

Alive and active

RETURNING TO FAMILIAR sites can be a strangely warm yet disorienting experience. This summer I arranged to meet a friend at the Anglican cathedral in Montreal. While the stonework was cleaner than I remembered, the sandstone at the sculpted entrance was eroding where countless tourists (including me) had reached out to touch a patch of raw stone exposed by some accidental blow. Between other memories, I remembered how the cathedral sat on piers when the site was excavated for a shopping mall underneath, a development that would generate long-term rental income for the cathedral. Some took issue with commerce underpinning the congregation's operations; on the hoarding, a graffiti tag pushed back: "All my hope in God is founded."

Jack and Barbara Shepherd managed the Anglican bookstore on the site, the Diocesan Bookroom, when I was growing up. They lived next to the suburban church I attended. Jack was an army veteran who had served in Italy during the Second World War. He read the lessons on Sunday and gave generously of his time with a kindness that was genuine.

Perhaps most incredible, he was a shopkeeper at the end of an era, a time before big-box stores and Amazon, when the bookseller was someone you might actually meet on the street.

The bookstore relocated after construction to the underground mall, and the Shepherds soon retired. By 2008, "the Diocese's Resources for Ministry Committee (R4M)" was asking the Bookroom whether it should still exist. The outlook was clear: "Competition from discounting chain bookstores, Internet purchasing and the continual diminishing numbers of Anglicans in Montreal made it too costly to continue." I didn't

venture into the mall to see what now occupies its space, but why seek the living among the dead?

Jake Meador quoted Chris Hagen, owner of Looome Theological Bookstore in Stillwater, Minnesota, in a post for *First Things* this summer, noting that bookstores play a unique role in the life of communities, in his case religious: "Most vibrant communities that develop within the church gather around a charismatic individual or a set of ideas. Bookstores keep those ideas alive." Glossing the idea, Meador added, "In a time of fracture and forgetting, I can think of few things more valuable than bookstores."

This issue of *Amphora* highlights the importance of print to religious communities, through Paul Jay's history of the print shop the Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul operated in Kingston, Ontario, and also to horticultural communities, in Spencer W. Stuart's examination of Bunny Mellon's vision for her collection. Stuart's review of Jorge Carrión's *Bookshops* examines the role of booksellers, and the next issue will serve up more of Stuart's reflections on the trade.

While the work of Frank Viva has a more popular bent, it highlights the broad set of talents employed to engage readers and the culture today. "Digital" doesn't have to be a synonym for "diminished." Words endure in new forms, and remain alive and active only if translated for the present. The changes and chances of this fleeting world may weary us, as the old Anglican prayer pleads, but Paul Jay closes his article reminding us that words remain alive and active—even after the presses have shut down.

~ Peter Mitham, editor