creative photography. His work has been featured at Pecha Kucha, on his Facebook page "Noah's Art Winnipeg," at the Forks Market, and on CBC radio. He is a long distance runner and has been part of a Special Olympics track team for six years. Noah lives with his family and his service dog dropout, Charlie, and attends the Community Access Program at Churchill High School.*



△ *Cathy Campbell recently retired as the priest incumbent of St. Matthew's Anglican Church and Vice-Chairperson of the WestEnd Commons. She has served parishes in Vancouver, been an academic at the University of Toronto and Cornell University, and is the author of Stations of the Banquet: Faith Foundations for Food Justice (2003).*

PARISH NEWS **ROUND UP**

▷ Anglican Journal

Though we shared that the Diocese will no longer be carrying print copies of the *Anglican Journal* in January, we have received a request from Archdeacon Michael Thompson, the General Secretary of the Anglican Church of Canada to continue receiving it for the time being. Since our Diocese ceased producing a print edition of the *Rupert's Land Newsover* two years ago, we have been working toward also not receiving a print edition of the *Anglican Journal* and directing our readers to [view it online](#).

Archdeacon Michael Thompson writes, "The request from Rupert's Land to cease mailing the print *Anglican Journal* has opened up some broader issues, including the nature of the relationship between the Journal and dioceses, the national mandate of the *Journal*, and its distribution model."

He further comments about the rapidly shifting context of our church communication "in which three dioceses have, within the last year, ceased publishing a print edition of a diocesan newspaper, and two have dropped from 10 times a year to quarterly." He has asked us to continue receiving the print *Anglican Journal* for the next 12–18 months while a review is carried out at the national level of the future ministry of the *Journal*. – Don Phillips

▷ Epiphany Indigenous Anglican Church

On February 12, Vince Solomon was installed as the incumbent for the new Epiphany Indigenous Anglican Church. The church was created to provide "a community of worship, healing, and outreach for persons seeking Indigenous customs and ways in an Anglican community in order to live out their Christian vocation."



Photo: Kyla Neufeld

▷ House Blend Ministries

Big changes are happening for House Blend Ministries in its 10th year, including the selling of its current community home in order to purchase one that is more appropriate for the ministry. [Read the full blog post and explanation](#) from Rachel Twigg Boyce, founder and Executive Director of House Blend Ministries.

▷ PWRDF

In Rwanda, PWRDF is teaming up with Global Affairs Canada to fund medical training to reduce infant mortality rates. At the Rwinkwavu District Hospital, about 90 km east from the capital Kigali, doctors and nurses are learning how to resuscitate a newborn baby without vital signs, while staying calm. [Read more about the efforts here](#).

LENT IN RUPERT'S LAND

Several parishes in Rupert's Land are offering programming for the Lenten season. For a full list of parishes and events, please check out the [RLN events page](#).



All events are free and all are welcome to attend.



Photo: Moyan Brenn

UPCOMING ISSUES

▷ **April's** issue is all about **Contemplation**: the Christian contemplative practices of meditation and prayer.

▷ In **May** we'll be exploring **Hospitality**: what it means to open our homes to our neighbours in the example of the Good Samaritan.

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KEEPING FAITH IN **SILENCE**

Teresa Looy

You might have missed the sparsely advertised film *Silence*, which was in two Winnipeg theatres for about two weeks in January. If you did, that's a shame, because this is a profound and thought-provoking movie.

Directed by Martin Scorsese, this 161-minute film is based off the 1966 Shūsaku Endō novel also titled *Silence*. We follow two Jesuits who travel to Japan in the 17th century to seek out whether the rumours that one of their fellow priests apostatized are true, during a period of history when Christians were sorely persecuted in Japan for their beliefs.

Our Jesuits take their lives in their hands to make a journey we expect, as viewers, to be heroic, but the reality is much more complex. The Japanese Christians hold tightly to their faith, but live in constant fear; most Japanese citizens would happily sell them out to the authorities for the princely sum of 30 pieces of silver.


It's rare to see a film so openly exploring faith from a sympathetic perspective. Scorsese is himself Catholic, and it shows: The spirituality expressed in *Silence* is Catholic not just by a quirk of history (the Reformation was scarcely more than 100 years old at that point),

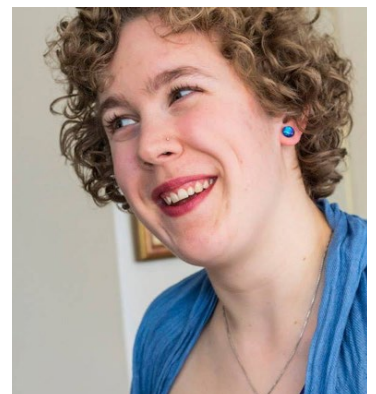
but by its high view of the sacraments. When the Jesuits arrive in their village, the Japanese Christians are more hungry for Sacrament than Word, begging for Eucharist and Confession, which they have done without for many years.

The Sacrament of Confession is, in my view, the heart of *Silence*. The Judas-character, Kichijiro, is our Jesuits' sometime-guide, a Christian who watched his family martyred. He is a pathetic character, one who sins frequently and causes harm to Fr. Rodrigues, the protagonist. He begs again and again to confess and be absolved, repeating his sins and continually apostatizing. Perhaps we can see ourselves in his grasping for the straws of forgiveness and our own inability to free ourselves from repeated sin.

An outsider, one unfamiliar with the Catholic view of Confession, might see *Silence* as deriding the Sacrament. Popular media often portrays it as a lip-service ritual, allowing us to sin without guilt. Yet Kichijiro is paralleled with Fr. Rodrigues, who has the arrogance to believe that his suffering means he is like Christ. Who is more holy? Who is more to be pitied? Who are we most like? The

lives of these two men leave these questions open.

Some have criticized the movie, and fairly, for being too bourgeois in its nuanced approach to faith. Do we need yet another film struggling with the silence of God in pain? While I think this criticism is valid, the movie's explorations are no less important simply because they may not be the main message "the masses" need to hear. Ultimately what we see in *Silence* is not just a single man facing big challenges to his faith, but an entire community of faith holding on to hope. 



△ *Teresa Looy works as a program coordinator at Green Action Centre in Winnipeg. She has been attending St. Peter's parish and is in the process of being received into the Catholic Church.*

BOB DYLAN AND THE THEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Michael Gilmour

New York City was cold, muffled and mysterious, the capital of the world. On 7th Avenue I passed the building where Walt Whitman had lived and worked. I paused momentarily imagining him printing away and singing the true song of his soul. I had stood outside of Poe's house on 3rd Street, too, and had done the same thing, staring mournfully up at the windows. The city was like some uncarved block without any name or shape and it showed no favouritism. Everything was always new, always changing. It was never the same old crowd upon the streets.
— Bob Dylan, *Chronicles*

Bob Dylan succeeds where so many of us fail. We also walk familiar city streets but rarely see and feel so much. Michelangelo imagined magnificent sculptures locked inside stone, and similarly Dylan suspects hidden mysteries, “like some uncarved block,” in the banalities of that urban landscape.

We meet two very different kinds of people in this brief excerpt from his 2004 memoir. There are those swept up in those ever-shifting sidewalk mobs. If it's never the same old crowd,



Photo: Alberto Cabello

they're clearly on the move, stopping for nothing. They contrast with the poets Walt Whitman and Edgar Allan Poe, and with the author himself. Dylan, after all, “paused momentarily” on 7th Street. He “stood outside” 3rd. And for what? *To imagine*. To listen for those great American poets, singing the songs of

their souls. That's what poets do. They stop, look, and wonder, whereas the rest of us hurry along, unaware of nearby treasures hidden in uncarved blocks.

Dylan knows others who pause and look. In the near context, he mentions Woody Guthrie, Kris Kristofferson, Joni Mitchell, Graham Nash,

and Johnny Cash, among others. Thank God for such artists. They see things the rest of us miss. They sing true songs of the soul, whereas busy pedestrians walk past much, seeing little beauty in the day-to-day and hearing little else than traffic noise and the hubbub of the city. Occasionally we catch bits of their visionary songs. Fragments of a tune rising above the din. Maybe it's why we tend to attach value to particular artists in the first place. Maybe it's why ragged clowns like us follow them. It's a shadow *you're* seeing — we say to Whitman or Cash or Mitchell or Dylan — that we're chasing.

What has any of this to do with the theological imagination? Dylan, after all, is a song and dance man, not a religious thinker. And what is more, he's famously uneasy with exaggerated assessments of his music. No, no, no, it ain't me, babe. "I know I ain't no prophet / An' I ain't no prophet's son" he sings in "Long Time Gone."

That's all true but I still associate Dylan's art with religious contemplation. But what I find in his music is not theological *content* so much as ways of pausing, looking, and imagining. To listen to *Highway 61 Revisited* or *Tempest* is to step out of the

passing crowd for the five or 10 minutes of a song's duration. It is to stand beside him as he looks up at the apartment windows imagining worlds behind.

I don't see Whitman or Poe or anything half so "mysterious" as what he describes. That is why being with such an artist matters. We need someone to look through the surface of things if we're to contemplate wonders locked in stone, worlds behind the world. And so it is we occasionally hear a *something* in the arts we scarcely have words to describe. I want to say "Visions of Johanna" or 100 other Dylan songs are prophetic, but I don't know why. It's not about entertainment, or at least not just about entertainment. Instead it's about an awakened imagination. It's a whiff of enchantment in an otherwise un-enchanted world. It's a looking at, but also a looking through.

Dylan is the most important theologian in my life, oddly enough, not because he teaches me doctrine but because he tunes the radio, turning the dial so static gives way to a clearer signal. He creates spaces for mysteries; he gives permission to look past the obvious. An awakened imagination makes the contemplation of spiritual matters possible. Art

— for me, at least — was and is a necessary first step. His is a world of ghosts, with Poe and Whitman at their writing desks, pens in hand. His is a world with treasures everywhere we look, just waiting for the artist to carve them out of stone.

To my mind, there is no openness to religious mysteries without "Visions of Johanna" or "Red River Shore" or "Scarlett Town." Everyone's playlist is a bit different, of course. The crowds at Pentecost heard the apostles speaking their own language. So too are our engagements with the arts. [rln](#)



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