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From the President



In this age of emailing, “Facebooking,” texting, and tweeting, I believe that Torch Clubs offer a refreshing alternative to these impersonal communication methods. Torch introduces the value of the serious presentation and thoughtful discussion of ideas and experiences that speak in our time. Speaking as not only your Torch President, but as a member, I believe it is worthwhile to be part of that. It could be worthwhile to someone you know to become a part of that as well.

A strong membership base is the key to every Torch Club’s success. While your Club may have a membership committee charged with recruiting members, each Club member should also consider recruiting members. Here are a few tips for inviting a

prospective member to a meeting:

- Offer transportation to the meeting
- Make the guest feel special
- Be sure that the prospect has literature about Torch
- Be sure that the guest is seated with congenial conversationalists
- Follow up personally after the meeting.

As you talk to prospective members, be sure to stress the enjoyment of meeting and mixing with other professionals and mention the social time. If you’d like more information on recruiting new Torch members, be sure to talk to your local Club leaders.

—Edward B. Latimer, IATC President

Gold & Silver Torch Awards

At our annual convention, special Gold and Silver Torch Awards may be given to individual members for truly outstanding service, through nomination by their local clubs, submitted in advance through the Awards Chairman.

Gold Award

The Gold Torch Award honors members who have served Torch at the local, regional, and—most importantly—the International level. To qualify for this award, the nominee must have been a Torch member for at least 10 years. In any one year, the number of Gold Torch Awards may not exceed 0.1% (rounded to the nearest whole number) of the membership of the International Association of Torch Clubs (i.e., three awards for membership of 2,500 to 3,499).

Silver Award

The Silver Torch Award recognizes members who have served in an exemplary manner at the local club level. To qualify for the Silver Torch Award, the nominee must have been a member for at least 5 years. In a given year, the number of Silver Torch Awards nominees by a local club may not exceed one for each 25 members or portion thereof.

Nominations for both Gold and Silver awards should be sent by March 31, 2011 to Charles E. Carlson at IATC, 11712C Jefferson Ave #246, Newport News, VA 23606 with copies to your regional director.

Was Islamic Radicalism Born in America?

An Egyptian whose writings have radicalized current Islamic terrorists carried home negative impressions of America from two years of study in some of its best colleges.

By Arthur Goldschmidt



About the Author

Arthur Goldschmidt is Professor Emeritus of Middle East History at the Pennsylvania State University, where he taught for 35 years. He received his PhD in history and Middle Eastern studies from Harvard University in 1968. The recipient of seven teaching or advising awards during his career, he is the author of a widely-used textbook, *A Concise History of the Middle East* (published by Westview Press and now in its ninth edition). He has also written *Modern Egypt: The Formation of a Nation State* (2nd ed. Westview Press, 2004), *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt* (Lynne Rienner, 2000), *Historical Dictionary of Egypt* (3rd ed., Scarecrow Press, 2003), and *A Brief History of Egypt* (Checkmark Books, 2008). The secretary of the Central Pennsylvania Torch Club, he also chairs the IATC History Committee.

Presented to the Central Pennsylvania Torch Club on April 14, 2010.



One night I was in a church in Greeley, Colorado. After the religious service in the church ended, boys and girls from among the members began taking part in chants, while others prayed, and we proceeded through a side door onto the dance floor that was connected to the prayer hall by a door. Every boy took the hand of a girl, including those who were chanting.

The dance floor was lit with red, yellow, and blue lights, and with a few white lamps. And they

danced to the tunes of a gramophone. The dance floor was replete with tapping feet, enticing legs, arms wrapped around waists, lips pressed to lips, and chests pressed to chests. The atmosphere was full of desire. When the minister came down from his office, he looked intently around the place and at the people, and encouraged those men and women still sitting who had not yet participated in this circus to rise and take part. As he noticed that the white lamps spoiled the romantic, dreamy atmosphere, he set about dimming them one by one, all the while taking care not to interfere with the dance, or bump any couples dancing on the dance floor. And the place really did seem to become more romantic and passionate. Then he went up to the gramophone to choose a song that would befit this atmosphere and encourage the males and females who were still seated to join in.

And the minister chose a famous American song called "But Baby, It's Cold Outside," which consists of a dialogue between a boy and a girl returning from their evening date. The boy took the girl to his home and kept her from leaving. She entreated him to let her return home, for it was getting late and her mother was waiting, but every time she would make an excuse, he'd reply...: "But baby, it's cold outside!" And the minister waited till he saw people dancing to the rhythm of this moving song, and

he seemed satisfied and contented. He left the dance floor for his home, leaving the boys and girls to enjoy this night in all its pleasure and innocence!¹

This is a scene that many of us might have witnessed years ago. The writer is not a blue-nosed puritan from a fundamentalist Christian sect. He is a 43-year-old Egyptian bachelor attending classes in educational administration at Colorado State College of Education (now the University of Northern Colorado) under a scholarship provided by his own government. The year is 1949. The writer is Sayyid Qutb, unknown to most Americans, but a well-known author in his last years whose books radicalized many leading Muslims including Khomeini, Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and indirectly those terrorists who hijacked passenger planes and flew them into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 9/11.

Sayyid Qutb's Early Development

Born in Upper Egypt in 1906, Qutb describes in an autobiographical sketch called *A Child from the Village* how he grew up among impoverished and superstitious people. He writes little about his religious ideas. His organization is episodic, not chronological. He always refers to himself in the third person. Qutb's family was respectable, though his father was gradually selling off his land to pay his debts. His mother insisted that the boy attend a state school, not a traditional Islamic *kuttab*, for she wanted him to become a government official who would restore the family fortune. When Sayyid Qutb was about 15, an uncle who lived in Cairo took him under his wing and enrolled him in an

excellent secondary school in the capital city. Then he attended a respected Arabic teacher's college that has turned out many Egyptian intellectuals. After graduation he became a teacher, an inspector, and an official within Egypt's education ministry.

He had an eventful literary career. Convinced that Egypt must free itself from British control and become a modern nation, Qutb attached himself to one of Egypt's most prolific poets and writers, Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad. Between 1924 and 1953, Qutb wrote some 130 poems and 500 magazine articles, most of which promoted modernization and secular values.²

In World War II, Egypt was overrun with British troops. After the war, Qutb began to lose faith in modernization. Even as he continued to work as an educational administrator, he wrote some articles for a magazine published by the Muslim Brotherhood, the society that urged Egyptians—indeed, all Muslims—to return to the values and institutions prescribed by the Quran and the sayings and actions of Muhammad. Then, in 1948, the education ministry gave him a grant to do graduate work in educational administration in the United States. Egypt was then in a crisis. The people, increasingly nationalistic, demanded complete independence from foreign rule. British troops had finally left Cairo and Alexandria but still occupied the Suez Canal. Many Egyptians demonstrated against a twenty-year alliance treaty their government had signed with Britain in 1936.

Jews and Arabs were fighting for control of neighboring Palestine. Britain turned its Palestine mandate over to the United Nations, which voted to partition the country between the Jews and the Arabs, a decision that Egypt and the other Arab states opposed because most of Palestine's inhabitants were Arabs. Egypt's head of state, King Farouk, had grown fat, dissolute, and hated. Just after Egypt and the other Arab governments

declared war against the new state of Israel in 1948, Farouk divorced his wife. Egyptians accused him of betraying the country's military secrets to his mistress, film star Lilianne Cohen. If Sayyid Qutb was disillusioned with Westernization, he wasn't alone.

Shocked by American Depravity

Qutb relates an incident that happened while he was on board the ship that took him to America in 1948. One evening he heard a knock on his stateroom door. When he opened it, there was a gorgeous blonde, half-naked, who asked him if he wanted some company for the night. Qutb pointed to his single bed, saying it wasn't wide enough to share. "A single bed can hold two people," she replied. As he firmly closed the door on her, he heard a thud as she stumbled and fell to the floor, and he realized she was drunk.³

New York was the first American city he saw. In his hotel he met a black elevator operator who seemed to like him "because I was closer to his color." The man offered to get him "entertainment, which included perversions," he wrote to a friend. "Some of those rooms may have pairs of boys or girls, who'd ask him to bring them bottles of Coca Cola and didn't even change their positions when he came in. "Don't they feel ashamed?" Qutb asked. The operator exclaimed: "Why, they're just enjoyin' themselves, satisfyin' their particular desires."⁴

Qutb enrolled at Wilson College, now part of the University of the District of Columbia. His studies were soon interrupted by a medical emergency, and he was taken to George Washington Hospital to have his tonsils removed. He was dismayed to hear the nurses and staff laughing as they described the mangled body of a hospital employee who had been fatally injured in an elevator accident.⁵ He perceived that Americans rejoiced upon reading that the Muslim Brotherhood's founder had been

killed in Cairo, news that would have shocked Qutb but probably meant nothing to most Americans in February 1949.⁶ He disparaged the racial segregation he observed in DC. Once a movie theater cashier tried to stop him and a friend from entering. "But we're Egyptians," they replied. Despite the cashier's profuse apology, the two walked away. If blacks couldn't enter, neither would they.

That summer Qutb moved to Greeley, to audit courses in Colorado State College of Education, reputedly among America's most progressive teaching institutions. Founded as a planned community by the agriculture editor of the New York *Tribune* and named after chief editor Horace Greeley, this temperance community was peopled by middle-aged and middle class people proud of their moral rectitude. Welcomed as a great Egyptian writer by the college president and faculty, Qutb should have felt at home there.⁷

But he didn't. He despised the food, noting that sugar was reserved for pickles and salads, and people glared if he requested—as Egyptians do—extra sugar for his coffee or tea. "On your plate you will find combined a piece of salted meat, some boiled corn, some boiled peas, and some sweet jam. On top of this is something the Americans call 'gravy,' consisting of fat, vinegar, flour, broth, apples, salt and pepper, sugar and water." He was amused to watch students seated at his table shaking salt on their watermelon. "Don't you Egyptians do that too?" they asked him. Looking innocent, he replied, "No, in Egypt we sprinkle pepper." A curious girl asked him, "How does that taste?" "You can try it for yourself," Qutb replied, and she did. "It's tasty," she said, and soon all the students were shaking pepper on their watermelon.⁸

He couldn't get a decent haircut in Greeley, leaving the barber shop to return to his room and cut his own hair again. He observed that American men

would spend hours in the hardware store, talking about their gardens and buying equipment. They were especially preoccupied with their lawns. To a friend he wrote that “There has been a Ph.D. dissertation about the best way to clean dishes, which seems more important to them than the Bible or religion.”⁹ In addition to his contempt for the way we ran our churches, shown earlier, he also complained that “‘Jazz’ music is [the American’s] music of choice. This is music that the savage Bushmen invented to satisfy their primitive inclinations, as well as their desire to make animal noises.”¹⁰

Qutb noted the primitive nature of American men expressed in the game of football “which has nothing to do with its name, for the foot doesn’t take part in the game. Instead, each player attempts to catch the ball with his hands and run with it toward the goal, while the players of the opposing team try to tackle him by any means necessary, whether this be a blow to his stomach, or crushing his arms and legs with great violence and ferocity. The sight of the fans as they follow this game, or watch boxing matches or bloody, monstrous wrestling contests...is one of animal excitement born of their love for hardcore violence. They pay no attention to the rules and sportsmanship, to the extent that they are enthralled by flowing blood and crushed limbs, crying loudly, everyone cheering for his team. ‘Break his head. Crush his ribs. Beat him to a pulp!’ This spectacle leaves no room for doubt about the primitiveness of the feelings of those who are enthralled by muscular strength and desire it.”¹¹

American sexual mores troubled him, highlighted by the new Kinsey report on male sexual behavior. He described Americans as “a reckless, deluded herd that knows only lust and money.” Divorce was rife, for “Every time a husband or wife notices a new sparkling personality, they lunge for it as if it were a new fashion in the world of desires.”¹² He wrote that “the American

girl is well acquainted with her body’s seductive capacity. She knows it lies in the face, in expressive eyes, and thirsty lips. She knows seductiveness lies in the round breasts, the full buttocks, and in the shapely thighs, sleek legs—she shows all this and does not hide it. She knows all this lies in clothes: in bright colors that arouse primal sensations, and in designs that reveal the body’s temptations—and in American girls these are sometimes live, screaming temptations! Then to all this she adds her fetching laugh, the naked looks, and the bold moves. She does not ignore this for one moment or forget it.” He continued: “The American boy knows well that the wide, strapping chest is the lure that no girl can deny, and that she dreams especially of cowboys. A young nurse in a hospital told me frankly: ‘I want nothing in the man of my dreams but two strong arms he can really squeeze me with!’”¹³

“There is no doubt,” Qutb concluded, “that this fascination with physical strength is indicative of the vitality and sensuality of this nation. If this fascination were tamed and sublimated, it could lead to the creation of a great art that would relieve life’s gloominess, infuse the human spirit with fragrance, and bind the sexes with ties higher and more beautiful than the ties of thirsty bodies, burning passions, and eye-popping sex that beckons through the limbs, and is embodied in [their] motions and gestures. But the nature of life in America, and the circumstance that conditioned the formation of the American people, does not help with any of this. Instead it resists and fights it.”¹⁴

Return to Egypt

Qutb left the Colorado College of Education in December 1949 for San Francisco and then Palo Alto. By the following summer he decided to return to Egypt, where the political crisis had worsened. After the king allowed a free election, the most popular political party, the Wafd, won. It tried to reform the

government, but nothing worked and the people grew more frustrated. About this time, Qutb formally joined the Muslim Brotherhood, which had rejected Egypt’s democratic constitution. For the Brothers, the Quran alone was their constitution. Egyptian “freedom fighters”—or terrorists—attacked British troops patrolling the Suez Canal. In January 1952, an angry mob (including Muslim Brothers) burned most of downtown Cairo, notably Sheppard’s Hotel. Six months later, an Egyptian officers’ cabal led by Gamal Abdel Nasser—the Free Officers—seized the government and made Farouk abdicate his throne.

This revolution could have brought Qutb to power, for his writings had already influenced the Free Officers. A recent collection of scholarly articles on Egypt’s modern history edited by the present writer included one that proved that Nasser’s officers supported the Muslim Brothers before the 1952 revolution, when they would meet secretly in Qutb’s study.¹⁵ After the revolution, Nasser offered to make him education minister or general manager of Radio Cairo. Qutb rejected both posts, preferring to be an adviser and a member of the editorial board. Egypt’s new government soon broke with the Muslim Brothers. Nasser’s officers envisioned a state-run, modernizing society moving toward what they would later call “Arab socialism,” whereas the Brothers, now fully including Sayyid Qutb, wanted a government based on the Quran. Between 1952 and 1954, Nasser struggled for power against the revolution’s titular head, Muhammad Nagib, who was supported by the Muslim Brothers, the Communists, and the liberal parties. Backed by the secret police and probably the Americans, Nasser eventually won. Soon after he ousted Nagib, he was making a speech in Alexandria when eight shots rang out. Nasser ducked, probably saving his life. Convinced that the Muslim Brothers had plotted his assassination, he banned the

organization, closed its papers, and jailed many, including Qutb.

Qutb As a Major Source of Radical Ideology

Incarcerated for nearly the rest of his life, Qutb took advantage of his isolation to write the books that would revolutionize the Muslim world: a six volume interpretation of Islam's holy book called *In the Shadow of the Quran*, and a manifesto called *Milestones*—the latter work smuggled out of prison and circulated secretly among Muslims who were growing disillusioned with Nasser's secular government and Arab socialism. "Mankind today is on the brink of a precipice," he began.¹⁶ "Humanity is threatened not only by nuclear annihilation but also by an absence of values. The West has lost its vitality, and Marxism has failed. At this crucial and bewildering juncture, the turn of Islam and the Muslim community has arrived." But true Islam had not been practiced for centuries. The world had reverted to *jahiliyya*, the ignorant condition that prevailed before Muhammad's mission. Qutb exhorted Muslims to rebuild their community, purify Islam, and wage jihad against all nations that are in a state of *jahiliyya*—basically the whole world. Executed by Nasser in 1966, Qutb did not live to see this jihad, but his writings would be translated into many languages and inspire such radicals as Khomeini and Bin Laden, and especially Ayman al-Zawahiri, the principal ideologue of al Qaida.

Was Qutb's experience in America, especially in Greeley, a turning point in his life and thinking? Did his observations of our society and culture convince him that the world was in a state of *jahiliyya*? Perhaps, but history teaches that most events have multiple causes. Egypt's experiences under colonialism, the Arabs' defeat by Israel, Nasser's break with the Muslim Brothers, and the weakness of Egypt's Muslim elite were contributing factors. Qutb's reclusive

personality, his sexual frustrations (unmarried, he probably never had sexual intercourse),¹⁷ and his sensitivity about coming from a poor village in Upper Egypt also colored his writings. But he was profoundly alienated from what we regard as the world's most advanced culture. And some of that alienation goes back to a church-run dance in a Colorado academic town not unlike the cities where many Torch members live.

Notes

1. Sayyid Qutb, "The America I Have Seen" in Kamal Abdel-Malek, ed., *America in an Arab Mirror* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 20. The translation is by Tarek Masoud and Ammar Fakeeh.

2. John Calvert and William Shepard, introduction to Sayyid Qutb, *A Child from the Village* (Syracuse University Press, 2004), xvii. A recently published book adds much to what we know about Qutb's life and teachings: John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

3. Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 10. Much of my account of Qutb's first impressions of America come from this source.

4. *Ibid.*, 12.

5. *Ibid.*, 16.

6. Wright, 15-16.

7. John Calvert, "The World Is an Undutiful Boy: Sayyid Qutb's American Experience," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 11, no. 1 (2000): 87-103.

8. "The America I Have Seen," 26. See also Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*, 139-55.

9. Wright, 23.

10. "The America I Have Seen," 24.

11. *Ibid.*, 14.

12. Wright, 12.

13. "The America I Have Seen," 22.

14. *Ibid.*, 22-23.

15. Tewfik Aclimandos, "Revisiting the History of the Egyptian Army," in

Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy J. Johnson, and Barak A. Salmoni, eds. *Re-Envisioning Egypt, 1919-1952* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2005), 82-84. Aclimandos has published several books and articles about Egyptian history, but his major research on the Muslim Brothers and the Free Officers has not yet appeared.

16. Albert J. Bergesen, ed., *The Sayyid Qutb Reader: Selected Writings on Politics, Religion, and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 35.

17. Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*, 110.

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Scientific Breakthroughs in the Twenty-first Century and Their Impact on Humankind

Biometrics, computers, and quantum physics create a new world of science in the new millennium.

By Cecilia Yau



About the Author

With an MA from McMaster University and an MS from the State University of NY at Buffalo, Cecilia Yau is an educational consultant in creative problem solving, writing, and leading workshops in Canada and the U.S. to help people manage professional and personal life changes. She coordinated the K-13 Gifted Program in Canada's Niagara South Board of Education for twenty years and was appointed Chairperson of the Ontario Consultants for the Gifted. She currently teaches at Niagara College and Brock University, both in St. Catharines, and has been on the faculty of the Creative Problem Solving Institute since 1983, also serving on the Board of the Creative Education Foundation for six years. The author of two books—*Qualitative Research in Creativity* and *Breakthrough and Beyond: 20th Century Scientific Revolutions and Artistic Innovations*—she is at present working on a new book, to be titled *Creative Geniuses*. A member of the St. Catharines Torch Club for over ten years, she served as president in 2003-2004. This is her second published Torch paper.

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Mankind's pursuit of science is driven by his innate curiosity. This is expressed by a child's question to the stars, "Twinkle, twinkle, little star / How I wonder what you are?" Man's need to know and understand the makeup of

the universe, the secrets of the human body, and the origins and ultimate fate of humankind are the motivating forces that drive scientists in their relentless pursuit of scientific explanations. However, we find that science is double-edged: it could guarantee the very survival of the human species, or ultimately destroy us. Science in the twenty-first century has reached a new watershed. The coming together of three scientific breakthroughs—the quantum revolution, the computer revolution, and the bio-molecular revolution—is taking science to an unprecedented level. The cross-fertilization among these three revolutions is giving us a qualitatively different science from that of previous centuries. We are also moving from a reductionist to a synergistic science. Science is no longer brilliant insights achieved by individual geniuses like Newton or Einstein or Feynmann, but is necessarily a collaborative effort by scientists around the world working on complex, complicated, and terribly expensive investigations and experimentations.

The Quantum Revolution

The particle physics experiments at the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) are the best examples of the amazing feats accomplished by the quantum revolution. The LHC is the world's largest and most powerful particle accelerator to date, built by CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, near Geneva, Switzerland, funded and built over decades by a collaborative team of 8,000 physicists from over eighty-five countries, as well as hundreds of universities and

laboratories from around the world. Possibly the most complex machine ever built by mankind, it is intended to collide opposing beams of protons with very high kinetic energy. Its main purpose is to *explore* the validity and limitations of the Standard Model, the current theoretical picture of particle physics. New discoveries could open up "new symmetries and point toward a unified description of all the interactions;" scientists may be able to catch a glimpse of a new unification theory. The LHC could even reveal evidence of dark matter, which is theorized to make up 96% of the Universe. It might actually be able to create dark matter particles in its laboratories.¹ Also, its extreme high energies may even make it possible to "see" hidden dimensions beyond the three dimensions we now experience. Today's physicists believe that these experiments will provide significant answers to the central questions at the heart of twentieth-century particle physics.

The data recorded by each of the big experiments at the LHC will fill around 100,000 dual-layered DVDs every year. To allow the thousands of scientists scattered around the globe to collaborate on the analysis over the next fifteen years (the estimated lifetime of the LHC), tens of thousands of computers located around the world are being harnessed in a distributed computing network called the GRID. The first experiment, started on October 2, 2008, hit an immediate snag. Either because of a faulty electrical link or because the computers were promptly hacked by people who opposed the project, its superconductivity magnets

*science ... could guarantee
...survival of the human
species, or destroy us.*

were accidentally melted. This meant that the LHC had to be shut down temporarily. Nevertheless, on September 15, 2010, scientists from Geneva reported with great excitement that in a series of recent experiments the Large Hadron Collider appeared “to produce a small amount of the matter that existed in the first moments of the universe,” which could be the “hot dense matter that would have existed microseconds after the Big Bang.”² These studies may explain how the liquids, gases, and solids in our universe were created. Further LHC experiments could unveil a plethora of discoveries in the near future. On October 25, 2010, an insider’s tour of CERN and the LHC will be opened to the public.³ In the far future, the quantum revolution will hold the secret for the ultimate destiny of humankind. H.G. Wells wrote, “There is no way back into the past. The choice is the Universe—or nothing.”⁴ Space colonization will not only reveal to us whether intelligent life exists in outer space, but is also a critical strategy for our long-term survival. Our earth is in the midst of a cosmic shooting gallery. On a time scale of millennia to millions of years, it is inevitable that a meteor or a comet or some other natural disaster will destroy most life on earth. We need to move to outer space to survive as a species. Also, our own universe could ultimately die by either fire or ice. We need someday to move to other universes to keep our species going.

The Computer Revolution

In no time, computer microchips will be so small and cheap that they will be everywhere in our lives: in our airplanes, our mobile phones, our appliances, our homes, our cars, and even in our clothing. Moore’s Law states that computer power will double every

eighteen months. In the near future, we will interact with our invisible computers with our voice, our body motions, and our body heat and electric field. They will even recognize our facial gestures. The Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) is already navigating our cars. Smart cars in the future will use radar to sense the presence of other cars and actually do the driving for us. In the 1990s, the explosive growth in the Internet was driven by combining the power of microprocessors with cheap lasers, which can carry trillions of bits of data at the speed of light along glass fibers. Today, most parts of the globe are wired to the Internet. The Internet has literally opened the world to us. Its influence on our political, social, and emotional lives is still unpredictable! The demand for computer power will become so great that the reign of silicon could come to an end one day. Scientists will have to discover a new architecture for computers, such as optical and DNA computers.

According to scientific visionist Michio Kaku, from 2020 to 2050, invisible computers will be able to converse with each other. Also, programs using artificial intelligence (AI) will be added to the Internet capable of speech recognition, reason, and even common sense! We will be able to talk to the Internet as if it were an intelligent being. Intelligent machines have already become a reality. The chess matches between chess mastermind Garry Kasparov and the computer Deep Blue are good examples. Garry was stunned when Deep Blue won the first match. But he then found the computer’s Achilles heel. Deep Blue moved in a step-by-step, precisely logical sequence. When Garry made a chaotic step, Deep Blue was confused and didn’t know how to move. So a human won the second match! Today, in some theorems of mathematics, computers have worked out the proofs. But they involve such numerous or intricate subcases, no human could possibly check them!

Intelligent machines, though

fascinating, can become a nightmarish scenario. They can be a threat to our very existence! By the middle of the twenty-first century, machines may grow powerful enough for society to turn over the running of entire cities and nations to computers. Although computers could perform flawlessly, tiny errors inherent in all feedback mechanisms could escalate until the whole system would collapse. Scientist Daniel Crevier mused that one day, computers could acquire an intelligence superior to our own.⁵ Then we could be eliminated in the process of creating the next species of intelligent life on earth—a scary thought!

The Bio-molecular Revolution

Whereas the twentieth century was the age of physics, the twenty-first century is the age of biology, resulting in the molecular genetic revolution. The Human Genome Project is a good example of this revolution. The genome is a blueprint of the innumerable human genes hidden among the twenty-three pairs of chromosomes in our cells. This map was completed in the year 2000. What we found out quite surprised us. To start with, 99.9% of all genes are the same in all peoples in our world. Thus, beneath all our seeming differences in race, ethnicity, and culture, we are fundamentally the same.⁶ What is more shocking is that humans have only about 30,000 genes compared to approximately 18,000 genes in a worm or 14,000 genes in a yeast cell.⁷ That’s a humbling thought indeed. We are closer relatives to worms and fruit flies than we have ever imagined! With the Human Genome Project, researchers are gaining a first glimpse into the intricate networking and interacting of complex metabolic pathways in the human body. Researchers are now working to know what protein is produced by each gene; what each protein does, and how it interacts with other proteins to maintain a healthy, fully functioning human being. This study of the nature of proteins and their complex

interactions is called Proteomics. Biologist Lynn Margulis believes that the human genome is 95% junk DNA and this junk “plays an important role in the control and timing of gene functioning.”⁸

Genome research will lay the groundwork for entirely new ways of diagnosing, treating, and preventing diseases. Scientists are beginning to unlock the secrets of hereditary illnesses linked to genes such as cystic fibrosis, Huntington’s disease, muscular dystrophy, high blood pressure, and others. Researchers will also better understand the role played by altered genes in more complex disorders such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, Alzheimer’s disease, and psychiatric disorders. The first genome sequences of two single individuals, gene pioneer Craig Venter and DNA icon James Watson, have already been published. Now it costs about \$100,000 to obtain a personalized genome sequence. Within five years, it will be available for about \$1,000 each. One day, you could have your newborn’s six-billion chemical-based gene code digitized to your Blackberry before you leave the hospital!

Today, we are also finding that cancer may be too genetically complex for any magic bullet medicine to defeat it in the foreseeable future. Genetic pathways, when altered by DNA mutations and mistakes, are likely responsible for triggering the formation of tumors. Molecular medicine will help with early prevention and detection of cancer; development of effective cancer vaccines; the use of blockers to shut off cancer’s blood supply; and, with gene therapy, injecting the correct genes to replace the defective ones. Within ten years, the International Cancer Genome Consortium is planning to map the genetic mutations that drive about fifty of the most common cancers. A year ago, the world’s oldest woman, an Indiana woman named Edna Parker, died at the age of 115 years and 220 days. This bio-molecular revolution will no doubt be able to expand our life span,

allowing robust elders to live in good health to a ripe old age. Recently, bioengineering scientists, with the discovery of “universal donor cells,” have been able to grow organ parts.⁹

These organs are not rejected by the recipients’ immune system. We may expect a wide variety of simple human replacement parts within 10 years. Scientists are now asking the question, is there a limit to the human life span? According to researcher Hayflick, it is about 125 years.¹⁰ However, with our new gene therapy and the search for the “pluripotent” adult stem cells, the human life span could be expanded further.

The breakthroughs in science in the twenty-first century result from the interaction of the quantum revolution, the computer revolution, and the bio-molecular revolution. The quantum revolution will give us new materials, new energy sources, and perhaps the ability to create new forms of matter such as nanotechnology—that is, self-replicating micromachines. The computer revolution will give us unlimited and inexpensive computer power, eventually placing artificial intelligence within our reach. And the bio-molecular revolution will give us a complete genetic description of all living things. We are in the process of becoming choreographers of life on earth.

However, the double-edged nature of our scientific and technological advances provides instruments for both immense good and terrifying evil. We have in our hands dangerous arsenals such as chemical and biological weapons. We will need to make enlightened choices about the kind of future we want. In the past, we were mere unaware participants in the slow march of evolution. Today, evolution is more like a rocket hurtling through space and we are becoming its pilots. We, as a race, must take on the responsibility of building safeguards over each phase of our technological advances. We need to control what kind of life we would

like to create for our species. We could inadvertently end up destroying ourselves or take our place among the stars or even other universes!

Notes

1. Lyndon Evans and Chris Quigg, “Large Hadron Collider (LHC),” in *AccessScience* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 4, at <http://www.accessscience.com> [accessed November 26, 2010]. See also “The Large Hadron Collider: The World’s Most Complex Machine,” *Scientific American*, February, 2010.

2. “Collider May Have Smashing Success: Experiments Could Help Explain Universe’s Origin,” *Toronto Star*, September 23, 2010.

3. “Private, Insider’s Tour of CERN,” *Scientific American*, May, 2010.

4. Michio Kaku, *Visions: How Science Will Revolutionize the 21st Century* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1997), 295.

5. *Ibid.*, 130.

6. Cecilia Yau, *Breakthrough and Beyond: Twentieth Century Scientific Revolutions and Artistic Innovations* (St. Catharines, Ontario: Lincoln Graphics Press, 2002), 73-74.

7. Tanya Talaga, *Toronto Star*, February 17, 2001.

8. *National Post*, March 5, 2001.

9. Kaku, 217.

10. *Ibid.*, 201-204.

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Darwin Among the Theologians

The debate between “evolutionists” and “creationists” may be less polarized than we think.

By Robert J. Schneider



About the Author

Robert J. Schneider earned a BA in classics from the University of the South (1961), and a PhD in medieval studies from the University of Notre Dame (1965). He taught at Berea College for thirty-two of his forty years in academia, retiring as Distinguished Professor of General Studies and Professor of Classical Languages. Since 1996 he has been studying and writing on the links between religion and science, the subject of a senior seminar he taught at Berea. Recipient of a Templeton Foundation Science and Religion Course Prize (1997) and the Genesis Award in Science and Religion (2008), he has co-chaired the Episcopal Church’s Committee on Science, Technology and Faith. This year he is living in Indonesia with his wife Dr. Maria Lichtmann, a Fulbright Scholar. He plans to write a historical study of Darwin and Anglicanism.

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Everything exists in God. All we can perceive is the activity of nature, but with faith we can see God at work. The tiniest particle of matter and the smallest moment of time contain something of God’s concealed activity. God hides behind the curtain of his creation’s business.

Jean-Pierre de Caussade, 1675-1751

Over the past fifty years, the notion has become widespread in American

society that acceptance of the scientific theory of biological evolution is incompatible with belief in God and the doctrine of creation. Since the 1960s, Henry Morris, Ken Ham, and others espousing young earth creationism (YEC) have convinced large numbers of conservative and fundamentalist Christians to accept their version of a “scientific biblical creationism” based on their literalistic interpretation of Genesis and other biblical texts. In their belief our universe was created in six days, less than 10,000 years ago, they reject biological evolution as contrary to Divine Revelation. The YECs have sought, unsuccessfully, to find scientific evidence to support their biblical interpretation.

Since the 1987 Supreme Court decision against giving creationism equal time in science classes, the creationists’ ranks have been reinforced by the more sophisticated members of the Intelligent Design Movement (ID), which Phillip Johnson popularized in his 1991 book *Darwin on Trial*. Other prominent ID proponents such as Michael Behe and William Dembski have succeeded in convincing many that life—in particular certain molecular biological systems—is too irreducibly complex to be the result of evolutionary processes. Therefore, they assert, these processes must be the work of a Designer. ID proponents claim that biological evolution is merely a philosophical dogma dressed up as science. They also have sought to convince state and local school districts to offer ID concepts in public school science courses, an approach designed to cast doubt on evolution and promote ID as an alternative view.

Both groups insist that the science of evolution is wedded to an atheistic

belief system that may be called “evolutionism.” I use this term to describe the views of such materialistic scientists and philosophers as Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett. They assert that this universe of matter, energy, and space-time is the sum of all reality. Any concept of God is superfluous. To some, religion is a toxic byproduct of evolution that must be purged from society. Ironically, these “New Atheists” have unintentionally aided and abetted the creationists they abhor through books that promote their own fundamentalism in rapier-sharp rhetorical attacks against religion and Christianity in particular.

A New Scientific Paradigm

While creationists and atheistic materialists fire their salvos at one another, there is another group in the middle, for the most part an “excluded middle” in the popular media. It consists of people of faith representing a spectrum of theological traditions from liberal Christianity to reformed and conservative traditions. Among them are scientists who are also theologians, or at least theologically literate, as well as theologians who are former scientists or scientifically literate. Like the creationists, they espouse a doctrine of creation against the materialists, but they reject YEC and ID concepts of creation as theologically outmoded and their scientific claims as vacuous. YEC is bad science, they say, and ID is philosophy, not science. These new theologians, usually called “theistic evolutionists” (or “evolutionary creationists”), all agree on the following: (1) biological evolution is a paradigm as true as any in science can be true; (2) the *science* of evolution must be distinguished from the *belief system*

of evolutionism, for the latter does not follow logically or scientifically from the former; (3) evolution is compatible with Christian (and Jewish and Islamic) doctrines of creation; and (4) this message needs to be gotten out to those sitting in the pews, for so many of their fellow believers suffer from ignorance of both the nature of science and the scientific enterprise on the one hand, and the meaning of creation on the other.

Such contemporary thinkers acknowledge and agree that the natural sciences and theology constitute separate domains. It is neither the task of theology to confirm scientific theories nor of science to confirm theological concepts. Yet, they also assert, the empirically based knowledge and theories of modern science, in particular biological evolution, can inspire theologians to reflect anew on the doctrine of creation. They offer to people of faith theological models of how God may interact with an evolving world that faith declares to be a creation, making it possible to re-envision a fundamental Christian doctrine in the light of a new paradigm of science that, in the words of theologian Arthur Peacocke, biological evolution may receive “a positive theological appraisal.”¹

Christian Responses to Darwin in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century

It all began with Darwin. One often hears it said, especially by scientists who adhere to the “warfare model” between religion and science, that during the nineteenth century, churchmen rejected Darwin’s theory while scientists embraced it. Nothing could be further from the truth. During the Victorian Age, a significant number of naturalists were very skeptical of Darwin’s theory of natural selection and some rejected it outright. Darwin, on the other hand, counted a number of churchmen in his corner, including country parsons who enjoyed the avocation of amateur

naturalist, and such leading theologians as Anglican Aubrey Moore and Presbyterian James Orr, grateful to Darwin for unintentionally inspiring theologians to rearticulate the classic concept of God’s immanence in creation. American theologian Benjamin B. Warfield, a champion of biblical inerrancy, saw no conflict between evolution and Genesis properly understood, drawing on the thirteenth-century Thomistic concept that God, the Primary Cause of all that exists, works in creation through secondary causes, of which the evolutionary processes constitute one set. Orr, Warfield, and their evangelical colleagues in the natural sciences, such as American botanist Asa Gray and geologist James Dana, believed in a divinely guided evolutionary process and rejected a strict, naturalistic Darwinism.

Evolution was also championed by liberal churchmen. In the 1880s, popular American preacher Henry Ward Beecher published a collection of sermons on evolution and religion, endorsing philosopher Herbert Spencer’s version of Darwinism as evolution leading to progress in nature and the development of humanity. British theologian Ernest William Barnes passionately preached what the local press called his “gorilla sermons” from the pulpit of Westminster Abbey. According to historian Peter Bowler, Barnes “was vague about the actual mechanism of evolution, and simply assumed that some progressive, purposeful process was at work under the guidance of a creative spark which God had built into nature.” He and his liberal contemporaries were also challenging Christianity to abandon or reformulate such traditional doctrines as original sin, the virgin birth, and the special creation of humankind, a challenge fiercely opposed by those flocking to the banner of Fundamentalism.² The battle over evolution was and still is as much a battle

over the interpretation of Scripture as it is a conflict over theories of science.

Darwin in the Twentieth Century

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, substantial doubts about the validity of natural selection led to an eclipse of Darwinism within the scientific community, comforting churchmen who preferred a divinely guided evolution. But over the past eighty years, doubts about Darwin’s version have been substantially laid to rest. Mendelian genetics applied to species populations provided support for natural selection. Following the discovery of the structure of DNA, enormous advances in genomics have provided irrefutable evidence for mutation and selection on the molecular level. More accurate techniques for dating geological ages and the discovery of many more hitherto unknown species, alive and extinct, have filled out in much greater detail the story of life’s history. Biotic evolution is likely to be the reigning paradigm and natural selection its best explanation for centuries to come.

This evolutionary paradigm has challenged theologians to reflect on its implications for Christian faith. Can one articulate a meaningful theology of an evolving world characterized by mutation and natural selection? How can one speak of divine action in such a world? What models of God’s relationship to the creation might make sense to people of faith in light of the new universe story? Does Holy Scripture, shorn of a strict literalism, still serve as a source for understanding the relationship between God and the world?

Contemporary Theological Models of God’s Relationship to an Evolving Creation

Over the past three decades the writings of Christian thinkers responding to these questions show that, far from being threatened by the scientific paradigm of evolution, a number of

theologians have confidently articulated new models of divine action that incorporate it. One overarching model, anticipated by the eighteenth-century mystic de Caussade, appears in the concept of **panentheism**, popularized by twentieth-century philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. Panentheism is to be distinguished from **pantheism**, which means “all things are God.” Panentheism means “all things are *in* God.” Peacocke, who pioneered in DNA research before becoming an Anglican priest and evolutionary theologian, put it this way: “God is the circumambient Reality enclosing all existing entities, structures and processes, and as operating in and through all, while being ‘more’ than all. Hence, all that is not God has its existence within God’s operation and Being.” Following continental Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann, he emphasizes that this concept is not to be understood spatially, as if the world were God’s body, but ontologically; (i.e., as a distinction in the order of being: the created world exists *in* but is not identical *with* the uncreated Creator). The world is given existence, energy, life, nourishment, and continuous creation by the God “in whom,” St. Paul said, “we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:15).³ Panentheism provides a framework within which other models can exist.

It should be pointed out that this and other models of relationship between God and the world are not intended to answer the question, “*How* does God create?” Behind it lies the understandable desire to be able to point to God’s “fingerprints” or to find a “causal joint” where God’s creative activity could be discerned. How reassuring that would be to so many believers! Intelligent Design advocates claim to be able to do so, and this is a major reason for the popularity of this new movement. But most theologians take the position of quantum physicist and Anglican priest John Polkinghorne

that “divine action will always be hidden.... [The] intermingling of providential grace with the freedom of nature will not be demonstrable by experiment though it may be discernable by the intuition of faith.”⁴

Among contemporary notions, something like Warfield’s concept of secondary causation appears in the thinking of astrophysicist and Jesuit William Stoeger. He holds that God uses the laws of nature as instruments to fulfill the divine purposes: “If we put this in an evolutionary context... we can conceive of God’s continuing creative action as being realized through the natural unfolding of nature’s potentialities and the continuing emergence of novelty, of self-organization, of life, of mind and spirit.” Such an understanding of God preserves the doctrine of God’s transcendence as well as God’s immanence: God is not a cause like natural causes.⁵

Physicist Howard J. Van Till proffers a similar notion, his principle of a “robust formational economy.” The evidence science has gathered may lead a believer to conclude that God has “thoughtfully conceptualized and fully gifted” the creation from its beginning, making it possible “for the creation to organize and transform itself from elementary forms of matter into the full array of physical structures and life-forms that have existed in the course of time.” One must understand “creation” not as “the imposing of form ... but the giving of being, a uniquely divine act.”⁶ Likewise, Polkinghorne characterizes the world as having a “free process” just as human beings have free will, a view shared by others. Peacocke suggests that just as a composer is present in the music that the performers make through their own interpretation and talent, so God is not only present in the compositional elements God creates but also in the “music” the world creates (cf. the improvisational quality of jazz). Random mutation and natural selection may be

seen, according to Roman Catholic theologian Elizabeth Johnson, as no threat to the notion of divine action:

God uses chance, so to speak, to ensure variety, resilience, novelty, and freedom in the universe, right up to humanity itself. Absolute Holy Mystery dwells within, encompasses, empowers through the evolutionary process..., thus making the world through chance and its genuinely irregular character. If God works through chance, then the natural creativity of chance itself can be thought of as a mode of divine creativity in which it participates.⁷

The Creator as Lover

In reflecting on such an evolving universe some theologians have emphasized a biblical model of God that differs from the popular notion of an Absolute Monarch determining every event. The God of Evolution is the God whose nature is love (1 John 4:8). Whitehead characterized God’s relationship to the world as that of a *persuasive Lover*, and others have taken up this theme. Consider that the love relationship is the fundamental and most intimate of relationships, and that the essence of love is to persuade rather than coerce. Consider further that the beloved’s response is to flourish, grow and emerge into fullness of life as a result of being loved. If this is so in human experience, in a much more profound way, speaking analogically (and it is important to understand that all God-talk is analogical and metaphorical), God’s divine, unconditional love for the creation must be such as to invite, to “lure” the creation into ever more complex ramifications of being. To accomplish this, God “freely accepts the limits of loving finite and created beings, [and] accepts the integrity of nature, its processes and its laws.” God invites the world through the complex interplay of its elements to emerge into more novel

forms and greater beauty through the evolutionary process.⁸

The Vulnerable God: Creation, Kenosis, Suffering and Redemption

Many Christians are likely to be uncomfortable with the notion that the Creator may be something less than the omnipotent God of classical theology, the God who exercises absolute power over the creation. Yet the notion of a vulnerable, self-limiting God is itself biblical. In the Letter to the Colossians (1:17), it is said of Christ (panentheistically) that “in him all things hold together.” Of this same Christ, Paul writes (Phil. 2:5-8) that “though he was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness, . . . [and] humbled himself. . . .” The Greek noun for “emptying” is **kenosis**, an important concept for many theologians today. Applied to God’s relationship to an evolving creation, it suggests that God freely and graciously withdraws absolute power over the creation in order to “let the world be,” to allow the world to experience its possibilities. Kenotic theology invites the believer to think of God’s relationship to the creation in a way that brings out love’s humility. Jürgen Moltmann reflects on Paul’s words that “love is patient” (1 Cor. 13:4):

God acts in the history of nature and human beings through his patient and silent presence, by which he gives those he has created space to unfold, time to develop, and power for their own movement. We look in vain for God in the history of nature . . . if what we are looking for is special divine interventions. Is it not much more that God waits, and awaits . . . ? ‘Waiting’ is never disinterested passivity, but the highest form of interest in the other. Waiting means expecting, expecting means inviting, inviting means

attracting, alluring, enticing. By doing this waiting and awaiting, one keeps an open space for the other, gives the other time, and creates possibilities of life for the other (2001, 149).⁹

Creation as kenosis is, in Polkinghorne’s words, “the work of Love.” It is God’s love, not God’s power, that is almighty.

However, an evolving creation brings into even sharper relief that always troubling theological conundrum known as **theodicy**: how can a loving and benevolent God allow so much suffering in nature? If evolution is creation, then how does the theologian justify God’s creating a process that has led species into dead ends and massive extinctions? What sense can one make of all this apparent brutality and destruction of life that counts life’s evolutionary history in many millions of species over billions of years? This was, after all, one stumbling block that led Darwin to lose faith in the benevolent God of his Anglican tradition. Some theologians have addressed this tragic question by turning to the concept of a loving, self-emptying, vulnerable God. Just as in human affairs, love must allow the beloved freedom to make mistakes and even fall into tragedy, so God’s love for his autonomous creation must take the risk of allowing evolution to lead individuals and species to suffering, death, and extinction. Lutheran minister and physicist George Murphy and Roman Catholic theologian John Haught look to a Theology of the Cross for inspiration. Murphy sees in the cross of Christ God’s answer to the suffering of the natural world as well as human suffering and sin: “God suffers with the world from whatever evil takes place.”¹⁰ Haught writes: “Evolutionary biology not only allows theology to enlarge its sense of God’s creativity by extending it over measureless eons of time; it also gives comparable magnitude to our sense of the divine participation in life’s long and often tormented journey.”¹¹

Yet for Christians a redemptive understanding of the world’s suffering is also possible in the light of this kenotic theodicy, as some theologians have asserted (an understanding I also share). For St Paul, through Christ “God was pleased to reconcile *all things* . . . by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20). God in Christ redeems the entire cosmos: the whole creation is “groaning like a woman in labor,” awaiting its release (Rom. 8:19-25). And through Christ’s resurrection, God brings to the whole creation the “promise of the future” (Haught) that will be fulfilled when some day, in some way—a mystery too deep to imagine—all things will be taken up into the life of God in Christ (1 Cor. 15:28; Eph. 1:10).¹² Paul’s mystical eschatology was adapted decades ago by paleontologist, Jesuit priest, and mystic Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a pioneer in reconciling evolution and Christian faith. Inspired by his spiritual mentor, he wrote that “Evolver and evolved shall merge into one, united by the differentiating and communicating action of love” (1 Cor. 15:24-28).¹³

These are some of the models of divine action in the world offered by contemporary Christian theologians. They present a theology of creation that draws from biblical themes and responds positively to the latest scientific understanding of the world. Just as scientists have revised their story of nature in the light of new discoveries, models and theories, giving to humanity an evolving and evolutionary narrative, so theologians are developing a comparable narrative of divine action in creation. Their reflections offer ways to affirm faith in creation while reinterpreting its meaning in light of the new universe story science has written.

Notes

1. For a general orientation to this subject, see the author’s website at Robert J. Schneider, “Science and Faith: Perspectives on Christianity and

Science,” <http://community.berea.edu/scienceandfaith> [accessed December 2, 2010]. In preparing this presentation, I wish to thank my reviewers for their suggestions and my wife Dr. Maria Lichtmann for her help.

2. Bowler, Peter, *Monkey Trials and Gorilla Sermons: Evolution and Christianity from Darwin to Intelligent Design* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 168-171.

3. Arthur Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming—Natural, Divine, and Human* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 158-59; “Articulating God’s Presence in and to the World Unveiled by the Sciences,” in Philip Clayton and Arthur Peacocke, ed., *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans, 2004), 146.

4. John Polkinghorne, *Quarks, Chaos and Christianity: Questions to Science and Religion* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 72.

5. William Stoeger, SJ, “Describing God’s Action in the World in the Light of Scientific Knowledge,” in *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, ed. Robert John Russell, Nancy C. Murphy, and Arthur R. Peacocke (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1995), 249.

6. Howard J. Van Till, “The Fully Gifted Creation,” in *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*, ed. J. P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 188.

7. Elizabeth Johnson, “Does God Play Dice? Divine Providence and Chance,” in *An Evolving Dialogue: Theological and Scientific Perspectives on Evolution*, ed. James B. Miller, rev. ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 363, 365. Reprinted from *Theological Studies* 56 (1996): 3-18 at http://www.aaas.org/spp/dser/03_Areas/evolution/perspectives/Johnson_1996.shtml [accessed December 1, 2010].

8. Denis Edwards, *The God of Evolution: A Trinitarian Theology* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 40, 42.

9. Jürgen Moltmann, “God’s Kenosis in the Creation and the Consummation of the World,” in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans, 2001), 149.

10. George L. Murphy, *The Cosmos in the Light of the Cross* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 87.

11. John F. Haught, John F., *God after Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 46.

12. See Murphy, *Cosmos*.

13. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, *Christianity and Evolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1969), 308.

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You Can Get There From Here

A half century in the making, America's Interstate Highway System has capped 225 years of highway development.

By Gary R. Harris



About the Author

An Asheville, NC native, Gary R. Harris has been a member of the Western Carolina

Torch Club for more than forty years, serving in all the club offices. With a PhD from UNC Chapel Hill, he was a teacher and administrator in the Durham, NC public schools and a professor at Converse College in Spartanburg, SC before teaching in the education department at Furman University in Greenville, SC. Now retired, he and his wife Hazel, a doctoral graduate of Duke, have two children and a grandson. Dr. Harris enjoys reading, old movies, golf, cycling, training Golden Retrievers, fly fishing, and playing the banjo.

Presented to the Western South Carolina Torch Club on January 26, 2010.

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Introduction

The growth of America has paralleled the growth of its highway system. While the title of this paper suggests a mere getting from one place to another, the road systems provide the foundation for much of the nation's economic activity as goods and services move to destinations far and near. The defense of the nation is dependent on roads that can handle rapid, efficient movement of military personnel and equipment. Convenience and safety for all travelers has always been a concern. The U.S. Interstate System is one of the greatest construction

accomplishments the world has seen.¹

Early Road Construction and Funding

The first roads in America were Indian or animal trails. They were usually well located lying along the shortest and best routes across the country. Many of today's major highways follow these trails. After English settlers made them into roads, they were widened by order of the provincial or local authorities. Nevertheless, they remained very poor—dusty in the summer and almost impassable in the spring and winter with unannounced rickety bridges, dangerous fords, and deep mud. During the colonial period, a man venturesome enough to travel from Philadelphia to New York would not think it amiss to make his will and assemble his family for prayer before beginning his journey. In 1784, George Washington set out on horseback to survey a route for America's first federal interstate highway. He was concerned that western settlers would become economically and politically dependent on Spain or Great Britain if he did not open a wide door and make a smooth way for them to travel. The idea of a National Road was adopted by Jefferson and a sympathetic Congress. In 1806, President Jefferson signed a congressional act establishing the National Road. The law proclaimed the federal government's participation in road construction. Road commissioners were appointed to select a route and plan for the construction of the first interstate highway. The road's original

road systems provide the foundation for much of the nation's economic activity as goods and services move to destinations far and near.

construction was loosely copied from the French who at the time were considered the finest road builders in the world. It was twenty feet wide, had a one-foot-deep foundation on a base of seven-inch stones, with a travel surface of three inch stones. The road covered 131 miles from Cumberland, Maryland to what is now Wheeling, West Virginia. By 1818, at a cost of \$13,000 per mile, more than twice its original estimate of \$6,000 per mile, the nation's coastal region and the fast expanding interior were connected to form America's first interstate road.

As this National Road was extended westward from Wheeling and the Department of War was put in charge, its quality improved. The Army Corps of Engineers supervised the work. The McAdam system dominated construction and repair on the road into the next century. The approach to building a durable highway was simple: dig a shallow road foundation of 10 inches and fill it with smaller stones no more than two and a half inches wide and no less than one inch in diameter which would in time unite by its own angles to form a hard, solid surface. In Ohio, two percent of the sale of federal public lands paid for much of the construction, but the federal government

could not impose tolls along state roads to fund the highway's upkeep. After much debate and constitutional hairsplitting, the federal government began transferring ownership of the National Road to the states after paying for improvements and installing toll gates. For the remainder of the nineteenth century, the road system grew rapidly with the expanding nation. Mud held the nation prisoner, keeping most people from traveling more than 20 miles from their homes. Around the turn of the twentieth century, only seven percent of the nation's more than two million miles of roads had any hard surfaces, primarily around the larger cities.²

Bicyclists became the loudest single voice advocating good roads. One of their number, General Roy Stone, became the first special agent for the country's first federal road agency, The Office of Road Inquiry. The office was housed at the Department of Agriculture, as highways were seen as a farm issue—connecting the farmer to his market with good roads. With his meager \$10,000 annual budget, he very cleverly planted small sections of well-built roads, sometimes no more than 100 yards long, around the country in well publicized demonstrations beginning in Atlanta, Georgia in 1896. His goal was to addict the nation to good roads.³

The Automobile

Charles and Frank Duryea had America's first crude automobile running up and down the streets of Springfield, MA by 1893. Henry Ford had his Model T out by 1908, and with his revolutionary manufacturing system had built over 15,000,000 automobiles by 1927. Many other automobiles were being developed during this time, and their rapid spread and acceptance in the first two decades of the twentieth

century created an exponentially greater need for good roads. Ford would not participate in the private, corporate funding of the transcontinental Lincoln Highway, claiming that the road system would necessarily become a job for governments.

Trucks came into their own during WWI, delivering crucial supplies at home and on the battlefields of Europe. Victory came at the cost of the country's entire road network. The heavy trucks destroyed nearly every mile of major roadways in the United States. Every type of surface failed under their weight—bricks, stone, gravel, and clay. In Michigan, however, a stretch of highway built with an extra thick concrete surface survived well under the heaviest traffic the war effort produced, so there was hope for the future. By the 1920s, improvements in the process of applying asphalt and cement made it easier and cheaper to pave rural roads in America.⁴

Federal-State Highway Department Partnerships

States began as early as 1893 creating highway departments, but all states were forced to get their highway acts together in order to take advantage of federal legislation with its promise of generous funding. President Wilson gave the presidential seal of approval to the banding together of a group of highway officials creating the American Association of State Highway Officials. This was a monumental step for the highway movement in America. These were professionals who knew how to build good roads and were dedicated to the job and had official authority at the state level to do so. Further, it provided a quasi-independent forum in which states and the federal government could seriously discuss road building interests out of sight of politicians. The partnership of federal and state

governments built the interstate highway system. There was a dramatic increase in road building during the 1920s and 30s. Thomas McDonald was appointed Chief of the Bureau of Public Roads in 1919 and, for the next thirty-four years, he pushed hard for more and better roads, always with one simple objective: "We will be able to drive out of any county seat in the U.S. at 35 mph and drive into any other county seat and never crack a spring."

Federal Aid Road Acts and the Pershing Map

The Federal Aid Road Act of 1916 laid the financial and political groundwork for the federal and state partnership by authorizing \$75 million in matching funds over the next five years for highway construction. Funds would be released only to states that had a highway department. The states would maintain the roads in perpetuity. In 1916, only eleven of the forty-eight states had highway departments. By 1919, every state was on board. If the Act of 1916 laid the groundwork, the Federal Highway Aid Act of 1921 provided some real muscle, with five times more funding than the 1916 act. McDonald used every opportunity to build a case for a good road system. In 1921, the U.S. Army accepted his invitation to determine the most important overland routes for national defense. Ultimately, a map thirty-two feet long (one inch for every eight miles) was delivered to the Army General Staff. General Pershing himself testified before Congress that the highways most important to National Defense were also those most needed for commercial and industrial growth and the motoring public. The military's map, dubbed the Pershing Map, foreshadowed the future U.S. Interstate System. Thanks to federal gasoline taxes and FDR's work programs, road building continued even

through the Depression.⁵

The Eisenhower Years

Another military figure initiated the construction of a highway system of greater magnitude than the Great Pyramids, the Great Wall of China, the aqueducts of Rome, and the Panama and Suez Canals all combined. Dwight David Eisenhower knew the value of a good road. He made a career out of understanding how to put them to use. As a young army officer, he drove across the nation in 1919 as part of the U.S. Army's first motorized cross country expedition, witnessing the sad condition of the country's roads and the gaping hole they created in the nation's defensive network. The convoy had 39 officers, 285 enlisted men driving 81 vehicles of every size, shape, and make in a line that stretched for 3 miles. Ike was assigned the convoy as an observer for the Army's new Tank Corps. The convoy followed the Lincoln Highway, a private, corporate project begun a few years earlier, which existed largely in the imagination and on paper. More than half of the 3,000 mile trip was made over dirt, mud, and sand roads. Two scouts on motorcycles were ordered to move out ahead and blaze a trail over the poorly marked road—using painted arrows. It's hard to say if the Lincoln Highway or the convoy suffered greater losses. No one was killed but there were injuries. Trucks crashed through bridges into rivers, skidded off roads and rolled down mountain sides, or just gave out with the beating from the rough, rutted roads. Nine trucks had to be left behind as unsalvageable.

This trip made a lasting impression on Eisenhower. Later, as Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, he led the largest land battle America has ever fought, the Battle of the Bulge, moving more soldiers, fire power, and supplies, at faster speeds than the world had ever

seen or has yet to see again. He did most of it on existing roadways. He, in fact, used the Nazis' own highways to defeat them. Hitler had completed 2400 miles of the Autobahn, a military highway of extraordinary design and quality. Hitler fought hard to keep Ike's armies off the Autobahn, but once on it, the allies literally used it to chase them down. Once the Allies controlled this highway, they were able to force an unconditional surrender in just 6 weeks. Years after the U.S. Interstate System construction had begun, Eisenhower recalled, "After seeing the autobahns of modern Germany, and knowing the asset these highways were to the Germans, I decided, as President, to put an emphasis on this kind of road building. I made a personal and absolute decision to see that the nation would benefit by it. The old convoy had started me thinking about good two-lane highways, but Germany had made me see the wisdom of broader ribbons across the land."

Ike's Grand Plan and Its Funding

At the outset of his presidency, Ike began pushing for a brand new highway that would be built on a new right of way. Running past old U.S. highways, it would be built to the highest design standards and with the best materials in the world. Many governors objected to the federal government's being involved in road building, using gas taxes from each state. But Ike had no intention of leaving work of such overriding national importance to the states. As conservative as his politics were, he believed a new interstate highway system should be built from the top down as the finest highways in the world had been—those of Rome, France, and Germany. He strategically chose the July 12, 1954 Governor's Conference to roll out his Grand Plan. The death of his sister-in-law prevented him from

attending, but, unwilling to postpone his announcement, he left prepared notes for Vice President Richard Nixon to read. He wanted a 50 billion dollar highway system finished in ten years. Nixon recalled Ike's convoy trip, and pointed out that highway casualties were comparable to a bloody war with 40,000 deaths a year. Civil suits clogged the courts, economic losses were in the billions a year because of inefficiencies, detours, and traffic jams. Most gripping was the inadequacies to meet demands of catastrophe or defense, should an atomic war come.

He encouraged the governors "to study the matter and recommend to me the cooperative action you think the Federal Government and the 48 states should take to meet these requirements so that I can submit a positive proposal to the next session of Congress." After some reluctance, the governors saw opportunity in the Grand Plan's 50 billion dollar pot of gold. The speech paved the way for Ike's plan to be accepted. The big question became "Who is going to pay for it?" Bonds, recommended by a blue ribbon panel, lost favor because of the interest pay out. User taxes suggested in a bill presented by Representative George Fallon of Maryland were shot down because they were claimed to be too punitive. But Ike continued to hammer and finally it all came together. At last everybody saw the benefits of the Grand Plan and their stake in it. Fallon drafted a new and improved federal aid to highways act including a Federal Highway Trust Fund devised by Congressman Hale Boggs of Louisiana. The trust would collect its money from federal taxes on gasoline, diesel fuel, rubber tires, heavy trucks, buses and other items. Tolls would be allowed in certain areas. This Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 led to the construction of more than 41,000 miles

of highways. Over the course of thirteen years, the original act promised to reimburse—not advance—the states 90% of the cost to complete their portions of the system, whatever the cost ended up to be.

On August 2, 1956, the first contract for the building of the interstate system was awarded by the Missouri State Highway Commission. This was the beginning of the Interstate Decade, 1956-1966, when more than half the new Interstates were built. Once started, no one could claim it was theirs. Presidents, governors, and leaders of industry became participants and spectators to the biggest show on earth.

Construction Standardization

Ike had said he wanted the best design and the best material in the world to go into the Interstate System. Devising rules for building was the first step. Standards for signs, shields, steel, gravel, and sand continually evolved. In 1956, the states and the Bureau of Public Roads had the task of starting from scratch. Standardization became the Interstate's hallmark and perhaps its most important characteristic. Before the system was built, a 10 mile drive could go from bone rattling to sublime. One of the first decisions was to build, near Ottawa, Illinois, seven miles of test road at a cost of \$27 million. It was a joint public and private effort. In November of 1958, the test track was ready. This highway to nowhere may be the most important stretch of the Interstate System ever constructed. It was an experiment in the durability of road materials and the benefits of one design over another. It was a laboratory where scientists used 24 ton missile carriers loaded with blocks of concrete to carry out their work. Their mission was to see how long it took to pulverize the experimental roads and bridges. It was a two lane loop, curving and

straight. Half of the seven-mile loop was paved with concrete; the other half with asphalt. The track was built in 836 separate sections. The sections had various subsurface materials and used different engineering concepts. Included in the loop were sixteen bridges, scaled down models of the over 50,000 similar structures that would eventually be built on the Interstate System. Durability was important because the road must last at least 20 years before being reconstructed. Everything had to be right because overbuilding was expensive and wasteful. Under designing could cost more in the long run. The Defense Department supplied large and small vehicles for testing and plenty of soldiers to drive them. Their duty was simple: Start driving and don't stop until November 1960. They wreaked the expected devastation. Entire sections were destroyed. The sections left standing were the obvious winners. The best materials were compiled into manuals, which became the "bible" for building the Interstate System. The manuals were quickly revised when new developments and discoveries came to light.

Signage

Signage on the Interstate System was important. A driver has only ten seconds to read a sign 1000 feet away. The color of the signs was of utmost importance. The problem was resolved by putting up three submitted colors on a yet-to-be-opened section of highway in Greenbelt, MD. Hundreds of drivers were asked to speed by and make their choice on background colors of blue, green, and black with white letters. The polled motorists chose green, and so it was, is, and will be. The initial investment was \$200,000,000 with the major signs costing from \$10 to \$50,000 each. A test similar to the one to select the background color for signs

was run on the selection of shields that identify the highways themselves. Over one hundred entries were in the running, but the final choice after the drive-by tests were run was the familiar red, white, and blue. The highway numbering system was established beginning with the lowest numbers in the southwestern corner of the U.S. and increasing the farther north and east the highways are found—the exact opposite of the U.S. routes. For example, U.S. Route One goes up the east coast while Interstate Five goes up the west coast.

Rights-of-Way and Urban Paths in the Yellow Book

Rights-of-way had to be purchased. For the entire Grand Plan, about 2 million acres of land were set aside, an average of nearly 40 acres for each mile. Part of that land would be for the highway itself and part for the services and amenities that were expected to grow up beside it. Earth was moved—43 billion cubic yards compared to 262 million for the Panama Canal. When Ike signed the deal to create the Interstate System in 1956, he virtually launched a new industry—the manufacturing of heavy earth-moving equipment. Ultimately the System went downtown. In September 1955, every Congressman received the Yellow Book, a hundred-page document that identified the crude paths of the soon-to-be-constructed Interstate System through the lawmakers' hometowns with simple maps of 122 cities in 43 states. When it came time for the vote on Ike's Grand Plan, the Yellow Book played a significant role in getting Eisenhower the support he needed. It was the Bureau of Public Roads that had created the book. One of the strangest things about all this is that Ike knew nothing about the Yellow Book. His staff had told him it was a historical narrative of highway legislation. In

reality, it contained over 100 maps of urban highways Ike never wanted built. He was nearing the end of his presidency when he learned of the Yellow Book and its direct contradiction to his wishes, but it was a battle he decided not to fight. The ballooning budget could be a matter for the next administration to deal with.

In the cities, the right of way problems, the social and racial problems, and the engineering and construction problems were all enormous. It was all accomplished with hundreds, even thousands of miles of Interstates, connectors, spurs, beltways and accesses built in and around the cities named in the Yellow Book, culminating in the last 7.3 miles of the Interstate to be built. The Big Dig in Boston simply goes under everything instead of over it. Interstate 93 was run under the subway system at a cost of \$15,782 per inch—leaving the streets, buildings, and parks untouched. The construction technology and engineering are mind boggling. It has, in fact, been a laboratory for every conceivable kind of tunnel building problem.⁶

Safety Standards

Since the mid 1950's, we have seen the suburban movement develop with the convenient Interstate System. The trucking industry has far surpassed rail traffic with 46,677 miles of the Grand Plan to work with crossing 54,663 bridges and diving into 104 tunnels. There are sixty-two routes on the Interstate System. Only three are transcontinental running coast to coast—I-10, I-80, and I-90. There are seven that run from the South to Canada. Without an Interstate System, 6,000 more people would lose their lives in auto accidents every year. Two people die for every hundred million miles traveled on other highways compared to one person for every

hundred million miles traveled on the Interstate. There are at least two twelve-foot-wide lanes each way. On the left is a four-foot wide shoulder, on the right a ten-foot breakdown lane, with curves banked and gradual, designed to sustain seventy mile-per-hour travel in the country and fifty in cities. Grades are six percent or less in the country and five percent or less in town. There are guardrails, berms, concrete dividers, breakaway signs and lamp posts, good signage to prevent sudden swerves, and the rumble strip to awaken sleepy drivers. Enough premium quality concrete, rebar and asphalt has been laid to construct a wall nine feet thick and fifty feet high that would reach around the world. As Ike wished, safety has been of prime concern. In 1991, the U.S. Congress and President George Bush approved the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, a \$151 billion, six year program, bringing an end to construction of the Interstate System. The Big Dig under Boston, the final project, built the last miles with the last dollars to be spent in the Grand Plan. The next generation of road building projects will be considered improvements to the completed system.⁷

Notes

1. Thomas A. Bailey, *The American Pageant* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1956), 72; Oliver Perry Chitwood, *A History of Colonial America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948), 470. While the Bailey and Chitwood sources are ancient, they bring an interesting flavor to the difficulty of travel in the early development of roads.

2. The progress in early road building was so significant that as early as 1831 people in Ohio were able to eat fresh oysters that were shipped from

the East by stagecoach. See Dan McNichol, *The Roads That Built America* (New York: Sterling Publishing, 2006), 29.

3. Henry Ford's influence with the "Model T" created a new and greater demand for a better road system. He felt that the only way to go was through government and refused to support private, corporate construction. See Casey Cooper, "History of the U.S. Highway System" (2004), at www.gbcnet.com/ushighways/history.html [accessed November 28, 2010].

4. Ibid. Road-building technology advanced in a logarithmic manner, allowing good roads to be built just about anywhere.

5. Pershing's map showed a clear connection between roads for commerce and those for national defense. McNichol, *Roads That Built*, 63.

6. Ibid., 146. There was considerable social unrest regarding Interstate construction in some cities, especially Boston, where rights-of-way were planned to rip through many ethnic communities.

7. "The Interstates affect every American, every single day," concluded Richard Weingroff, the Federal Highway Administration's historian. Ibid., 219.

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Talking Silence: A Memorial Tribute for Thomas Merton on the Occasion of the Fortieth Anniversary of His Death, December 10, 2008

The well-known Trappist monk was far from silent in promoting ecumenical dialogue.

By Joseph G. Reish



About the Author

Joseph G. Reish, PhD, is Dean of Libraries at Western Michigan University. With degrees from Georgetown (ÔBK), Middlebury (Vermont/Paris), and Wisconsin-Madison, he is Professor in French and recipient of the Chevalier des Palmes Académiques, an honorary knighthood bestowed by the French Ministry of Education. He publishes in French eighteenth century cultural studies, drama, and academic administration. A member of The Torch Club of Kalamazoo MI for six years, he first delivered a presentation on “In the Shadow of Charles DeGaulle, ‘*un grand homme grand.*’” He joined the Editorial Board of Cistercian Publications in May 2010. Reish has assisted in the publication of a major resource for Cistercian Studies, a descriptive catalog of the Obrecht Collection of Monastic Manuscripts housed in Special Collections at the University, once described by Thomas Merton in *Sign of Jonas* as “treasures that no millionaire has or enjoys.”

Presented to the Kalamazoo Torch Club on December 10, 2008.



Our mental associations with monks in the Western Christian tradition most likely run from the jolly, ale-drinking monk of British folklore, Friar Tuck, to the sinister Silas, the albino, self-mortifying hitman fictionalized in Dan

Brown’s highly popular *Da Vinci Code*. We might also remember the real-life, eunuch-monk, Abelard, and his unfortunate affair with Héloïse. Then there is the narcoleptic Frère Jacques in the French folk song, where the monk fails to heed the narrative imperative “to ring the abbey bells” for the morning Divine Office: “Sonnez les matines. Sonnez les matines.” In the English version, Brother John fails to join his brethren in the choir for “matins,” despite the fact that “Morning bells are ringing. Morning bells are ringing.” John, like his cross-channel twin, is still nestled in his plank-board bed in the common dormitory of the abbey, clad in his customary white robe with the black scapular as are all Cistercians of the Strict Observance.

Many are familiar with Thomas Merton, the famous twentieth century contemplative Cistercian monk, whether or not they have read his works. He lived at the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani, Trappist KY, but had contacts throughout the world. Merton, also known as Father Mary Louis, OCSO, first entered into our popular culture because of his best-selling novel, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, published in 1948.¹ The *Intercollegiate Studies Institute* lists Merton’s work as one of the “50 Best Books of the Twentieth Century.”² Robert Giroux, a long-time friend of the monk from their Columbia University days and later publisher at Harcourt Brace, speculates how the book’s success propelled its author into the national literary consciousness: “I

believe the most essential element is timing. The *Mountain* appeared at a time of great disillusion: we had won World War II but the cold war had started, and the public was looking for reassurance.”³ A direct, tangible result of the book’s popularity was the high number of postulants entering monasteries after the war, even arriving at Merton’s Abbey of Gethsemani in military uniform. Brother Patrick Hart, Merton’s secretary and literary executor at the Abbey, has told this writer about the “Cistercian Fever” caused by the popularity of *The Seven Storey Mountain*. Other monastic orders like the Benedictines attempted to inoculate themselves against this epidemic that brought more avid recruits to Gethsemani in the 1950s than to other contemplative or mendicant communities.

Forty years ago, Merton died in a freakish accident of electrocution in Bangkok, Thailand, when an upright electric fan fell on him. His front-page obituary in the *New York Times* noted that “the Trappist monk... spoke from the world of silence to questing millions who sought God.... [H]e was a writer of singular grace about the City of God and an essayist of penetrating originality on the City of Man.... In the history of recent Roman Catholic letters, Merton occupied a place of unusual prominence. He wrote of ageless spiritual life and religious devotion with the knowledge of a modern.”⁴ Despite an earnest desire for seclusion and solitude, Merton became an object of popular pilgrimages

to the hinterland of Kentucky in search of the author of *Mountain*. As obituary noted, “Merton was permitted, even encouraged, to propagate his thoughts [on the virtues, if not the rapture, of contemplative life by his Superior, Abbot Frederic Dunne]. This he did in poetry, in a stream of books, in reviews of books by others and letters to editors.”⁵ The reluctant dynamic between mandated utterance through written texts and personally chosen silence peppers Merton’s early writings. His Superior profits by Merton’s facility for the written word, and the latter obeys his Father Abbot.

In recognition of the fortieth anniversary of his death, this paper will explore Thomas Merton’s literary and personal legacy, filtered through my personal responses to a variety of texts from his extensive bibliography and oral and written commentary from those who knew him well. His literary executor, Brother Patrick, encouraged me in these efforts to go directly to Father Louie’s texts and by-pass the commentators, pointing out that “Merton himself in his journals tells his side of the story accurately and honestly. How those pages are interpreted is left to [you] the reader.”⁶ My desire to commemorate this anniversary, growing out of my enthusiasm for Merton and multiple visits to the Abbey of Gethsemani in Trappist KY this past year, coincided with a program opportunity: I was pre-destined to engage the Kalamazoo Torch Club, and now the wider readership of *Torch*, in a conversation about Thomas Merton.

My personal attraction to Merton began some five years ago. Despite a rich, fulfilling, and dynamic family and professional life, my spiritual being was running at a deficit, having neither grown nor matured for years. I had long given up on my sense of awe, wonderment, and insight into what must have been an ephemeral calling or spiritual disposition. While practicing—or walking through—my Catholic faith, I had been acting like

the dyslexic who gets by, perhaps often succeeds, with routine motions and faked spontaneity. As grains of this spiritual subterfuge irritated my sense of personal authenticity, I recognized a need for a major change in this aspect of my being.

The situation changed radically during an extended discussion on the modern Roman Catholic Church during a holiday in Belgrade, Serbia, in February 2005, with a friend, Monsignor Kevin, who accused me of being stuck in a “pre-Vatican II” ditch. Yes, he had pegged my calcified religiosity! Readily I confessed to my friend Kevin that “teen masses,” dancing nuns, sounds of banjos and bongos, and Disney-like exegesis of the Gospel texts all seemed to appeal to the lowest intellect in the “cry room.” I felt distant from the communion of the faithful. Kevin let me know that I could pilot my spiritual life higher. Communal forms of worship—mass, for example—would still be part of my renewal, but I should incorporate private meditative prayer time to enrich my public practices of faith.

For my spiritual agenda, Kevin suggested reading about individuals who had discovered unique approaches to finding the presence of God within themselves and in others. Thomas Merton figured prominently among his choices and won my thorough appreciation from the start. I acknowledged that Santa Teresa de Avila’s prayer life was too difficult to integrate into my life. I was not yet prepared for deep Spanish mysticism. I did latch on to St. Edith Stern, whose intellect and prayer life moved me deeply. Her Christian feminism seemed thoroughly logical to me, a cautious male feminist in matters religious. Ste. Thérèse de Lisieux provided a creative approach to spirituality involving the smallest and humblest of God’s creations. But I truly liked the robust—albeit, meat and potatoes—approach to living faith illustrated in Thomas Merton’s collective

writings.

Once I had finished *The Seven Storey Mountain*, I expressed new passion for matters spiritual, in effect a renewal I described thus in my “cyber journal”:

Merton’s book is electric with the awe of progressive spirituality. He passes from a cognitive sense of reality to a spiritually sensitive view of his place, role, and identity in a new reality, which, however, remains built on rational thought. Bit by bit, he divests himself of the tangible, the selfish, and the stubborn control of his world, and he enters into new life. Merton’s Baroque rapture overwhelms him, and I admit being swept away in the euphoria. Merton is consistently exuberant, whether he finds himself on a first visit to Paris, sojourning in Cuba, writing in Olean, NY, or entering the Abbey of Gethsemani. He is filled with so much spirit that it becomes infectious, and I, the reader, contract the same disposition.

I later came to realize that Merton, like me, had experienced a spiritual journey out of an empty life to a life of contemplation. In his former life, he had drunk deeply and tasted myriad pleasures bordering on the scandalous. Merton’s siring a child while a student at Cambridge was the impetus for his English godfather to send him off to New York City, a form of familial exile. Merton would continue his undergraduate studies in English at Columbia University. The youthful escapade dogged Merton’s psyche as he converted to Catholicism in 1938 and attempted a fast track to the clerical life. The illicit parenting seemed to have served as the reason for Merton’s not being accepted into the Franciscan Friars. He had had contact with the Franciscans at St. Bonaventure University where he taught after the

completion of his master's degree in literature from Columbia. In 1941, the same year he was turned down by the Franciscans, the gates of the Cistercian Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani opened wide for him and, at 26, Merton renounced the active world for a quiet contemplative life at the monastery tucked away in the knobs and hollers of Nelson County, Kentucky.

A fellow Torch member admitted to having read Merton's "twentieth century confessions" and the monk's description of his trials and successes at scaling *The Seven Storey Mountain*. He had devoured the book, and still spoke of it with enthusiasm. Formerly a fellow explorer searching for definition in his life much like Merton, my interlocutor had first been heartened by the monk's chronicling of his personal transformation. He had enjoyed the book as he was then also searching for an affirming, comfortable identity. Today, though, he confesses that he is a confirmed atheist and secure in this choice: "I don't believe in god." He would most likely admit that Merton's opus falls into his personal reading history as a "period piece" of times gone by. My exchange with that fellow Torch Club member illustrates that each one of us moves on in life; values change; we grow. In a preface to the Japanese edition of *Mountain* written two years before his death, Merton had second thoughts about his autobiography that had appeared almost twenty years earlier: "Perhaps if I were to attempt this book today, it would be written differently. Who knows? But it was written when I was still quite young, and that is the way it remains. The story no longer belongs to me."⁷ The organic nature of the quest motif had, in fact, been evoked at the very end of *Mountain*, even from its first printing: "SIT FINIS LIBRI, NON FINI QUAERENDI (LET THE BOOK END, BUT NOT THE END OF INQUIRY—translation my own)."⁸

Other Torch Club colleagues have told me about their fascination with the later Merton works of the nineteen fifties and sixties when he emerged from the literal and figurative confines of the monastery. They expressed interest in the more public-oriented, outward-looking parts of his bibliography that reflected his contact with the broader U.S. and the world. Once, on a rare occasion outside of the monastery, while walking the streets of Louisville on March 18, 1958, Merton had a personal epiphany that changed his focus outward to the noise of the active world he had left years before. He chronicles this insightful moment later in his *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*:

*In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers.*⁹

Aware of his professed Cistercian vow of "stability," whereby he would live and die in the communal space that he entered as a postulant in 1941, Father Louie remained grounded, in principle, at Gethsemani for twenty-seven years. Yet with memories of his youth serving as his travel journals, Merton became an armchair tourist at the abbey transported in spirit through his insatiable reading, translations, and epistolary connections with as many as 2100 correspondents. Bibliographers note that he left examples of correspondence numbering in the ten-thousand-figure range. His journals, essays, and poetry witness a growing personal quest for inner peace, inspired and extended by contact with other people and cultures espousing similar internal dynamics.

Merton reached out to kindred spirits of the Eastern religions (Hinduism and Buddhism) in the spirit of a pan-global monasticism. He championed the ecumenical spirit and interreligious

dialogue flowing out of the Vatican II Council. Moving further outside himself into public space, Merton attempted to reformat his ethic of inner peace for that of outer peace, fairness, and justice. Championing Civil Rights, he would write on social justice for the Black American minority. Advocating a position of universal peace, he corresponded with those in the anti-war movement at the time of the Vietnam War, and spoke in favor of nuclear curtailment because too often the world stood on the edge of global conflagration. A recent article in the *National Catholic Reporter* underscores Merton's activist tendencies in confronting the tumultuous world of the 60s:

*Throughout the 1960s, [Merton] wrote about the hot issues: social justice, civil rights, nuclear arms, the war in Vietnam. "I am on the side of the people who are being burned, cut to pieces, tortured, held as hostages, gassed, ruined, destroyed. They are the victims of both sides. To take sides with massive power is to take sides against the innocent."*¹⁰

Only in the last year of his life did Merton actually breach the walls of the monastery and begin real travels to the Far West of the United States and eventually to India and Thailand. Early in that year, Abbot Flavian Burns had taken over the responsibility of the abbey; the young superior had, in fact, been a scholastic under Merton's tutelage in the 50s. The older Merton was his confessor, and because of this bond Merton would have greater possibilities of freedom of movement and the eventuality of accepting an invitation to speak at a conference in Bangkok in early December. The focus of the gathering was to push for the acculturation of Western monastic orders established in Asia with practices familiar to the Far East. Merton was slated as a keynote speaker because of his familiarity with the dynamics of East-

West religions and his desire to establish inter-religious dialogue. Spending time in India before the conference permitted him to have three one-hour sessions with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Writing to Burns from New Delhi, Merton notes a kinship developing between the Dalai Lama and himself:

The talks with the Dalai Lama were very fine. He did a lot of off-the-record talking, very open and sincere, a very impressive person, deeply concerned about the contemplative life, and also very learned. I have seldom met anyone with whom I clicked so well and I feel that we have become good friends... You will be happy to know that when we parted the DL called me a "Geyshe," which is for his group the highest praise, meaning one who is completely learned and proficient in spiritual things. Someone who was with me said the DL had never before said any such thing of a Westerner.¹¹

Any further communication between these two like-minded men sadly ceased abruptly that December 10. Merton's body ironically returned to the States in a military transport that had also served in Vietnam. Some twenty-eight years later, the Dalai Lama would reciprocate Merton's visit to India by visiting the monk's grave at Gethsemani Abbey, adorning the simple white cross marking the site with his own prayer shawl. In his homily for Merton's funeral mass, Abbot Burns referenced his special affection for his mentor:

This was a younger Brother, even a boyish Brother, one who could have lived a hundred years without growing old. His life was far from silent, despite his hermit bent, since he was... an artful minister of the Word... Father Louis undertook this trip to Asia in the spirit of th[e] same quest for God [practiced at Gethsemani]. His letters to me

from there were buoyant with hope for further progress in his quest... [T]hose Asian monks ... symbolized for him man's ancient and perennial desire for the deep things of God.¹²

In his anniversary tribute, Brother Patrick recognizes that "Thomas Merton has been dead 40 years, and [I] remain still his secretary and [am] grateful for the opportunity to assist in editing some of his voluminous legacy for future generations of seekers after the one thing necessary."¹³ In like manner, I much appreciate this opportunity to bring Father Louis, a.k.a. Thomas Merton, to the attention of my fellow members of Torch, and to share the impact that he has had on my intellectual and spiritual life.¹⁴

Notes

1. Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1948).

2. See http://www.isi.org/journals/ir/50best_worst/50best.html [accessed December 8, 2008].

3. Robert Giroux, "Introduction to the 50th Anniversary Edition," of *The Seven Storey Mountain, An Autobiography of Faith*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998), xvi, at <http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&id=ncX7XkyIqP0C&dq=seven+storey+mountain&printsec=frontcover&source=web&ots=QyDqmdyrKd&sig=aXj0ODCfnCBfpOgmIjehwGgdO3c&sa=X&oi=bookresult&resnum=8&ct=result#PPR19,M1> [accessed December 8, 2008].

4. Israel Shenker, "Thomas Merton Is Dead at 53; Monk Wrote of Search for God," *New York Times*, December 11, 1968.

5. Ibid.

6. See Brother Patrick's personal fortieth anniversary tribute, "Remembering Thomas Merton, A Final Communion with 'Uncle Louie,'"

Louisville Courier-Journal, December 7, 2008.

7. Merton, Thomas. (1989). *Preface to the Japanese Edition of the Seven Storey Mountain, August 1963* in "Honorable Reader," *Reflections on My Work*, ed. Robert E. Daggs (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company), 39.

8. Ibid., 423.

9. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1968), 156.

10. Rich Heffern, "Merton: Argonaut Exploring the Christian Soul," reprinted from *Mirabile Dictu*, December 12, 2008, originally published in *National Catholic Reporter*, December 10, 2008, at http://ca.renewedpriesthood.org/hpage.cfm?Web_ID=1181 [accessed October 27, 2010].

11. Thomas Merton, *The School of Charity; Letters, Selected and Edited by Brother Patrick Hart* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990), 409-10.

12. Patrick Hart, ed., "Epilogue: A Homily," *Thomas Merton/Monk: A Monastic Tribute* (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 1974), 219-20.

13. *Louisville Courier-Journal*, December 7, 2008.

14. Beyond narratives, poetry, letters, journals, and social commentary, Merton's artistic output also includes photography, drawing, artful pedagogy, and spiritual treatises. Interested readers interested should mine the incredible riches of The Merton Center at Bellarmine University, Louisville KY, <http://www.merton.org/>, join the International Thomas Merton Society, enjoying the newsletter included in the membership fee, <http://www.mertoncenter.org/ITMS/newsletter17-1.htm>, and spend a "Week with Thomas Merton," April 10-15, 2011, in Louisville, Bardstown, and Gethsemani with the Exploritas Road Scholar Program, <http://www.mertoncenter.org/events.htm#1>.

How Children Learn Language (and Why Adults Cannot Learn the Same Way)

Modern theories of language acquisition give children the edge.

By Ann St. Clair Lesman



About the Author

Ann St. Clair Burwell Lesman did her undergraduate work in foreign languages at Rollins College, has Master's degrees from Duke and the University of Maryland and a PhD from the University of Maryland, with additional graduate work at the University of North Carolina and The Johns Hopkins University. In addition to her doctoral dissertation in diachronic linguistics, her recent scholarly activity concerns machine translation and word-sense disambiguation. Coauthor of textbooks and websites for the teaching of Spanish, she is currently a Professor in the Foreign Language department at Shenandoah University. Past-president of the Winchester Torch Club, Ann lives with her husband Robert in Virginia's Shenandoah River Valley. Her paper "Semantics and the Remarkable Human Brain: Why Computers Don't Translate Well" was published in *Torch*, vol. 80, 2007 and won the Editor's Quill Award.

Presented to the Winchester Torch Club on November 7, 2007.

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A well-known—and indeed well-designed—series of foreign language learning publications touts its programs by claiming "What's the fastest way to learn language? Act like a baby....Dynamic immersion² unlocks the innate language-learning ability you acquired before birth and mastered as a

child....Visit our website and find out how you can reactivate your own innate, language learning."¹The linguists who developed the program must cringe at these claims by the advertising department, or if they don't, they should. Adults can indeed learn new languages and, with good instruction and enough effort, learn them well. But the ability to learn a language in the way we did as children is forever lost, as every expert in language acquisition well knows. That "innate language-learning ability" we all had was lost along with our baby teeth and our belief in the Tooth Fairy—and at about the same time!

Traditional Behaviorist Model of Language Learning

From the time when serious study of language development in children began until language acquisition theory emerged as a branch of the cognitive sciences shortly after the middle of the twentieth century, the behaviorist model prevailed. In the nature vs. nurture debate, theories that favored nurture predominated. According to behaviorist theory, all learning could be reduced to what was called "operant conditioning." Responses occur as a reaction to particular stimuli; thus, given X, Y happens. Learners do X because they are rewarded and learning is the formation of habits. Most people associate behaviorism with Pavlov and his salivating dogs. B. F. Skinner extended the work of Pavlov into various areas of human behavior, including language development in children. From a behaviorist perspective, children are presumed to learn language

Young children have limited knowledge of the world, immature thought patterns, and strange ideas and beliefs.

from parents and caregivers who encourage imitation and provide reinforcement.

However, the assumption that children only learn what language their caregivers teach them flies in the face of evidence. In some cultures there is no deliberate instruction of language by the adults in the community, and yet the children become fluent speakers of the language. Adults in our culture may model a few dozen or a few hundred words—mostly nouns—to children, yet children rapidly acquire thousands. Verbs are rarely modeled. As one linguist pointed out, Billy's mother probably does not say, when she comes home: "See, Billy. I am opening the door. I open." She probably says "Hello, Billy, I'm home. Did you miss me? Have you been good?" The best evidence that children do not learn only what is taught to them is in the errors they make. A child who says, "She teached me how to do it," "The mouses ran away," or "The other one is gooder" never heard those words. The child is demonstrating that he has intuited basic principles of English grammar—which also were not taught to him—and is applying them.

Chomsky's Theory of Innate Language Ability

In the 1950's, Noam Chomsky burst on the scene and changed forever the

way language acquisition is viewed.² Chomsky and other “nativists” argued that children are born with innate, language-specific abilities hard-wired into their brains. He coined the term “language acquisition device,” or LAD, and posited universal principles of syntax underlie every natural language. A child only needs input from his community’s language (or languages) in order to deduce its structure and acquire it quickly. For the last 50 years, linguists have hammered away at Chomsky’s ideas, finding flaws here and there, but the basic premise is widely accepted and undergirds language acquisition research today. Children are born with “the language instinct” and in normal circumstance will learn to speak a language as birds learn to fly.

Based on his theory of innate language-specific capacities, Chomsky posited a set of innate principles and adjustable parameters common to all human language and called his system “universal grammar.” Universal grammar ability allows children to deduce the structure of their native language or languages from exposure to the language. This conjecture was the source of a complicated area of theoretical linguistics called transformational linguistics that seeks to describe the underlying principles of grammar that inform all natural languages. The premise draws its support from the early age at which children acquire language, the rapidity with which they do so, and the fact that, long before they are capable of sophisticated reasoning, they demonstrate that they understand complicated grammatical theory. Much of the evidence comes from the errors they make in producing speech, as noted above, as well as the errors they do not make.

Cognitive Linguistics

Another area of cognitive science, deeply indebted to Chomsky’s ground-

breaking hypotheses but today standing in contrast to them, is the area of cognitive science called cognitive linguistics. Cognitive linguistics assumes that language learning is the product of general human cognitive abilities and the interaction between learners and their surrounding communities. That is, children learn languages through abilities that exist for other purposes. It does not disagree that part of human linguistic ability is innate; it does deny that it is separate and apart from the rest of cognition. It rejects the idea that there is an autonomous linguistic faculty in the mind and disputes the idea that language learning is the predestined unfolding of innate structures. The storage and retrieval of linguistic information is similar to the storage and retrieval of other knowledge, and language comprehension, language usage, and language creativity employ cognitive abilities analogous to those used in other non-linguistic tasks.

An extreme view of linguistic determinism asserts that thought cannot exist without language. I wouldn’t go that far. Unstructured thought can certainly exist without language; aphasics have a mental life, animals probably do, and all of us have thoughts we grope for the words to express. Certainly language and cognition influence each other. The unique aspects of human thought such as logic, the ability to think about the past and future, and the ability to imagine what is not but what might be are only possible through language. Charles Darwin, in 1874, in *The Descent of Man* said, “If it could be proved that certain high mental powers, such as the formation of general concepts, self-consciousness, etc., were absolutely peculiar to man...it is not improbable that these qualities are merely the incidental results of other highly-advanced intellectual faculties, and these again are mainly the result of the continued use of a perfect language.”³

The Miracle of Language Acquisition

No matter where you come down in the universal grammar vs. cognitive linguistics debate, the phenomenon they treat—how children learn language—is astounding. Language acquisition in children begins at birth and continues for a number of years, concurrent with the maturation of the central nervous system. A great deal about the process is still only partially understood. We do know that brain lateralization, whereby the two halves of the brain’s cerebral cortex—left and right—execute different functions, is necessary for language development. Verbal abilities reside in one half of the brain, generally in the left side for right-handed people, often in the opposite side for left-handers. Brain lateralization continues for about a dozen years after birth. The greatest changes in lateralization occur during periods of most intense language development.⁴

During the most concentrated period of language acquisition, pretty much between the ages of two and five, children accomplish a staggering feat. Naomi Baron coined the term “language orienteering” for the strategies that children employ to draw themselves into language communities.⁵ With this “language orienteering,” by the time they are four, they have generally mastered almost all the phonology (the sounds) of their community’s language or languages. Some children of five or six may still have problems with a few of their language’s phonemes. English-speaking children may lisp or have difficulty pronouncing “r,” but they generally have what is called “native pronunciation.” More impressively, they have mastered the structure of the language. By the age of five or so, the syntactical model—the understanding of the grammar of the language—is complete. By age six the period of most vigorous growth ends, with the child having learned about 10,000 words,

although lexical development—that is, the learning of new vocabulary words—continues intensely until about age twelve.⁶ Then it drops off sharply about that time, although the learning of new vocabulary words continues through adult life.

Young children have limited knowledge of the world, immature thought patterns, and strange ideas and beliefs. Yet they show excellent understanding of an immensely complicated system: the syntax of their native language. They may have a lot of errors in their speech, which often amuse adults. Nevertheless, their grammatical errors often suggest good understanding of the syntax but incomplete assimilation of exceptions. The child who says, “there are two mans at the door” has mastered the concept of the plural of nouns. One who reports, “She is my bestest” friend understands the idea of superlative forms for adjectives and knows that they are formed by adding “-est” even if he or she failed to hear that “best” already has that ending. A child who says “Michael beed bad” or “we buyed it” knows what words are verbs, understands the concept of past action, and knows the rule for creating the past tense of regular verbs. Even the child who says “up me” for “pick me up,” which involves a misunderstanding of the grammatical function of the preposition “up,” mistaking it for a verb, nevertheless knows how to use a verb in a command form with a direct object pronoun.

One measurement of language development in pre-school children is the “wug” test developed by Jean Berko Gleason at Harvard.⁷ A child is shown drawings of a fanciful creature and told: “This is a wug. Now there are two of them. There are two _____.” If a child supplies “wugs,” he or she understands the concept of plural for nouns. This cannot be imitation of a sentence the child has heard. The child is shown another drawing and told “This man is zibbing. He knows how to zib. Yesterday

he _____.” If the child says “zibbed,” he or she demonstrates mastery of past tense. The tester continues, “A person who zibs is called a _____,” allowing the child to supply “zibber” and display comprehension of the agent ending. The test continues through other grammatical principles, such as comparison of adjectives, using nonsense words. Thus, the child must generate responses based on intuition of grammatical principles.

Language and Abstract Thinking

The concept of numbers, at least of numbers one, two, and three, seems to exist early in the infant brain. This is not surprising, since tests with several species of animals have demonstrated that they also have an understanding of this kind of simple enumeration. Calculus, we can assume, is a cultural product, since it has not existed across cultures and through time. However, prelinguistic babies seem to understand oneness, twoness, and threeness. From there on, learning to understand and use numbers is a bumpy process. Very young children who can impress adults with their ability to count up to ten or twenty may still show uncertainty in their grasp of quantities.

Paul Bloom in *How Children Learn the Meanings of Words* describes the capacities that underlie early word learning: “An understanding that the world contains objects, events, and relations, kinds and individuals...; an ability to appreciate the referential intentions of others, to understand what they are referring to when they communicate.”⁸ Among other things, word learning is the product of children’s ability to figure out what other people are thinking when they use the words.

For children to learn new words, the words do not need to be presented in a labeling context; in other words, a child does not need to be able to see what a word refers to. Words can be learned outside of space and time. When an adult

says, “Drink your milk,” the child may or may not be looking at his milk. “Time to go to bed” occurs when the child is not in and may not be looking at his bed. Children have to be exposed to words in contexts in which they can infer their meanings. Parents sometimes name objects but, as I mentioned earlier, do not often describe actions. They may say, “Look at this picture. This is a truck.” However they probably do not say “I am walking now. I walk.”

Bloom points out that “In sum, adults’ attempts to teach children words might help speed up the word-learning process. But they are not necessary for word learning and, even when they are present, do not substitute for the child’s own ability to infer the referential intentions of others.”⁹ Thus, in order to acquire language, children do not need to have their efforts at speech encouraged, nor do they even have to have them corrected.

Advantage of Youth

Young children are notably superior to adults at successful acquisition in the linguistic domains of imitation of sounds, and intuiting grammar, and probably also in word learning.¹⁰ In the 1960’s, Eric Lenneberg declared that the crucial period of language acquisition ends around the age of twelve. A language learned after that could never be learned in a normal and fully functional sense. This was called the “critical period hypothesis.” Much work has been done refining this model; researchers describe several “critical periods” for different linguistic skills. However, the basic concept stands.

In the United States we view second languages with suspicion. Although the founding fathers rejected calls to establish a national language, it is clear that today we have an “English only” policy with regard to education. It was once widely believed that bilingual children were inferior performers in intelligence tests. This erroneous

conviction seemed to be supported by early research using seriously flawed investigative methods. Recent tests where children are matched by socioeconomic status and educational level of parents show, by age ten, a superiority for bilingual children in cognitive tests, verbal tests, and even non-verbal tests. Researchers now describe bilingual children as having more “cognitive flexibility” than their monolingual counterparts.

What we have learned about first language acquisition has heavily influenced foreign language instruction. Today, instead of talking about foreign language learning, we refer to second language “acquisition” and value the importance of a large amount of comprehensible input in order to establish models of the new language in the student’s mind.¹¹ However, those involved in the field of foreign language instruction know that adults cannot learn language the way children do. A window closes. People working in neurolinguistics, a branch of the cognitive sciences that concerns itself with the human brain mechanisms underlying the comprehension, production, and abstract knowledge of language, have suggested that perhaps the areas of the brain that were earlier dedicated to the miraculous feat of language acquisition are later needed for other processes in the growing child.

Language and Community

The gift of human speech that little children seem to acquire so rapidly and effortlessly is astounding. In normal speech, we produce about three words a second and can recognize a word about one-fifth of a second after it is perceived. When we learn a word, what do we really learn? The meaning of a word depends on something that occurs in a person’s mind. Learning a word is a social act. As noted linguist Steven Pinker explains, “Semantics is about the relation of words to thoughts, but it is

also about the relation of words to other human concerns. Semantics is about the relation of words to reality....”¹² It is about community and social relations. The meaning of a word consists of information stored in the minds of people who know the word.¹³

Human languages have allowed us to form our communities and develop our civilizations. Language is a remarkable construct. Anyone who has looked at a generative grammar textbook is aware of how immensely complicated the system underlying natural language is. We have all mastered it, and have forgotten doing so. The more we are able to understand the development of human language, the more we understand about the human mind. But what we know so far about the process is still just a tiny amount. The language one learns has a profound influence on how one thinks. Language is, as Pinker points out, “the stuff of thought.” The acquisition of language—this mind-boggling achievement that a child accomplishes in just three or four years—is what allows him or her to join the human community. However, after the critical period of language acquisition ends, the child will never be able to learn language in the same way again.

Notes

1. From advertising materials of Rosetta Stone, 1919 N. Lynn Street, Arlington, VA 22209. The software is of good quality. However, the advertising contradicts language acquisition theory.
2. Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* (The Hague: Mouton, 1957).
3. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 2nd ed. (New York: Hurst, 1874), 128.
4. Naomi S. Baron, *Growing Up with Language* (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1992), 41.
5. *Ibid.*, 94.
6. Paul Bloom, *How Children Learn the Meanings of Words* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 12.

7. The “wug” test, widely cited by linguists discussing language acquisition, is described in Stephen Pinker, *The Stuff of Thought* (New York: Viking, 2007).

8. Bloom, 258.

9. *Ibid.*, 84.

10. *Ibid.*, 27.

11. Stephen Krashen popularized the term in his work *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning* (New York: Prentice-Hall International, 1988).

12. Pinker, *The Stuff of Thought*, 3.

13. *Ibid.*, 9.

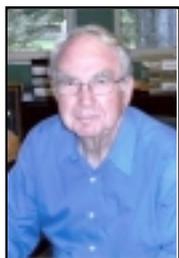
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Politics and the Translation of the Bible

The Bible reflects many hands and many tastes in its translation of ancient scriptures.

By Edgar V. McKnight



About the Author

Edgar McKnight, William R. Kenan Jr. Professor Emeritus of Religion at Furman University, was Assistant Professor of Religion and Classical languages, serving over the years until his retirement in 1998 as chair of the Classics Department, chair of the Religion Department, and associate dean for academic affairs. In addition to studying and lecturing at many universities in the United States and abroad, he was Fulbright visiting professor at the universities of Tuebingen and Muenster in 1981-82 and 1995-96, was a visiting professor of New Testament at Wake Forest Divinity School, and taught a graduate seminar at Gardner-Webb University. McKnight has authored, co-authored, or edited more than a dozen books of biblical interpretation, including a recent volume entitled *Reading the Bible Today: A Twenty-first Century Appreciation of Scripture* and a commentary on the letter to the Hebrews. A member of Torch since the early 1960s, he resides with his wife Shirley in Greenville, S.C. They have two grown children and three grandchildren.

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Early Translations of Wycliffe and Tyndale

The story of the translation of the Bible into English usually features textual study, knowledge of the nature of the Hebrew and Greek of the Testaments, and changes in the English language. This essay focuses upon the larger political and/or theological context of translation, beginning with the first complete translation of the Bible into English by

John Wycliffe in fourteenth century England. Between 1382 and 1387, Wycliffe and like-minded colleagues produced two translations of the Latin Vulgate into English and sent Lollards or itinerant preachers throughout England, inspiring a spiritual revolution. Wycliffe, a heretic insofar as the state and the church in England were concerned, declared that church authority was not centered in the pope and the cardinals and that the Scriptures were the only law of the church. As a “reward,” the church expelled Wycliffe from his teaching position at Oxford, and when he died forty-four years later, the pope ordered his bones exhumed and burned. In the early sixteenth century, William Tyndale translated the Bible directly from the original Hebrew and Greek instead of making a secondary translation from the Latin Vulgate—an innovation that has led some to call him the father of the King James Version and other “authorized” versions. His was more widely circulated than the handwritten Wycliffe Bibles because printing had been invented between the time of Wycliffe and Tyndale.

From William Tyndale to the King James Version

The translations from William Tyndale’s to the King James Version—from 1526 to 1611—were all embroiled in politics. Tyndale was influenced by the Reformation of Luther and Calvin as well as by the earlier activities of Wycliffe and the Lollards. Tyndale, like Wycliffe before him, emphasized Scripture rather than the authority of the pope. Tyndale, who is assumed to have studied at Cambridge, was ordained a priest and spent two years as a tutor and preacher in Gloucestershire. When he went to London to seek the bishop’s permission to undertake an English Bible translation, the bishop refused and Tyndale sailed to the

continent, settling first in Germany and finally in Antwerp, Flanders. On the continent he translated the New Testament from Greek into English. Tyndale’s anti-Catholic sentiment can be seen in his translation at several points. Tyndale, for example, supported Protestant iconoclasm in his translation. He translated a Greek word (*eidololatrias*) in 1 Corinthians 5:11 not as “idolater” but as “worshiper of images.” He transformed 1 Corinthians 10:19 from a passage about cultic food sacrifice to a denunciation of images and image worship (“What say I then? That the image is anything? Or that which is offered to images is anything?”)

The anti-Catholic bias in Tyndale’s New Testament incurred the wrath of Sir Thomas More, Lord Chancellor of England from 1529 to 1532, who sized up Tyndale as a heretic threatening to destroy the edifice of 1500 years of church tradition. A year after More was beheaded in 1535 because he opposed the divorce of Henry VIII, Tyndale himself was strangled and burned at the stake by agents of Emperor Charles V, with the English crown looking the other way. By this time Henry had adopted an anti-Catholic and iconoclastic stance—but it was too late for Tyndale. In 1547, Henry VIII was succeeded by his son Edward VI who had received a thoroughly Protestant education in the Reformed or Calvinistic tradition and sought to complete the purification of religion begun by his father. But with Mary Tudor (“Bloody Mary”) in 1553 came a five year Catholic interlude. This was followed by the long Protestant reigns of Elizabeth (1558-1603) and James I (1603-25).

Between the work of Tyndale and the publication of the King James Version of the Bible—nearly a hundred years—a variety of translations appeared. The Coverdale Bible (1535), Matthew’s Bible (1537), and the Great Bible (1539) are

closely connected with the work of Tyndale and represent a moderate reformation attitude. The Coverdale Bible (1535), the first complete English Bible printed, was the work of Myles Coverdale, a graduate of Cambridge who had left the Augustinian order after being influenced by the Reformation movement. It was a secondary translation out of German and Latin instead of a direct translation from the Hebrew and Greek. Matthew's Bible came out two years later in 1537, published under the pen name of Thomas Matthew by John Rogers, a former associate of Tyndale. His Bible is basically the work of Tyndale, using Tyndale's New Testament and as much of the Old Testament as he had translated. The remainder of the Old Testament and the Apocrypha are basically the translation of Coverdale. The same year that Matthew's Bible was published and licensed by the king, a new edition of Coverdale's Bible was published, issued "with the king's license." To have two widely variant translations circulating under royal authority was confusing. To correct this, Thomas Cromwell asked Coverdale to revise the Matthew's Bible so that it could become the standard and take the place of the two Bibles then competing for authority. Coverdale complied with the request and, in 1539, the Great Bible became the authorized Bible. It was called "great" because the pages of the 1539 edition measured 16-1/2 by 11 inches.

The Geneva Bible (1560) represents a radical Reformation reaction to the reign of the Roman Catholic "Bloody" Mary, who had tried to bring England back to the Roman Catholic Church when she came to the throne in 1553. Utterly immoderate in her zeal, she caused those who refused to return to the Roman church to be burned at the stake as heretics. One group of Protestants went to Geneva, Switzerland, where they engaged in Bible translation and published the Geneva Bible in April of 1560. By the time of its publication, Queen Elizabeth had become the reigning monarch in England, so the Bible was dedicated to her with admonitions to "root out and cut

A late twentieth century and early twenty-first century translation created a stir in evangelical circles because of its attempt to do away with gender-exclusive language. A variant of The New International Version (1973), it is one of the most popular versions produced in the twentieth century.

down these weeds and impediments [the Catholic adherents to the Pope]." The Geneva Bible was heavily dependent upon Tyndale's translation, betraying an antipapal bias at the very beginning when the translators noted the recent "horrible backsliding and falling away from Christ to antiChrist, from light to darkness, from the living God to dumb and dead idols." Similar digs at the papacy peppered the edition's extensive marginal notes, as at Revelation 17:4, where the notation identified the whore of Babylon as "the Antichrist, that is, the pope." From 1560 to 1611 (when the King James Version was published), over 120 editions of the Geneva Bible appeared, more than three times the number of all other English editions combined.

The immediate predecessor of the King James Version was the Bishops' Bible (1568) issued in reaction to the Geneva Bible. The bishops and other clergymen in England had no part in making the Geneva Bible, and in 1561 Archbishop Matthew Parker submitted a proposal that the Great Bible be revised. This would provide an official translation involving the clergy that would offset the offensive Geneva Bible. The work of revision was completed in seven years, and on September 22, 1568, copies of the Bishops' Bible were sent to the Queen.¹

The King James Bible

When James I was crowned King of England on the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, he was met on his journey from

Scotland to England with a petition containing about 800 signatures containing a list of grievances from Puritan clergy. The king invited the clergy who signed the petition to a conference that met at Hampton Court in 1604. Although the conference failed to accomplish the Puritans' aims, with James threatening to evict from their land holdings all who failed to conform to the established church, the king did look with favor on a proposal by one Puritan, President John Reynolds of Corpus Christi College at Oxford, that a new translation of the Bible replace those produced in the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI, which were "corrupt and not answerable to the truth of the original." King James approved the proposal, declaring that he had never yet seen a Bible "well translated in English." He surely was also aware that the notes in the popular Geneva Bible did not support the divine right of kings.

The translators were given general directions concerning their work. The Bishops' Bible was to be followed and "as little altered as the truth of the original will permit." The forms of the biblical names were to be maintained as they were commonly used, as nearly as possible; and the old ecclesiastical words were to be kept—"church" instead of "congregation," for example. The translators themselves were not sure that the people would welcome their translation. In fact, there was good reason to believe that the translation would be condemned. In the very first paragraph of their introduction, the translators tried to get the sympathy of their readers. They said: "Zeal to promote the common good, whether it be by devising any thing ourselves, or revising that which hath been laboured by others, deserveth certainly much respect and esteem, but yet findeth but cold entertainment in the world."

The translators did not arouse sympathy with all readers. Perhaps the most forthright criticism of the new translation came from the distinguished scholar Hugh Broughton, who said that the translation bred in him "a sadness that will grieve me while I breathe, it is so ill done. Tell His Majesty that I had rather

be rent in pieces with wild horses, than any such translation by my consent should be urged upon poor churches. The new edition crosseth me. I require it to be burnt.”²In spite of Broughton’s criticism, the King James Version won the day. It became the “National Bible” in England and America, unchallenged for over three hundred years.

Two “Premature” Translations and the Revised Standard Version

Politics played a part in two translations at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. The English Revised Version of 1881-85 was a revision of the King James Version, and the American Standard Version of 1901 was the American answer to the work of the British translators, growing out of the work of the American scholars who assisted early on in the English Revised Version. Perhaps international politics was at work here. The American committee, which was organized in 1871 and began its work in October 1872, was asked to review the revisions of the British committee and make suggestions for revision. After publication of the English Revised Version, the American committee continued its work because it saw that an “American recension” of the Revised Version might be needed. In accordance with the agreement not to issue an American edition for at least fourteen years after the English edition, this “American Recension” (the American Standard Version) was not published until August 1901. The English Revised Version and the American Standard Version have since been described as “premature” revisions, as they predated revolutionary discoveries of early Greek manuscripts of the New Testament and the discovery of papyri materials that helped scholars determine the precise nature of the Greek New Testament. Of course, it was not possible for the scholars to foresee the premature nature of their venture. The major defect of these versions is their literal, word-for-word translations, which follow the order of the Hebrew and Greek words, so far as this is possible, rather than the order that is natural to English. Today we would

say that the translators followed the principle of “formal equivalence.”

The translation and reception of the Revised Standard Version in the mid-twentieth century were certainly political acts. In 1937, the International Council of Religious Education authorized a revision of the American Standard Version. The Revised Standard Version of the New Testament was published in 1946, and in 1952 the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, containing the Old and the New Testaments, was published. Religious politics going back to the fundamentalist-modernist controversy surfaced. The authorization by an ecumenical group made it suspect for some and acceptable to others. While the RSV quickly became the Bible of mainline Protestant churches, it was not accepted by conservatives, some calling it a Communist translation. Translators were actually investigated by the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1953. And a 1960 training manual of the U.S. Air Force Reserve warned against the communist-tinged RSV Bible on the basis of comments made by Billy James Hargis, a fundamentalist evangelist and Red-hunter based in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

A Contemporary Controversy

Debate over principles of translation and the use of inclusive language marks present translation efforts. Formal equivalence and dynamic or functional equivalence are two different principles. Following the principle of formal equivalence, previous translators were interested in producing a literal word-for-word translation. On the other hand, the principle of dynamic or functional equivalence produced a translation that used English word order with contemporary English idioms, the New English Bible (NT 1961, OT 1970). It is, therefore, an “authorized” translation, but it is outside the King James tradition in terms of translation principles.

One specific question today related to formal or functional equivalence is the treatment of the gender-bias inherent in the language of the Bible. To some extent the gender-biased language in the Bible is

an English language problem, but it is also a problem that arises because of the strong patriarchy that marked not only the ancient world but also the history of the translation and interpretation of the Bible in the Western world. The preface to the New Revised Standard Version notes its concern for gender-inclusive language:

During the almost half a century since the publication of the RSV, many in the churches have become sensitive to the danger of linguistic sexism. [M]asculine oriented language should be eliminated as far as this can be done without altering passages that reflect the historical situation of ancient patriarchal culture.

A late twentieth century and early twenty-first century translation created a stir in evangelical circles because of its attempt to do away with gender-*exclusive* language. A variant of The New International Version (1973), it is one of the most popular versions produced in the twentieth century. The NIV is the work of evangelical scholars seeking to produce a critically-accurate translation that would be acceptable to conservative Christians who rejected the Revised Standard Version. The decade-long project of translation began with studies by committees of the Christian Reformed Church and the National Association of Evangelicals. On the basis of these studies, a group of scholars met to plan for a new conservative translation. Translators were required to affirm a high view of biblical authority. That is, they had to believe in the inerrancy of the Bible. The NIV was a huge success. Main-line scholars praised it while criticizing the doctrinal bias. The 1973 edition did not use inclusive language. So as other translations did use inclusive language, the NIV became more popular among those opposed to equality of women. The struggle over inclusive language began with a language-inclusive edition of the NIV published in Britain in 1995 and a language-inclusive reader’s version of the NIV published in 1996. These editions did not replace masculine references to God

with neutral or feminine language but they did use gender-inclusive language where the translators decided that the biblical writers did not intend their language to exclude either gender. When Paul uses the Greek word adelphoi (brothers) in his letters, for example, he is addressing not just the men in the congregations. This is clear from the letters themselves. So the word previously translated “brothers” becomes “brothers and sisters.”

Success of these language-inclusive translations led the president of the International Bible Society in 1997 to promise the production of an inclusive-language New International Version in North America. This plan was originally canceled when leaders of large rigid evangelical and fundamentalist groups expressed their displeasure, based on their belief that a gender-inclusive translation would threaten the belief that the subordination of women to men is a divinely-ordained state of affairs. Paige Patterson, at that time president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, argued that the proposed inclusive-language version was part of a “feminist effort to re-engineer society and abandon God’s parameters for the home and for the church.”³ Confronted with such forceful expressions of disagreement, the International Bible Society decided to drop plans for an inclusive language edition of the New International Version in the United States, to revise the New International Readers Version so that it would contain *exclusive* language, and to ask its British publisher (Hodder & Stoughton) to withdraw its already-published inclusive-language New International Version.

By the spring of 2002, the International Bible Society recognized the shortsightedness of its decision to drop plans for an American inclusive-language edition. In the resulting New Testament portion of Today’s New International Version the majority of the instances of the generic use of masculine nouns and pronouns was removed. The preface to the TNIV New Testament declares without apology: “Among the more programmatic changes in the TNIV is the

elimination of most instances of the generic use of masculine nouns and pronouns.”

Conclusion

Beyond the political side of translation, this paper is designed to show and praise the plurality of translations. In a symposium marking the one hundred seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the American Bible Society, Donald A. Carson, Research Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, compared Bible translations with educational choice where there are also few absolute “rights” and “wrongs”:

Shall I send my children to the local school? To a private school? To a parochial school? To a junior college? To a state university? To a private university? Appropriate answers will vary from child to child, from city to city, according to the resources available. Whatever decision is taken, there are entailments one simply must live with. So it is with translation.⁴

The instruction Tyndale gave in his prologue to the first printed English New Testament is appropriate today. In light of history that has favored the Tyndale translation, we could expect advice that commends his work. Not so. He said that if others “perceive in any place that I have not attained the very sense of the tongue, or meaning of the Scripture, or have not given the right English word,” they must “put to their hands to amend it, remembering that so is their duty to do.”⁵ He must have envisioned something of what we have today—a translation for every taste.

Notes

1. The Roman Catholics in England provided an English translation for themselves called the Rheims and Douai Version. The New Testament was published in 1582 by the English College in Rheims, France and the Old Testament in 1609-1610 by the English College removed to Douai, France. It was a translation from the Vulgate, was revised in 1750, and became the approved English

version for Catholics in America in 1810.

2. Cited in F. F. Bruce, *The English Bible: A History of Translations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 107.

3. Paige Patterson, “A ‘Gender Neutral’ NIV,” *National Liberty Journal* 26 (May 1997), 22.

4. Donald A. Carson, “New Bible Translations: An Assessment and Prospect,” in *American Bible Society Symposium Papers on the Bible in the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Howard Clark Kee (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1993), 66.

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Messages of Dissent: Struggle Songs of American Workers

Protest songs provide a long-overlooked perspective on the challenges facing American labor.

By Charles W. Darling



About the Author

Charles W. Darling, Emeritus Professor of History at Youngstown State University, has taught classes and seminars in American folk music on the undergraduate and graduate level. A member of the Ohio Academy of History and the history honorary society Phi Alpha Theta, Darling has also taught courses on the Vietnam War and American economic, social, and cultural history. With degrees from Youngstown State and Ohio University, he pursued further studies at Pennsylvania State University and Ohio State University. He is the author of two books on folk music: *The New American Songster* and *Messages of Dissent: Struggle Songs in American History*. He has been a member of the Youngstown Torch Club since the 1970s. Darling received the Paxton Lectureship Award at the IATC Convention in Appleton, Wisconsin, in 2009 for his paper “The Origins of American Involvement in Vietnam.”

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Bob Dylan’s 1983 song “Union Sundown,” from the album *Infidels*, summed up the situation American workers faced a quarter-century ago: “Well it’s sundown on the union/ And was made in the USA/ Sure was a good idea/ ‘Til we got in the way.” “Union

Sundown” was not the first song to protest worker conditions and surely will not be the last. Indeed, Bruce Springsteen’s 1995 song “Youngstown” depicted workers losing everything they have if they play by all the rules. Workplace discontent is not a recent phenomenon. Even in colonial times a wage earner’s life was not pleasant, as this 1770 song suggests: “In yonder *Hutt* is to be seen/ A Hungry GIANT lank and lean/ With well patch’d threadbare Coat of Green/ To cover Round Shoulders.” Life for colonial seamen was even worse. Many of the chanties which were sung to keep the crew together while performing the assigned task contained some form of protest. “Boston Harbour” has a mutinous last stanza: “Now there’s one thing that we do crave/ That our captain meets with a watery grave/ We’ll throw him down in to some dark hole/ Where a shark’ll have his body and the devil have his soul.”¹

Songs Protesting Industrialization

During the nineteenth century, American workers challenged the technological unemployment caused by industrial mechanization. Even before the Civil War, a shoemaker’s song summed up their plight: “They’ve invented a new machine, peg and awl/ Makes one hundred pairs to my one, peg and awl.” But mechanization was not the only evil perceived by workers. An early craft union, The Association of Cordwainers, blamed employers for their circumstance and encouraged shoe

The history of the American labor union movement can be summarized briefly— success followed by failure. With few exceptions, unions prospered during good times and collapsed during hard times. ...Certainly, unsatisfactory management-labor relations suffered from the inability of each side to understand the other’s position.

industry workers to fight for decent conditions. “The Grinner’s Lament” was reprinted in the shoemakers’ weekly paper *Awl*. Stanza one expressed their feelings: “The bosses here have many forms/ By which to oppress their men/ For they are beasts of many horns/ And ever thus have been.” Similarly, in 1836, after their second wage cut in two years, the women working long hours at low pay in the textile mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, expressed their litany of grievances against their employers by going on strike. With no money and evicted from factory-operated boarding houses, they were literally starved into submission. Nevertheless, they defiantly sang a lengthy protest song, “The Lowell Factory Girl,” proclaiming “Then since they’ve cut my wages down/ To nine shillings per week/ If I cannot better wages make/ Some other place I’ll

seek.” Unfortunately, blacklisting generally prevented employment elsewhere.

Southern textile industries were hardly better. Low wages, unsafe conditions, brown lung disease, and the bitter hostility of owners toward unionism contributed to worker unrest. “Hard Times In the Mill” was written by workers in the knitting mills of Columbia, South Carolina, in the 1890s. The final stanza sums up their frustration years before the eight-hour work shift was achieved. “Ain’t it enough to break your heart?/ Have to work all day and at night it’s dark.” “Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues,” a satiric North Carolina song written during the Depression of the 1930s, concludes: “When I die, don’t you bury me at all/ Hang me up on the spool room wall/ Place a bobbin in my hand/ So I can keep on a-workin’ in the Promised Land.”

Songs of Populist Protest

Before the Civil War, agricultural interests dominated the political and economic landscape. Industrial and financial capitalism’s rapid rise after the 1860s resulted in an urban area explosion. Politicians shifted allegiance to blue and white collar urban voters. Farmers, faced with declining political power as well as suffering from both inflation and declining farm prices, joined agrarian-oriented political organizations such as the Grange, the Greenback Party, and later, the Populist Party. As Populism swept farm states in the 1890s, protest music became anthems for their cause. One song, “The Farmer is the Man,” portrayed their perennial problems: “Oh, the farmer is the man/ The farmer is the man/ Lives on credit till the fall/ Then they take him by the hand/ And they lead him from the land/ And the merchant’s the one who gets it all.” Another Populist song, “Hayseed

Like Me,” specified political action: “But now I’ve roused up a little/ Their greed and corruption I see/ And the ticket we vote next November/ Will be made up of hayseeds like me.” Sharecropper farmers suffered the most. They were continually in debt to either landlords or country store owners. “Down On Penny’s Farm” was a twentieth century song that described conditions of economic slavery perfectly. Stanza four says it best: “You go in the fields, you’ll work all day/ Way after night, but you get no pay/ Promise some meat or a little bucket of lard/ It’s hard to be a renter on Penny’s farm.”

Miners’ Protest Songs

Many of the best struggle songs were written by coal miners. The very nature of the work—isolated and hazardous—may explain the quality and quantity of their songs. Young boys hauling coal carts from deep underground returned to their homes in company-owned towns. Their families purchased food at company stores. They worshiped in company churches. Black lung disease was left untreated by company doctors. No wonder miners began organizing in an effort to improve intolerable working conditions and low wages. Strikes were frequent and owners retaliated in various ways. In the South, strikes were broken by using convict labor. “Buddy Won’t You Roll Down the Line” was a Tennessee miner’s song from the 1890s. “Way back in Tennessee they leased the convicts out/ Sent them working in the mines against free labor stout/ Free labor rebelled against it, to win it took some time/ But when the lease was in effect, they made ‘em rise and shine.” Retired miner Daniel Walsh penned a powerful reminiscence of his life, “The Old Miner’s Refrain,” embodying a message for all laborers who built this

country—who toiled long and hard enduring wretched working conditions and substandard wages. One stanza recalls:

At eleven years of age I bought myself a lamp –
The boss he sent me down the mine to trap;
I stood there in water, in powder smoke and damp;
My leisure hours I spent in killing rats.
One day I got promoted to what they called a patcher,
Or a lackey for the man that drives the team:
I carried sprags and spreaders and had to fix the latch –
I was going through my exercise, it seems.

Labor Union Movement Mirrored in Songs

The history of the American labor union movement can be summarized briefly—success followed by failure. With few exceptions, unions prospered during good times and collapsed during hard times. When the economy was booming, business owners could afford to cater to unions, but when the business cycle curved downward, the owners sought ways to cut costs. Jobs were first to go and that meant confrontation with unions. Unions created their own problems. Rigidity in contracts and job descriptions caused management to eliminate unions when possible. Certainly, unsatisfactory management-labor relations suffered from the inability of each side to understand the other’s position.

The successful early labor unions, such as the American Federation of Labor, appealed to the working class elite—skilled craftsmen. Less successful were industrial unions, such as the Knights of Labor (K of L), that opened

their ranks to all workers, but especially welcomed the unskilled. John Greenway, in his pioneering book *American Folksongs of Protest*, wrote that the American Federation of Labor was “virtually barren in songs” because of its less militant nature compared to the K of L or the Industrial Workers of the World. But Philip Foner’s research for *American Labor Songs of the Nineteenth Century* discovered a large number of AFL songs, especially from its formative years in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, the AFL-affiliated Machinists Union published a militant song which was dedicated to a group of blue collar workers who not only suffered intolerable economic conditions, but were generally ignored by the unions—working women. “The Factory Girl” was written by J. A. Phillips and published in the *Machinists’ Monthly Journal*, September 1895. Stanza six is an abridged morality play:

Two dollars and a half to live on,
Or starve on, if you will,
Two dollars and a half to dress on,
And a hungry mouth to fill;
Two dollars and a half to lodge on
In some wretched hole or den,
Where crowds are huddled together—
Girls and women and men;
If she sins to escape her bondage

Is there room for wonder then?²

One industrial union appeared headed for a long life: the Knights of Labor. By 1886, the K of L neared one million members. The union’s rallying cry was “Storm the Fort, Ye Knights” a powerful polemic based on the hymn “Hold the Fort”: “Lazy drones steal all the honey/ From hard labor’s hives/ Banks control the nation’s money/ And destroy your lives.”

The K of L supported the movement for an eight-hour work day; in fact, its uncompromising position was decisive in the union’s demise. The Knights called a nationwide strike for May 1, 1886, in support of the eight-hour issue. It was a colossal failure, and both sympathetic workers and antagonistic employers must have known that the union had been dealt a fatal blow. However, the eight-hour cause was not dead. A group of coal miners achieved the long-sought goal in 1897. The song “Eight Hour Day” was born during that struggle. It ends: “Eight hours we’d have for working/ Eight hours we’d have for play/ Eight hours we’d have for sleeping/ In free Amerikay.”

As the Knights of Labor’s membership declined following the 1886 debacle, coal miners formed a new union—the United Mine Workers of America (UMW)—in Columbus, Ohio, in 1890. The first test for the youthful union came in July of 1897 when over 200,000 miners struck soft coal companies in Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and Ohio. For decades, coal operators had employed a divide and conquer method to prevent labor unionization. A favorite technique was to hire miners from one ethnic or racial background at one mine, while a nearby mine would hire workers antagonistic to their neighbors. But the UMW succeeded in uniting the various ethnic mining groups. It also welcomed African-Americans to its ranks, so that by 1900 black miners represented 20 percent of its total membership. The united action during the two-month strike of 1897 was a resounding victory for the UMW, thereby assuring longevity and national prominence. One of the most famous labor songs in American history came out of the 1897 strike, “Miner’s Lifeguard.” Its chorus urged the unity that the UMW

advocated: “Union miners, stand together/ Heed no operator’s tale/ Keep your hand upon the dollar/ And your eyes upon the scales.” In the early 1900s, Finlay Donaldson wrote “Come All You Hardy Miners” during a particularly nasty confrontation between miners and coal operators, to rally workers behind the UMW’s President John White. White later left the union to become, ironically, a coal company official. A wage rate of sixty cents per ton was the union’s rallying cry: “Come out, you scabs and blacklegs, and join the men like one/ Tell them that you’re in the fight for sixty cents a ton/ They’re now in old Virginnny, they’re scabbing right along/ But when we win they’re sure to try for the sixty cents a ton.”

Songs of Radical Socialism

In 1905, what must be the most radical union in American history was founded: the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), or “Wobblies” as its detractors called it. It preached revolution: replacing the capitalist system by a form of socialism in which workers directly controlled the government. Yet the IWW’s immediate goals were more practical, as one member explained: “The final aim is revolution, but for the present let’s see if we can get a bed to sleep in, water enough to take a bath, and decent food to eat.”³ The Wobblies survived for less than two decades and never exceeded a membership of 150,000 workers. IWW opposition to America’s entrance into World War I sealed its fate, although a handful of members kept the union barely alive into the twenty-first century.

If song quality and quantity could measure success, then the IWW easily surpassed all other unions. Pioneer IWW organizer Ralph Chaplin composed an arousing anthem, “Solidarity

Forever,” using the tune to “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” Later it became the theme song for the AFL-CIO union. Ironically, when the song was written, the IWW and the AFL were bitter enemies. It begins:

When the union’s inspiration,
through the workers’ blood shall
run,
There can be no power greater
anywhere beneath the sun.
Yet what force on earth is weaker
than the feeble strength of one?
But the union makes us strong.
It is we who plowed the prairies,
built the cities where they trade,
Dug the mines and built the
workshops, endless miles of
railroad laid.
Now we stand, outcast and
starving, mid the wonders we have
made,

But the union makes us strong.
“Little red books” crammed with
protest songs were distributed at IWW
meetings to fan the fires of discontent.
Members participated in sort of an anti-
capitalist sing-along. The author of many
of these songs was Swedish immigrant
Joe Hill (Joel Ammanuel Haagland).
Arrested in Utah on a spurious murder
charge and found guilty by a hostile jury,
Hill was executed by a Utah firing squad
in 1915. His most notable number, “The
Preacher and the Slave,” to the tune of
the Protestant hymn “In the Sweet Bye
and Bye,” concludes:

Workingmen of all countries
unite,
Together we’ll stand and we’ll fight.
When the world and its wealth we
have gained,
To the grafters we’ll sing this refrain:
You will eat, you will eat, bye and
bye,
When you’ve learned how to cook
and to fry.
Chop some wood—do you good,

And you’ll eat in the sweet bye
and bye, that’s no lie.

Joe Hill’s “There Is Power In a
Union,” sung to the hymn “There Is
Power In the Blood” summarized the
IWW’s goal clearly and forthrightly:

Would you have freedom from
wage slavery?
Then join in the grand industrial
band.
Would you from misery and hunger
be free?
Then come do your share like a
man.
chorus:
There is power, there is power
In a band of working men
When they stand hand in hand.
That’s a power, that’s a power
That must rule in every land—
One industrial union grand.

Protest Songs As Strikers’ Rallying Cry

The Lawrence, Massachusetts,
textile mill strike of 1912 was
inspiration for one of the most famous
American struggle songs: “Bread and
Roses.” When woolen mills cut weekly
wages, 250,000 textile workers
throughout New England staged a
walkout. The IWW, led by Joseph J.
Ettor and Bill Haywood, played an
instrumental role in gaining concessions
for the mostly female workers, but not
before a bitter ten weeks of strife. During
one of the worker rallies, young women
may have carried a banner emblazoned
with the words: “We want bread and
roses too.” Caroline Kokksaat set James
Oppenheim’s poem “Bread and Roses”
to music. Noting that both mind and
bodies need nourishment, the song
declares: “As we come marching,
marching, we battle too for men/ For
they are woman’s children, and we
mother them again/ Our lives shall not
be sweated from birth until life closes/

Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us
bread, but give us roses!”

In 1913, within two years of the
Massachusetts textile strike, Ludlow,
Colorado, was the scene of the worst
atrocities in American labor’s history
when coal miners struck for the right to
organize as well as other reasonable
demands. The coal barons controlled
the mining towns in every way: houses,
streets, land, stores, and churches were
all company-owned. Company guards
enforced the law. The miners, in effect,
were economic slaves. After eight
months, the strike was still unresolved.
In the town of Ludlow, miners were
finally forced out of their homes, and
strike-breaking “scabs” took their jobs.
Despite dwindling resources, strikers
and their families set up a tent town on
the outskirts of Ludlow and continued
the strike. The governor dispatched the
Colorado National Guard, who ringed
the tent town with Gatling guns, set the
tents ablaze, and opened fire on the
residents. Woody Guthrie, the folk-poet
philosopher of the dust bowl, would
later compose a chilling ballad
describing Ludlow’s day of horror—
April 20, 1914: “We were so afraid you
would kill our children.” By morning
twenty-four miners, wives, and children
lay dead.

Another strike remembered in song
besmirched the reputation of Andrew
Carnegie, the Steel King, and dealt the
Amalgamated Association of Iron and
Steel Workers union a fatal blow. Faced
with the imminent expiration of the union
contract, Henry Clay Frick, company
manager and anti-unionist, issued an
ultimatum ordering union approval for
a new contract on company terms, or
else. When the union failed to respond,
Frick, with authorization from the
conveniently vacationing Carnegie,
locked all workers out of the
Homestead plant. The resulting

Homestead Strike of 1892 was joined by sympathizing steelworkers not in the union. Meanwhile, Frick had erected barbed-wire fences around the plant and had hired three hundred Pinkerton detectives as guards. The Pinkertons left Pittsburgh by barges and were towed up the Monongahela River to the Homestead, where the strikers met them with a fierce gun fight that saw casualties on both sides, with a dozen men killed and many more wounded. The strikers won the battle but lost the war, for by November of 1892 the union's treasury was depleted and the strike was called off. But Andrew Carnegie's image of a responsible businessman was shattered. Workers wrote their own songs praising the strikers. Michael McGovern, the "Puddler Poet" and a steel worker from Youngstown, Ohio, saluted the defenders in his book *Labor Lyrics and Other Poems* published in 1899:

Hurrah for the bright redeeming
light
Which guides the cause of Labor,
And union men who, with tongue
and pen,
Fear not the gun or sabre:
Who'll wage the fight till despot
might,
Like the Pinkertons, surrenders.
Hurrah! True Sumter heroes are
Our brave "Fort Frick"
Defenders!⁴

Almost 50 years later, folk composer Woody Guthrie questioned a Pittsburgh steel company: "What did Jones and Laughlin steal?" He answered: "Pittsburgh!"

Songs Remembering Martyrs

Violence in the Kentucky coal fields created many martyrs for the union cause. A particularly horrifying incident happened at Brush Creek. In 1931, nineteen-year-old Harry Simms was sent to Bell County, Kentucky, to help

miners organize. The coal operators offered \$1000 to kill Simms. At Brush Creek, he was shot in the stomach and four days later died in a hospital. At the hastily convened trial, protected by 900 state troopers and 175 special police, the two gun thugs were acquitted. Jim Garland wrote "The Death of Harry Simms" as a tribute to his martyred friend. One stanza recalls:

Harry Simms was killed on
Brush Creek
In nineteen-thirty two
He organized the miners
Into the N. M. U;
He gave his life in struggle,
'Twas all he could do;
He died for the union,
He died for me and you.

"Dreadful Memories" and "I Am a Union Woman" by Aunt Molly Jackson serve as fitting conclusions to this study of American workers' protest songs. Aunt Molly Jackson, a union organizer in the Kentucky coal fields during the 1920s and early 1930s, was called "the life and spirit of the Kentucky miners" by John Greenway. Molly Jackson's life, from her birth in 1880 to her death in 1960, spanned the era of brutalized working conditions in the United States. Her story epitomizes the spirit of coal miners and other workers as they struggled against almost overwhelming odds. As early as age five, Jackson accompanied her coal miner and preacher father to union meetings and picket lines. Later, as a registered nurse, she treated miners' families and witnessed the wretched conditions surrounding them. After her first husband died in a rock fall, Aunt Molly married Bill Jackson, who soon divorced her to free himself from reprisals made against her union activities. Blacklisted, Aunt Molly left Kentucky and toured the nation singing her many miners' songs and asking for

relief funds. At the New York Coliseum before a crowd of over 20,000, she introduced herself with a song about the children of blacklisted Kentucky coal miners, singing:

All this summer we have had
to listen
To our hungry children's cries;
Through the hot part of the summer
Our little babies died like flies.

Ideas of social and economic justice permeate her songs. "Dreadful Memories" recalls a bitter company-union confrontation in 1931 where she saw thirty-seven babies die from starvation: "Dreadful memories! How they haunt me/ As the lonely moments fly/ Oh, how them little babies suffered/ I saw them starve to death and die." Another Jackson song, "I Am a Union Woman," conveyed the chasm between employers and workers: "The bosses ride their big fine white horses/ While we walk in the mud/ Their flag's the old red, white and blue/ And ours is dipped in blood."⁵

Conclusion

This paper is an incomplete chronicle of workers' struggle songs. Thousands more exist. Mainstream historians and musicologists have generally ignored these messages, content to work along more orthodox approaches. They do a disservice to the hardworking men and women who struggled to build a strong foundation for a great nation. Perhaps Bob Dylan summed it up best: "Well it's sundown on the union/ And was made in the USA/ Sure was a good idea/ 'Till we got in the way."

Notes

1. Charles Darling, *Messages of Dissent: Struggle Songs in American History* (Youngstown, OH: CWD Press, 2005), 18. Hereafter, all songs,

or song excerpts, are from *Messages of Dissent*, except where noted.

2. Philip S. Foner, *American Labor Songs of the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 185.

3. Quoted in Darling, *Messages of Dissent*, 132.

4. Michael McGovern, *Labor Lyrics and Other Poems* (The Vindicator Press: Youngstown, OH, 1899), 30.

5. John Greenway, *American Folksongs of Protest* (A. S. Barnes and Company: New York, 1960), 274-5. See also pp. 252-75 for additional information about Aunt Molly Jackson.

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2011 Paxton Lectureship Award

The Paxton Award, created in honor and memory of W. Norris Paxton, past president of the International Association of Torch Clubs and editor emeritus of *Torch*, is given to the author of an outstanding paper presented by a Torch member at a Torch meeting. The winning author for the 2011 Award will receive an appropriate trophy, a \$250 honorarium, and paid registration to the 2011 IATC convention in Hagerstown, MD. The winner will be introduced at the convention banquet where he or she (or a designated representative) will deliver the paper on June 25, 2011.

Eligibility: The author must be a member of a Torch club and the paper must have been delivered to a Torch club meeting or a regional Torch meeting between January 1, 2010 and December 31, 2010 (inclusive). Current officers and directors of IATC are ineligible for this award during their terms of office.

Procedure: All papers to be published in *Torch* should be sent to the IATC Office, Attn. Editor, 11712C Jefferson Ave., Newport News, VA 23606, along with the current Manuscript Submission Form (available from the club secretary or IATC Office), duly signed by the author and a club officer. Paxton candidates will be selected by the Editorial Advisory Committee from all papers submitted for publication in *Torch*. The Paxton Award Committee will consider the EAC-recommended 2010 papers in the spring of 2011 to determine the winner of the 2011 award.

Judging: The reading and judging panel comprises five people: a member of the Board of Directors of the IATC, one of the last five winners of the Paxton Award, a member of the Editorial Advisory Committee, and two members selected by the IATC Board of Directors. Judging is based on the principles set forth in the IATC brochure "The Torch Paper," available from the IATC Office, and the "Manuscript Submission Suggestions" at the Publications link of the IATC website www.torch.org. The winner of the Paxton Award and other contestants will be notified early in May 2011.

Additional Information:

- A publishable Torch paper should be approximately 3,000 words in length.
- Local clubs are not allowed to submit papers directly for Paxton consideration.
- The Paxton Award paper will be published in the Fall 2011 issue of *Torch*.

Call to Annual Business Meeting and Torch Convention—Hagerstown, MD—June 23-26, 2011

Thursday, June 23: 3:00pm Officers' Exchange; 4:00pm Business Session I; 5:30pm Dinner & Torch Paper #1

Friday, June 24: 8:45am Business Session II; 10:00am Torch Paper #2; 11:15am Cafeteria Lunch & Tours; 5:00pm Bus to Country Club for Dinner & Silver Awards, then to Museum for Blues Concert

Saturday, June 25: 10:00am Torch Paper #3; 11:15 Lunch & Tours; 6:00pm Banquet, Gold Awards, Paxton Paper

Sunday, June 26: 7:30am Breakfast; 8:00 Interfaith Dialogue; 9:00 Torch Paper#4; 10:30 Business Session III

2011 Torch Convention Highlights

Thursday, June 23—Torch Paper #1

Divided Loyalties – presented by Edwin Itnyre. Ed earned his BS and JD degrees from George Washington University and spent his career in the Federal Executive Service. A member of Torch since 1997, in retirement he has pursued an interest in the Civil War, concentrating on understanding the divided loyalties of a border state.

Friday, June 24—Torch Paper #2

A Community's Response to the Influenza Epidemic of 1918 – presented by Melinda Marsden. Mindy earned her BA from Bucknell University and an MBA from Frostburg University. She has been a member of Torch since 1997, and is the retired Executive Director of the Washington County Historical Society. Her paper, culled from newspaper accounts of the time, takes the measure of a community by its response to a crisis.

Saturday, June 25 – Torch Paper #3

The Washington County Museum of Fine Arts – presented by Rebecca Massie Lane. Rebecca earned her BA and MA degrees in Art History from the University of Virginia and previously served as Director of the Sweet Briar College Museums and Galleries. She has been Director of the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts since 2008.

Sunday, June 26 – Torch Paper #4

Washington County Fossils – presented by R. Alan Hedges. Alan earned his PhD from Ohio State University. He taught theater arts, directed over 100 plays from the Greek Classics to Avant-garde, and has written numerous One-Act plays. His paper addresses an avocation – fossils (including a discussion of plate tectonics, the geologic time line, and the process of turning a plant or animal into a fossil background), focusing on his fossil-findings in Washington County, MD. Alan has been member of Torch since 2002.

“A Border State Perspective”

2011 Int'l Torch Convention Hagerstown, MD June 23-26

Registration Form

Paid by February 1, 2011 \$320/person

Paid by May 1, 2011 \$330/person

Paid **After** May 1, 2011 \$350/person

Partial Registration upon request:

Contact Jim Marsden

***Make check payable to:
Hagerstown Torch Club***

***Mail check to:
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Hotel Reservations are not included in registration fee.

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www.hagerstownhotelandconventioncenter.com

Room rate \$77 + tax: king, queen, double
(Convention rate is available for extended stay)

**Further convention information is
available at www.torch.org**

TOUR CHOICES

(Please select **One** for each day)

Friday, June 24

Antietam National Battlefield

Site of the bloodiest day of the Civil War, this bucolic vista is devoid of the commercial intrusions found at other battlefields. The monumental effort by both forces to end the war at Antietam only led to the war's extension.

Or

Downtown Hagerstown

Miller House, home of the county Historic Society, is the starting point for this inside view of Hagerstown's cultural treasures.

Saturday, June 25

Fort Frederick

The largest surviving stone fort in the United States, built in anticipation of the French and Indian War but never used. This jewel of a Colonial Fort was restored by the CCC and government programs and became Maryland's first state park.

Or

Historic Homes of Washington County

Patricia Schooley, Author of *Architectural & Historic Treasures of Washington County Maryland* will lead a tour of three of the homes featured in the book.

In conjunction with the IATC Convention June 23-26, 2011, the Hagerstown Torch Club is sponsoring a BOOK FAIR so that Torch members attending the convention may display books they have authored. The Fair will be an integral part of the convention, giving authors the opportunity to discuss their books with fellow members. In addition, on Sunday afternoon following the convention, the public will be invited in to enjoy the same experience

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Reflections

[In politics and security]
the perfect cannot be
the enemy of the good.

—Jon Meacham,
former Editor, *Newsweek*,
January 11, 2010
