

March 21 is World Poetry Day.

Margaret Avison (1918-2007), winner of two Governor-General Awards for Poetry (Winter Sun (1960) and No Time (1990)) and Griffin Poetry Prize (Concrete and Wild Carrot (2003)), was a Presbyterian who among other things worked for a time at Evangel Hall. The variety of jobs she held allowed her time to write poetry.

Avison's poetry covers many things, including Christian spirituality. The following lines display Avison's ability to surprise readers into new spiritual insights.

In the mathematics of God there are percentages beyond one hundred.

- from the poem "First" by Margaret Avison

Avison became a Christian as an adult in 1963, *The Dumbfounding* (1966) was her first book of poetry following her conversion. Given we are so close to Holy Week the title poem "The Dumbfounding" seemed appropriate to highlight on this International Poetry Day:

When you walked here,  
took skin, muscle, hair,  
eyes, larynx, we  
withheld all honour: "His house is clay,  
how can he tell us of his far country?"

Your not-familiar pace  
in flesh, across the waves,  
woke only our distrust.  
Twice-torn we cried "A ghost"  
and only on our planks counted you fast.

Dust wet with your spittle  
cleared mortal trouble.  
We called you a blasphemer,  
a devil-tamer.

The evening you spoke of going away  
we could not stay.  
All legions massed. You had to wash, and  
rise,  
alone, and face  
out of the light, for us.

You died.  
We said,  
"The worst is true, our bliss  
has come to this."

When you were seen by men  
in holy flesh again  
we hoped so despairingly for such report  
we closed their windpipes for it.

Now you have sought  
and seek, in all our ways, all thoughts,  
streets, musics – and we make of these a din  
trying to lock you out, or in,  
to be intent. And dying.

Yet you are  
constant and sure,  
the all-lovely, all-people's-way  
to that far country.

Winning one, you again  
all ways would begin  
life: to make new  
flesh, to empower  
the weak in nature  
to restore  
or stay the sufferer;

lead through the garden to  
trash, rubble, hill,  
where, the outcast's outcast, you  
sound dark's uttermost, strangely light-  
brimming, until  
time be full.

Peter Bush, Moderator  
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The Presbyterian Church in Canada