

## NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Eight, Number Two (December 2006)

\*\*\*\*\*

"What we have loved, others will love, and we will teach them how."  
(W. Wordsworth, from "The Prelude")

## NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

Happy New Year! I hope that your holidays have been full of joy and blessings, and that 2007 will be a good year for you and yours! Here in Minnesota, believe it or not, we are still waiting for our first snow of the season.

There are many members of the Notes list who I meet once at a workshop but may not see again. Occasionally, however, I have the great privilege to become reacquainted with Notes subscribers – in person. Such was the case in early November when I made a too-brief visit to Anchorage, Alaska to participate in the National Philanthropy Day conference organized by the Alaska chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP). This visit was made possible by long-time Notes subscriber, Julie Alfred, who lives in Anchorage and works for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese. Julie was persistent and patient, and we finally made the date work. I had a great time meeting new friends and sharing some thoughts about ethics and philanthropy. Thanks, Julie!

Another long-time colleague and friend, Simone Joyaux, recently reconnected and sent along some wonderful intellectual work she has been doing and sharing. Her “think-piece” focuses on a variety of topics that we have addressed in Notes – vocation, ethics, democracy and philanthropy – and contains many wise and insightful ideas. I can’t reproduce the entire document here, but if you run into Simone, ask her for a copy. Here is a brief excerpt from Simone’s work:

“What would happen if philanthropy were actually democratic? What would happen if we defined power as equitable and just?”

Let me be very clear. Equity (and what I think democracy should be) is anti privilege. Equity is about diversity and shared power. Democratizing philanthropy would empower those who don’t have as much privilege – or any privilege according to traditional definitions. (And remember, those who are less affluent give a higher % of their income than do the more affluent. Keep in mind that those who are “under-privileged” actually should have a say in how to change their lives and how to use your charitable gifts.)

What would happen if more philanthropic dollars went to produce social change so that we could create social justice?” This provocative question sets the stage for a couple of items below. Thanks, Simone.

Occasionally, I (or my colleagues) refer to items from previous issues of Notes. If you have not been a subscriber previously, and wish to review our conversations, past issues of Notes are available on-line at [www.jgacounsel.com](http://www.jgacounsel.com). The website version of Notes also includes helpful hyperlinks to sources for purchasing or subscribing to the various publications mentioned in Notes. I thank my friends at Johnson, Grossnickle & Associates for their many years of abiding support for our reflective practice.

\*\*\*\*\*

## REFLECT ON THIS

### >>Giving<<

In this traditional season of giving, it seems fitting to reflect on the fact that 2006 was the occasion for perhaps one of the most remarkable acts of philanthropy in human history – the decision by Warren Buffett to give more than \$30 billion to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The questions raised by Buffett’s decision are manifold and I’m sure, like me, you’ve read scores of commentaries on what this means for American philanthropy and for meeting needs in the world. Allow me to highlight a few of the comments that I found most helpful for my reflection – comments that I think are complementary of each other and evocative of the richness of this important conversation about our philanthropy.

Historian James Allen Smith, speaking as part of a panel organized by the Hudson Institute’s Bradley Center for Philanthropy and Civic Renewal, provided the following framework for thinking about what the Buffett/Gates philanthropy means. Smith suggests that we must consider the scale of the gift – both how it compares to historic giving (by Carnegie and Rockefeller, for example), and its scale in relationship to social needs. He also is struck by the ways in which Buffett structured the gift, suggesting that his decision to give his billions to the Gates Foundation may be a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the anonymous gift. Buffett, Smith suggests, may be saying that he trusts the Gates Foundation more than himself to make thoughtful use of his fortune, and that says something important about how our various gifts are used to their greatest impact. Finally, Smith also is intrigued by the self-consciously historical context for the gift. Buffett and Gates both referenced Andrew Carnegie and the Rockefeller family in explaining how they believed they must use their wealth responsibly. [The transcript of the entire panel discussion is available at <http://pcr.hudson.org>.]

Princeton University philosopher Peter Singer, well-known for his provocative views on animal rights and ethics, writing in *The New York Times Magazine* (December 17, 2006), uses the Buffett gift to make a larger point about what billionaires and all the rest of us should give in response to the needs of the world. Singer’s basic point is that the worth of human life, coupled with our professed democratic beliefs in human dignity and equality, should lead us to recognize the deep tension between those beliefs and the reality of global poverty. That is the tension, he believes, that drives Bill and Melinda Gates to give from their vast fortune. It is the tension that Warren Buffett also recognizes and that led him to entrust his riches to the Gates Foundation. And it is the tension that we, too, should see and feel and respond to with our own giving. Singer goes on to discuss motivations and obligations for

giving, various theories about who is responsible to meet the needs of our fellow humans, and different statistical formulas for understanding the impact our giving might have on social needs. It is an engaging and evocative article, worthy of your time and reflection, which ends with this clear message from Singer: “The target we should be setting for ourselves is not halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty (one of the UN Millennium Development Goals), and without enough to eat, but ensuring that no one, or virtually no one, needs to live in such degrading conditions. That is a worthy goal, and it is well within our reach.”

Singer’s challenge to all of us to “think about” our giving is compounded when we consider the sorts of issues raised by Kim Klein, co-founder and former publisher of the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal*, who writes in an editorial in the September/October 2006 issue of the journal that there are “bigger questions” we must face as a society that are raised by the Buffett/Gates partnership. We certainly must begin with dialogue about where philanthropic giving goes, how it may influence public policy, and how it is (or is not) accountable to the wider society. The really significant question, though, is “What kind of system allows anyone – with good, bad, or indifferent agendas – to accumulate that kind of wealth?” Klein’s clear message is that the Buffett/Gates merger is a step in the ongoing privatization of “essential services” (education and health care primarily). Klein encourages a wider public discussion and understanding of “the commons,” the aspects of our common life that we believe should be protected and available to all citizens. That sort of discussion, Klein believes, ultimately must challenge our understanding of the role of government and tax policy – the important tools by which our highest priorities as a society might be addressed. Klein offers some helpful tools for engaging this sort of conversation at [www.buildingmovement.org](http://www.buildingmovement.org).

Finally, Martin Marty writes in his *Sightings* column for July 17, 2006 about “The Joy of Stewardship” ([http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive\\_2006/0717.shtml](http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive_2006/0717.shtml)). Marty cites an article by John J. Miller in the July 7, 2006 *Wall Street Journal*, where Miller chides Bill Gates for saying that his motivations for his grant making were about “giving back” to society. Miller says Gates is naïve for wanting to salve his conscience with his giving. Marty rightly points out that “giving back” is not necessarily about guilt or salving of conscience, but is, in fact – from a theological standpoint – about the joy of stewardship, about sharing common life. The grace-filled opportunity for this sort of stewardship – the right sort, I might add – is a gift of remarkable magnitude and puts everything else in its proper place (including the giving of Mr. Buffett and the Gates Foundation!). So be it.

>>A vocational season<<

I have found inspiration in the liturgical season of Advent, especially as I think about how we help our students to understand their calls, their vocations, to service in the world. The following sermon contains many of the themes I have drawn from what I call “the company of Advent witnesses,” familiar scriptural personalities who offer helpful examples of how to listen for and respond to our vocations. The specific occasion for the sermon was the celebration of the retirement of Martin Sabo, an Augsburg College alum who has served in the US Congress for 27 years representing the Minneapolis district. I had the privilege to preach at his church in McLean, Virginia on the second Sunday in Advent.

[Scripture: Luke 3: 1-6]

I think it was the report of early morning fisticuffs in the K-Mart the day after Thanksgiving – the urgent and uncompromising pursuit of consumer goods that has more and more come to characterize our culture – that took my breath away and reminded me of how much we need the even more urgent and moving message of the Advent season, this remarkable gift from God that challenges us to pause and wait and stay awake to watch for the love that is at hand. The love that is breaking into our lives, even (and perhaps especially) in the aisles of K-Mart.

I am the eldest child of a Lutheran minister and I recall countless Sunday mornings, sitting in the front pew with Mom, dutifully taking notes on Dad's sermon so that we could have a discussion at Sunday dinner. "Punitive" comes to my mind when I remember my reaction to this family ritual – "of course I listen to what you're saying, Dad!" But with plenty of hindsight, I now know deep in my heart that Dad was teaching me a lesson that has shaped my life – he was reminding me to "pay attention," to attend to the Word, the words of grace and hope and peace, to love breaking into our lives as God's faithful people.

This Advent I'm especially mindful of how the messengers and messages of this liturgical season are relevant to our lives in the world, helping us to pay attention in a world full of distractions. Last week's gospel foretold the "signs" that we would see, signs of the coming of the Son of Man, signs that were like the leaves of a fig tree--pointing to the summer ahead, even as the new life and green of summer were already at hand and in view. Are you keeping watch, Luke asks? Are you awake? Are you paying attention to the grace and promise of God's reign?

And now comes John the Baptist – the one who was called to prepare the way for the Lord. John the Baptist, part of the remarkable company of Advent witnesses to God's reign – witnesses like Zechariah and Elizabeth, like Mary (and Joseph), the shepherds, the wise royals into whose lives God came with the upsetting and surprising call that you have been chosen to help God come into the world, so that God might be with us, taking on our human nature, bearing the sins of the world, dying so that we might be saved. Pay attention for God is here – stay awake because there is work to do – be not afraid for God is with us.

John the Baptist is quite the tale – we don't get much of the story in this morning's gospel, but it is all right to recall the entire narrative... This brave guy – Jesus' cousin - goes out to prepare the way; his is the voice of one crying in the wilderness. He preaches repentance, wears some really uncomfortable clothes, baptizes in the river Jordan, and proclaims that he is simply the set-up man for the one who is more powerful than he, the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. And in the end, of course, we may recall that John loses his head, but not before Jesus sends word to John in prison that his work was not in vain. "I am the One of whom you foretold," Jesus says. Job well done, faithful servant. Thanks for helping the world to pay attention. Thanks for helping the reign of God to commence. Thanks for bringing the word of God's love, the Word made flesh, full of grace and truth.

I find John's work to help the world pay attention to God's reign breaking in particularly instructive for our own faithful lives – our various Advent witnesses all were called to do God's work in ways that we might want to heed. At Augsburg College, we are particularly

focused on what we can learn from the calls - the vocations - of these faithful witnesses, for our own vocational journeys. What does John teach us about our 21<sup>st</sup> century lives of faith?

*Nobody said it would be easy.* This is such a tough message for all of us – especially for our young people. In a world where greedy fighting for electronics and toys in the aisles of K-Mart is part of our national character, how can we expect to overcome the sense of entitlement that invades all aspects of our personal and public lives? I deserve that scholarship, that car, that job, that relationship, that stock option, that respect... John accepted his call, and though I imagine he had his share of doubts along the way, he did what God expected of him – he prepared the way for the One who was to come. He called the world to pay attention to God’s reign and he gave up his comfort, his livelihood, his safety, his status, and ultimately his life, to live his call. The way of discipleship, the German theologian and World War II martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer tells us, is “costly.” The cross is more than a symbol of our faith – it is a way of faithful and joyful living – and nobody said it would be easy.

*Keep your faith and keep your wits.* This is the stuff of patience, which may be the most essential skill for faithful living in the world – and John was surely a role model of patience. Why didn’t he just run away and save himself? I have been thinking about this lesson a good bit recently as I consider the example of our friend (and Augsburg graduate), Martin Sabo, whose remarkable career of public service is about to conclude as he retires from Congress. How did he do it over these past almost 50 years? Surely he models a life of patience for all of us. He listens carefully, he discusses and reflects, he waits for wisdom and insight, he prays and worships, he considers the wider context and important relationships, he is not afraid to take an unpopular position if it is in pursuit of the greater good. He makes our world a better place. Now I don’t imagine Martin will appreciate comparison to John the Baptist – he is the consummate modest Norwegian-American – but I believe that John’s example of faithful living, pointing to the One who was to come, coupled with his intentional living, keeping his wits, if you will, as he doggedly went about his daily business, helps us to understand what it means to be patient. And Martin is a modern-day witness to how faithful and intentional living – the stuff of patience – is the essential skill for our lives in the world.

*Turn, turn, turn because God’s love is about to break in again and again.* John’s ministry was to call the people of his time to repentance, to turn away from their sinful ways because God’s love was about to break in. I come to baptize with water, John proclaimed, but the One who comes after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. The One who is coming will make all things new. The late Lutheran theologian and preacher, Joseph Sittler, once said that the whole of the Christian life is summed up in the liturgical formula, “O God, from whom no secrets are hid.” Wow. That is John’s more than ever relevant message for all of us. Your God knows you – your God has named you – your God loves you – no secrets are hidden from God’s loving gaze. Turn away from your sins because life abundant is yours through the graceful gift of faith. You are my beloved, our God says, turn to me and all things will be new.

Now comes John the Baptist as our Advent witness to God’s great love – the messenger sent to make the way straight, to set the stage, to call us to pay attention to love breaking into the darkness of our lives. To pay attention to a God who knows us so well – who

knows it won't be easy, who knows we will struggle to keep our faith and our wits, who knows how difficult it is to turn away from our comfortable lives – and because God knows us, God does not leave us alone.

Now, of course, our call to pay attention is different from the call that John the Baptist received (and offered) – all vocations are different, using our distinctive gifts to do God's work in the world. But the work to be done remains as relevant as ever. John's work was redeemed by the One who was to come – remember Jesus' confirmation that he was the One foretold. This Advent, may we pursue God's work for our time, may we pay attention to the ways in which love breaks into our world, again and again. It is our Advent call. Shall we pay attention together – pay attention to the needs of the world – pay attention for peace, for our children, for a living wage, for a world that knows no hunger, for justice in the land, for a sustainable earth, for common purpose? Will you pay attention and give up your comfort and safety – perhaps even your life – to do God's will? There is work to be done, a promise to be fulfilled, life abundant to know and enjoy.

I remember a time in my life when I paid special attention – it was at my mom's bed in a hospice as she took her last breaths. “Stay awake for night is coming - your God is at hand,” we prayed. We kept vigil, we kept watch, we paid attention until the promise was fulfilled.

God sends us John the Baptist, his parents Zechariah and Elizabeth, his aunt Mary, the shepherds and wise royals. God sends us my mom and dad and Martin Sabo and countless other faithful witnesses whose lives teach us to pay attention. God sends us this community of faithful brothers and sisters, who gather here like millions of others around the world and across the ages, to bear testimony to the love of God breaking into our world, breaking into the bleak and dark night with a message of faith and hope and love. God sends us a baby in the manger who makes all things new. Pay attention. Come, Lord Jesus.

\*\*\*

## PRACTICE THIS

>>Giving (continued)<<

Just a brief note – on a more practical level – about the gift of stewardship. I've heard many a church giving pitch (in sermons, pulpit talks, announcements, role-plays – you name it) and too often I'm right there with the 20<sup>th</sup> century American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who in 1931 questioned mainstream Protestant churches as to whether their understanding of stewardship was ethical (or theological)! Mere fundraising, he fumed.

At our new church here in Minneapolis, I heard a most elegant statement about giving to support our ministries. Grounded in our faith and common life, one of our members reminded us, we should consider giving that is:

- Regular – set a pattern and discipline for giving (of time, talents and resources), no matter how much you give;

- Proportionate – consider what portion of your resources you want to dedicate - be it a tithe – 10% - or some other measure that helps you make sense of where the church’s ministries fit in your life; and,
- Intentional – make an intentional plan for giving that is grounded in reflection and prayer, and that enables you to make decisions for now and the future.

Good ways to give, assuredly – but also good lessons for how to live. That is what stewardship truly means.

>>It's about time<<

The following bits and pieces about “time” appeared in the December issue of Notes in 1999 – just my second issue! I return to them because I think they are especially relevant to our lives as we embark on a new year.

“I’ve been thinking a great deal lately about time and patience and how hard it is to keep up with all of the demands placed upon me (by myself and others!)

Several sources have helped me to describe and better understand the tension in my life between the time I do not have and the longer horizon that I believe must guide my life and work.

I’m reading James Gleick’s fascinating book of essays, entitled “Faster: the Acceleration of Just About Everything” (Pantheon Books, 1999). How about that title? Hits pretty close to home, doesn’t it? Listen to Gleick’s words: “We are in a rush. We are making haste. A compression of time marks the century now closing. Airport gates are minor intensifiers of the lose-not-a-minute anguish of our age. There are other intensifiers—places and objects that signify impatience...Doctor’s anterooms (“waiting” rooms). The DOOR CLOSE button in elevators, so often a placebo, with no function but to distract for a moment those riders to whom ten seconds seem an eternity. Speed-dial buttons on telephone...Remote controls...” (page 9). Gleick’s essay titles read like a summary of my life: “Life as Type A,” “Quick—Your Opinion?” “7:15. Took Shower.” You get the point.

And then I happened upon Witold Rybczynski’s new biography of the great 19<sup>th</sup> century landscape designer, Frederick Law Olmsted, entitled “A Clearing in the Distance” (Scribner, 1999). In the précis for the book, we read this simple quote from Olmsted: “I have all my life been considering distant effects and always sacrificing immediate success and applause to that future.” With those disquieting words, Olmsted, the designer of Central Park in New York and Mount Royal Park in Montreal, reminds us that the horizon of our lives matters. We must think on the end times, on the future good, on the history of our work and relationships, for only in our distant effects will we find the strength and courage and wisdom to do our best work today—in the midst of this time.

[I also was struck by the work of] my graduate school colleague, William Schweiker, who penned a beautiful article entitled “The fullness of time: Reflections on the millennium,” in “The Christian Century” (November 3, 1999). Bill, who teaches at the University of Chicago, suggests that “We live best as creative stewards of time.” He describes two threads

of thought in Western thought concerning time: one that time is full; the other that time is empty. We live in the tension between the two threads.

Finally, Martin Marty and his son, Micah Marty, have produced a series of wonderful devotional books that include Marty's words and Micah's beautiful photographs. My favorite is "Our Hope for Years to Come: The Search for Spiritual Sanctuary" (Augsburg-Fortress Press, 1995), in which Marty offers these spirited and comforting words [about our times]...: "From the distance come sounds trumpeting encouragement. They herald reinforcements at hand, to be relied upon in our efforts of any day, of this day and night." (p. 39)

May it be so for all of us."

\*\*\*

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I have an interesting and diverse selection of books on my holiday reading list:

- *Strategic Giving: The Art and Science of Philanthropy*, by Peter Frumkin (University of Chicago Press, 2006)
- *A Race is a Nice Thing to Have: A Guide to Being a White Person or Understanding the White Persons in Your Life*, by Janet E. Helms (Content Communications, 1992)
- *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*, by Jonathan Sacks (Continuum, 2002)
- *What Paul Meant*, by Garry Wills (Viking, 2006)
- *The Robert Bellah Reader*, edited by Robert Bellah and Steven Tipton (Duke University Press, 2006)
- *Design on the Edge: The Making of a High Performance Building*, by David W. Orr (The MIT Press, 2006)

>>Streams of living justice<<

One of the grand traditions at Augsburg is the annual Advent Vespers worship services, during which the college's fine musical organizations welcome the Advent season with a stirring program of music and readings. Four services over two days attract more than 10,000 attendees to mark the beginning of the liturgical year. This year's Vespers were themed "Inscribe our hearts," a phrase from the following stirring hymn. William Whitla's lyrics and Gustav Holst's music still ring in my ears with their powerful message of faith and justice – a wonderful message for the New Year!

Let streams of living justice  
Flow down upon the earth;  
Give freedom's light to captives,  
Let all the poor have worth.



The hungry's hands are pleading,  
The worker's claim their rights,  
the mourners long for laughter,  
The blinded seek for sight.  
Make liberty a beacon,  
strike down the iron power,  
abolish ancient vengeance,  
proclaim your people's hour.

For healing of the nations,  
For peace that will not end,  
For love that makes us lovers,  
God grant us grace to mend.  
Weave our varied gifts together,  
Knit our lives as they are spun;  
On your loom of time enrol us  
Till our thread of life is run.  
O great Weaver of our fabric,  
Bind church and world in one;  
Dye our texture with your radiance,  
Light our colours with your sun.

Your city's built to music;  
We are the stones you seek;  
Your harmony is language:  
We are the words you speak.  
Our faith we find in service,  
our hope in other's dreams,  
our love in hand of neighbour:  
our home land brightly gleams.  
Inscribe our hearts with justice;  
Your way - the path untried;  
Your truth - the heart of stranger,  
Your life - the Crucified.

Words: William Whitla (1934-)  
Music: Gustav Holst (1874-1934), *Thaxted*

>>Subscription information<<

Subscriptions to Notes are simple to establish. Send me an email at [augpres@augzburg.edu](mailto:augpres@augzburg.edu), ask to be added to the list, and the listserv will confirm that you have been subscribed to the list. Please feel free to forward your email versions of Notes to others—they then can subscribe by contacting me. The current and archive issues of Notes are available on-line at [www.jgacounsel.com](http://www.jgacounsel.com).

>>Topics for the next issue (February 2007)<<

- Ashes and the ties than bind
- A commonplace on work
- The world house

(c) Paul Pribbenow, 2006