

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Eight, Number Four (April 2007)

"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 spring! Sorry to be a bit tardy with these April Notes, but we commence our students much earlier than most (May 5 is our big day!) and things have been more hectic than usual these past few weeks.

Not much chatter after the last issue of Notes.

Good friend, Don Johnson, who hangs out in France and Maine and makes a continuing difference for lots of philanthropic organizations across the country, checked in with this additional quote for my commonplace on work:

"The task and potential greatness of mortals reside in their ability to produce things which are at home in everlastingness." (Hannah Arendt)

And Walter (Jay) Sperling, an Oregon-based thinker and wordsmith, wrote with these thoughts on the long view...

"Reading the story of the oaks growing in reserve in the latest issue reminded me of a story told by an entomologist at a nearby university, Oregon State, who came here from England. He said the groundskeepers at Cambridge are always being asked by tourists and visitors how they maintain the lawns so beautifully, and their answer is quite simple:

"You cut it, and then you roll it. Cut it, and roll it. If you do this for 1200 years, your lawn will look great as well."

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. 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

>>Peace education<<

As president of one of the five Norwegian-American colleges (the others are Augustana-Sioux Falls, Concordia-Moorhead, Luther and St. Olaf), I have the privilege of continuing and close contact with the Norwegian government and with the Nobel Peace Institute in Oslo. In fact, our five colleges share governance of an annual Nobel Peace Prize Forum, which is held on one of our campuses each spring.

The 2007 Peace Prize Forum was held at Augustana early in March and was organized around the theme of “The Power of One” (information and papers are available at www.augie.edu/peaceprizeforum). It has been intriguing to learn more about how peace education is integrated into the lives of our colleges.

I have been thinking about the state of our peacemaking in the days dominated by news of war. The current situation simply confirms that thin line we walk as humans between the best and the worst of our nature. To care or not to care – to love or not to love – to wage peace or wage war.

I continue to learn from several authors whose work – while realistic about our nature – suggests that there are other ways to imagine and act when faced with a threat, an enemy, an inevitability. I think of these authors as offering us the strategies of an alternative diplomacy, if you will – a sort of curriculum for peace education. Listen with me to their challenging lessons. (Some of what follows originally appeared in Notes 4:3, February 2003.)

First, the political philosopher and theologian John Courtney Murray, SJ, writing in his *We Hold These Truths* (Sheed and Ward, 1960): “Barbarism...is the lack of reasonable conversation according to reasonable laws. Here the word “conversation” has its twofold Latin sense. It means living together and talking together. Barbarism threatens when men cease to live together according to reason, embodied in law and custom, and incorporated in a web of institutions that sufficiently reveal rational influences...Society becomes barbarian when men are huddled together under the rule of force and fear; when economic interests assume the primacy over higher values...Barbarism likewise strikes when men cease to talk together...Argument ceases to be civil when it is dominated by passion and prejudice; when its vocabulary becomes solipsist; when dialogue gives way to a series of monologues; when parties to the conversation cease to listen to one another...” How shall we recover our capacity for conversation – genuine living and talking together?

Next, to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who writes in his collection of sermons, *Strength to Love* (Fortress, 1963): “Why should we love our enemies? The first reason is... (that) returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a world already devoid of stars.... Another reason is that hate scars the soul and distorts the personality...to its victims (and) to the person who hates...A third reason is that love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.” Practical, you ask? Idealistic, you charge! “Do to us what you will,” King said, “and we shall continue to love you.” And so he did.

And finally, to retired president of the Czech Republic and playwright, Vaclav Havel, whose address “The Need for Transcendence in the Post-Modern World” was delivered at

Independence Hall in Philadelphia: “Yes, the only real hope of people today is probably a renewal of our certainty that we are rooted in the earth and, at the same time, in the cosmos. This awareness endows us with the capacity for self-transcendence. . . .(T)he truly reliable path to coexistence, to peaceful coexistence and creative cooperation, must start from what is at the root of all cultures and what lies infinitely deeper in human hearts and minds than political opinion, convictions, antipathies, or sympathies - it must be rooted in self-transcendence:

- Transcendence as a hand reached out to those close to us, to foreigners, to the human community, to all living creatures, to nature, to the universe.
- Transcendence as a deeply and joyously experienced need to be in harmony even with what we ourselves are not, what we do not understand, what seems distant from us in time and space, but with which we are nevertheless mysteriously linked because, together with us, all this constitutes a single world.
- Transcendence as the only real alternative to extinction.”

This transcendence, Havel argues, is the foundation for our roles as ambassadors of trust in a fearful world – the only real alternative to not caring, to not loving, to waging war instead of peace, to extinction.

>>Practice resurrection<<

Here is a homily I gave in our final chapel of the 2006-07 academic year. The text for the day was John 11: 30-44, the story of Jesus calling his friend, Lazarus, out of the tomb. I think the message of the text is relevant to all people who must learn to live in the “mean time,” trying to make sense of how their values and beliefs shape their daily lives.

“I’ve been thinking a lot recently about living in the “mean time.” In our liturgical tradition, it’s called “ordinary” or “common” time. In the academic tradition, it’s the time when we step away from the intensity of life in the campus community and go on our breaks, on to a next phase in our education, on to a career. The question is how do remain faithful to our call, to our education, to our experience of life in community in this “mean time?”

This morning’s reading from John’s gospel is the assigned text for this specific day (Friday in the 3rd week after Easter) in the Easter season, and it offers us deep insight into the challenge of living faithfully in the mean time.

The story appears in John’s gospel before the story of Jesus’ passion – it clearly is meant to portend the future death and resurrection of Jesus. But because it is about someone else – in this case, Jesus’ dear friend Lazarus – it also is meant to offer the early faithful (and all of us) a startling challenge about our own lives in the mean time.

Seen through the lens of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the story of Lazarus is about how we are called out of death, out of the power and ways of the world, and into life, the power of the resurrection and God’s reign.

And it is a wrenching story...Lazarus has died prematurely; Jesus does not get to his friend's home until after he has been dead for several days (and thus the power of Jesus' healing ministry is negated); Jesus asks for the stone to be rolled away (which really grosses people out!); and then he calls Lazarus out of the tomb with this ominous summons, "Lazarus, come out!"; at which point Lazarus appears at the door of the tomb, wrapped in the grave clothes, and Jesus instructs the gathered to "Unbind him, and let him go."

So there is great drama here, but I wonder about the story from another perspective – how do you think Lazarus feels about being called back from the grave? – John doesn't address that side of things. I wonder if this was such a happy occasion for Lazarus. He has been resting comfortably in the grave, quiet and peaceful, freed from the disease that had caused him such pain and had led to his death, and now he suddenly is jerked back to life and light, now he must come back into the life of earthly responsibilities, back into the mean time, as one who has been resurrected!

I think we owe Lazarus a bit of empathy, at least, for the circumstances of the resurrected life, because as God's faithful people, this is our story as well. The story of the Easter season is that we, too, have been called out of the grave, out of the world's power, and into the light and life of those who know the resurrection. Now what, in God's name, do we do!?

As we set forth for our various summer adventures, I wonder about how your experiences of the last year here at Augsburg (or the last two, three or four years) will shape who you are and what you do. I wonder how you will live in the mean time, off for summer jobs or trips or on to a new phase in your life.

One of the central claims of an education grounded in the belief that the most important thing we do is help you find vocational meaning or hear your call is how the various experiences of your life – growing up in a particular family, in a particular place; belonging to a particular religious community (or not); having a certain group of friends; coming to a particular college, where you study in a particular way a particular set of topics; choosing a particular career path, and so forth – how all of these experiences are part of a narrative that has history, that has an "arc", that has been influenced and shaped by the inter-dynamics of relationships and institutions and decisions that are all part of your vocational story. What I believe we do at Augsburg is not to tell you what your vocation should be (though sometimes we all do need advice!), but to help you make sense of your vocational story, to find the coherence in the narrative, to see the significance of the various threads of your story as they weave a life for you in the world.

In this understanding of vocation, then, the mean time becomes especially important because it is the time when we need to take responsibility for how our story continues to unfold, even when we are away from those advisors and teachers and friends who perhaps inspired us or motivated us or supported us down this path.

Like Lazarus, we have been called out. That may be wrenching, disorienting, frightening – but like Lazarus, we also have been unbound, freed to live as those who have been saved, resurrected. And the unbinding of Lazarus by those gathered at the tomb reminds us also that we also can count on the continuing "unbinding" that comes from a community, this

community, of those gathered to witness the resurrection...God does not leave us alone in our vocational journeys in the mean time!

Wendell Berry, in his whimsical poem, "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front", offers us an insightful juxtaposition of the life of the world vs. the life called out, and herein lies the path for life in the mean time:

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
vacation with pay. Want more
of everything ready-made. Be afraid
to know your neighbors and to die.
And you will have a window in your head.
Not even your future will be a mystery
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card
and shut away in a little drawer.
When they want you to buy something
they will call you. When they want you
to die for profit they will let you know.

So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.
Denounce the government and embrace
the flag. Hope to live in that free
republic for which it stands.
Give your approval to all you cannot
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man
has not encountered he has not destroyed.

Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.
Say that the leaves are harvested
when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophecy such returns.

Put your faith in the two inches of humus
that will build under the trees
every thousand years.
Listen to carrion - put your ear
close, and hear the faint chattering
of the songs that are to come.
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.

Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful
though you have considered all the facts.
So long as women do not go cheap
for power, please women more than men.
Ask yourself: Will this satisfy
a woman satisfied to bear a child?
Will this disturb the sleep
of a woman near to giving birth?

Go with your love to the fields.
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head
in her lap. Swear allegiance
to what is nighest your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.

This is what it means to live in the mean time as those who have been called out – surely we can understand why Lazarus may not have fully embraced the risen life because practicing resurrection is not easy, it is counter-cultural, it flies in the face of the world's power and authority, but it is the call we have received as God's people and God surrounds us with the Holy Spirit and the community of the faithful who join us in living as those who have witnessed the resurrection, even in the mean time!. God's reign has begun and we have been called out! Practice resurrection! Thanks be to God.”

PRACTICE THIS

>>After Action Reviews<<

The horrific tragedy at Virginia Tech a few weeks ago has caused all of us who lead institutions to step back and consider how we are prepared for responding to crises. It takes a certain intentionality, I think, to ask tough questions and learn from our experiences – but such is the stuff of education and leadership. The following item originally appeared in Notes 5: 3 (February 2004) and offers a useful management tool for organizing our thoughts and findings.

“I have referenced on occasion the work of the Society for Organizational Learning, based at MIT and the publisher of *Reflections*, now an on-line publication (reflections.solonline.org). In the December 2003 issue, an article entitled “Cultivating a Learning Economy” describes the use of After Action Reviews (AAR), a tool first developed by the U.S. Army to help

accelerate learning and now a practice embraced by organizations attempting to build a culture of continuous learning.

The relatively low-tech concept of the AAR seems quite doable for most organizations and the article's authors offer a helpful synopsis of how the consistent use of AARs offers a vehicle for deep understanding, a safe way to discuss difficult issues, and a way of building reflective practice into the work of an organization.

AARs occur throughout the life of a project, focus on ongoing actions, and produce an action plan that project participants can use to be successful. Often guided by a trained facilitator, the AARs are meant to eliminate the role of rank through rules and processes that create a safe environment for conversation across hierarchical (and disciplinary) boundaries. The format for an AAR includes:

- A review of what was intended to be accomplished.
- Establishing the "ground truth" of what actually happened.
- Consideration of what might have caused events to occur as they did.
- The articulation of lessons to be learned for ongoing work.
- Establishing plans and expectations for the ongoing work.

As we all seek to create more knowledge-based organizations, a simple tool such as the AAR strikes me as an accessible and effective model.

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I read again recently as part of an Honors class I was teaching Earl Shorris' fascinating book, *Riches for the Poor: The Clemente Course in the Humanities* (W.W. Norton, 2000). Shorris tells the story of the Bard-Clemente program that teaches the humanities to the poor as a means of empowering them. It is a provocative tale and central to my thinking about the link between education and democracy.

The Spring 2007 issue of *The Hedgehog Review* (9:1) addresses the theme of intellectuals and public responsibility with several important essays and interviews.

The CEO of Habitat for Humanity, Jonathan Reckford, is a former Minnesotan. He has been in town recently talking about his new book, *Creating a Habitat for Humanity: No Hands but Yours* (Fortress Press, 2007), an inspiring story of how Habitat for Humanity teaches us how to listen for and follow a call.

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

- The needs of strangers
- Brand: promises vs. reality

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