

# Focus on Leaders and Learning

## Franklin fosters Christian art and learning

*“We need wisdom, which is knowing how to live.”*

Doug Koop  
ChristianWeek Staff

TORONTO, ON—John Franklin examines the world through curious eyes set into a gentle face surrounded by a frowzy fringe of white hair. He looks like a professor cut from the Robertson Davies cloth, the sort of man who rubs his beard thoughtfully and provides interesting, informed commentary. This he does. And he listens carefully too.

Franklin is indeed at home in the classroom and behind the lectern. For 25 years he was on the faculty of Ontario Bible College (now Tyndale). He currently teaches some courses in theology and the arts at Emmanuel College in the Toronto School of Theology, at Tyndale Seminary and at Heritage College in Cambridge, Ontario.

But the teaching is just one face of Franklin's many-faceted involvements. Sitting in his home office surrounded by overflowing shelves and piles of books, he is eager to speak about a host of projects and personal relationships that enrich his life and suit his calling. His day job is serving as executive director of Imago, a passionate advocate for Christians in the arts in Canada. “We seek to promote, support and encourage Christian artists in all the arts,” he explains.

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So, never mind that an incomplete grant proposal is due on the morrow and a trip to South Africa (in his capacity as chair of Lausanne Canada) is three days away. While his wife, Marion, works energetically in the kitchen preparing for yet another of the arts-oriented “soirées” that routinely bring groups of 40 or more into their home, Franklin gets excited about several recent conversations.

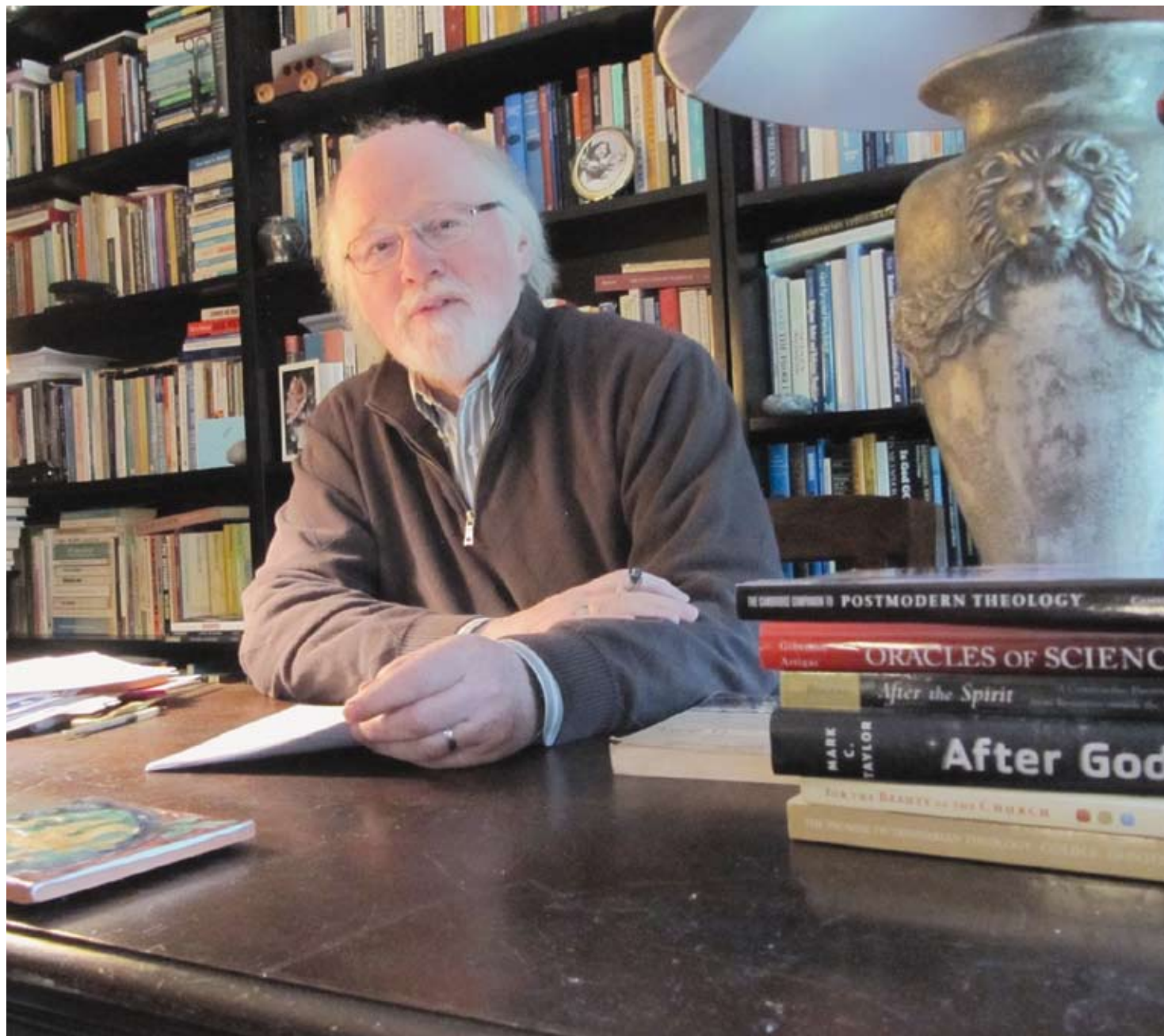
“It used to be something in the morning would make my day,” he says. “Now I have six, seven or eight of those things. It’s extraordinary. [Jazz musician] Mike Janzen is coming by with a proposal. I’m in touch with people about film: serious, competent Christian filmmakers. I’m excited about the evident growth of interest in the arts and creativity in missions. Art can be a great bridge across our differences and a valuable, effective context for the missional task. This is my life. I’m richly blessed. These things energize me.”

### Philosophy?

Strangely, it was his studies in philosophy that brought Franklin to this place. He completed an undergraduate honours degree in philosophy (Guelph) and a Masters at the University of Toronto. He returned to Guelph for further doctoral work. “I’m an ABD [all but dissertation] with PhD studies,” he says.

Why philosophy? “It took me up. In the classes I was quite captivated by the issues that were being addressed and the ideas being offered and discussed. I knew this is what I wanted to do.”

What’s the link between philosophy and art? “My main interest in philosophy was coming to know ourselves, the world and God. How is knowledge possible? The link is the imagination,



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and indeed how the arts are a resource for our knowledge and understanding of who we are and who God is.”

The best kind of education, says Franklin, helps to positively shape the character of students and

order their personal desires. “We’ve bought too heavily into the notion that if we get our ideas straight, everything will be fine. That’s not sufficient. Knowledge is not enough.”

And what’s the best way to make this happen? “We need increased biblical literacy and increased theological awareness,” says Franklin. “We’re inundated by the values of the culture, which are so easily adoptable. We’re often inclined to accept those values uncritically.”

“One of the things I taught was critical thinking, how to be reflective. When people lose their faith, it’s often someone else’s faith they’re losing (i.e. their parents’ faith, or their church’s). The life of faith requires effort, struggle and conflict. If that doesn’t happen, it sits at the surface...and the birds snatch it away.”

### Deep roots

“What’s needed is to develop deep roots. Immersing in the biblical story and deeper theological awareness is the best antidote. We need to take this stuff more seriously and not just be caught up with the new. In Acts 17 it talks about the people speaking about what’s new. We’re interested in the novelty.”

Where can a student go to get good teaching? “I’m always an advocate for time in Bible college,” says Franklin. “It’s a great opportunity for orientation and increasing awareness of Scripture and providing tools useful for all life in understanding Scripture and thinking theologically. There’s great value in that.”

“The problem is, that in our pragmatic culture, that’s not worth anything. You can’t go out and get a job because your character has been developed. But it’s absolutely essential for the pilgrimage we’re on as Christians.”

“We need to find creative ways to address the question of how to develop the inner life, to be more discerning, to shape character...We need to walk the road to wisdom and we need to sort out what that looks like in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for Christians. We are invited to be wise. Jesus is the wisdom of God. We need wisdom, which is knowing how to live.”

He continues. “Another term that’s important for me is improvisation. This is why wisdom is so important. Life calls us to improvise, and if you’re wise you can do it. It’s this ability to move with things, and not necessarily have a set response but have a deep understanding that is able to address the problems.”



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