Dear Lexie,

The Wonder of Worship: Avoiding Spiritual Shutdown

Over the past weeks, we have been consumed by the nonstop media reports and effects of the government shutdown. Politicians on both sides of the aisle, Democratic and Republican, refuse to negotiate. The President and Congress are “dug in” as they recite rehearsed talking points on their opposing views without compromise. Congress refuses to agree on how the government should be run, how funds should be spent and how to reopen the government. We are living in the daily drama of political posturing at its worst. We citizens sit on the sidelines and criticize these events while we suffer from the pains of political warfare.

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This Sabbath:

October 19, 2013

Speaker:

David Trim
"Stones of Meaning"

Special Musical Guests:

Washington Adventist University Band,

Preston Hawes, Director

Jose Luis Oviedo, Assistant Director

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Music of the Spheres:
The Heavenly Jazz Band

This is one of my favorite hymns, and I've always been intrigued by the phrase "music of the spheres." How many of us finite beings can gaze upon the universe and hear music?

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Hope in Shame
Thought by Barry Casey

In 1994 Quentin Tarantino's film, Pulp Fiction, was released and immediately bent the needle of the outrage meter. No matter. It went on to win an Oscar and solidified Tarantino's bad-boy...

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155K views later, We NEED your help!

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The Wonder of Worship: Avoiding Spiritual Shutdown

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As Christians, I believe we have found ourselves in a similar predicament. We are living in a time when many of our churches around the world are suffering from the effects of worship wars that have even brought some of us to the brink of a spiritual shutdown. We fellowship together while forming factions on opposing sides of the worship aisles. We debate and contend with one another about liberal versus conservative musical styles and types of worship without compromise. Yet we don’t realize that without biblical direction God is not pleased with our praise. Our worship wars have caused a spiritual breakdown because our personal preference not God’s presence informs our praise. As a result, we harshly criticize each other or sit on the sidelines while our churches suffer from the pains of worship warfare.

Each week, I want to invite you to join me in a conversation about the “Wonder of Worship (W.O.W.).” In this blog we will embark on a spiritual journey that will wow you! We will discuss principles that outline God’s biblical design for a lifestyle of worship and go to Scriptures to learn how to offer God true praise. David in Psalms 95:6 says, “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.” True worship enables us to come into the presence of a Holy God. Can you imagine how wonderful it will be to experience the power and presence of God with intentionality at our worship services at Sligo? Join me on this spiritual journey and we will experience the wonders of worship together. Wow, what a day of rejoicing that will be!
Music of the Spheres: The Heavenly Jazz Band

Jamie Jean

“This is my Father’s world, and to my listening ears all nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres.” (This My Father’s World by Maltbie Davenport Babcock)

This is one of my favorite hymns, and I’ve always been intrigued by the phrase “music of the spheres.” How many of us finite beings can gaze upon the universe and hear music? One can try to fathom the vastness of the heavens, and be awed by the Lord’s awesome creation. But perceive music…doesn’t seem likely.

The apostle Paul wrote,

“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.” (Rom. 1:20)

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4-7)

Music is generally attributed to humans, but God, the creator of music, created a universe that sings His praises—whether it’s birds, tiny crickets, rustling leaves, or enormous stars. Those who are blessed with the gift of music and color (synesthesia), see music in everyday life and every animate or inanimate thing. To me, the ubiquity of music (color and song) is assurance of the presence of God, for the universe cannot help but sing of His glory when He is present. God is omnipresent, so the music never fades. We only need to listen to know that He is near.

Stars by definition are “

A self-luminous celestial body consisting of a mass of gas held together by its own gravity in which the energy generated by nuclear reactions in the interior is balanced by the outflow of energy to the surface, and the inward-directed gravitational forces are balanced by the outward-directed gas and radiation pressures.” (dictionary.com)

Based on this description, one would not expect stars to also be musical.

Science recently discovered that the X-ray patterns of stars can be converted to music. In fact, NASA has developed software that converts scientific data of all kinds into synthesized musical sounds to aid in analyzing data. But it doesn’t stop there, researcher Gerhard Sonnert realized X-ray emissions from EX Hydrae resembled a clave rhythm, common in Afro-Cuban music. (I’m not making this up!)

Sonnert then got the idea to convert the sounds from EX Hydrae, some 200 light-years away, into blues, jazz and classical music. As part of the Star Songs project, he worked with his cousin Volkmar Studtrucker, a composer, to manually convert the ‘data’ into nine different songs. (Isn’t that amazing?!!?) What resulted is beautiful music straight from the heavens.

God left His signature everywhere, and His creation gives glory to His name. He commands the heavens to sing, and they actually do. It’s not a metaphor. We, as humans, merely need to use tools to interpret the songs, and therefore, know that He is God.

“Sing O heavens; For the Lord has done it…” (Isaiah 44:23)
The Hope in Shame

Barry Casey

“We have lost a sense of moral clarity that would give rise to the fear that certain actions—whether we privately feel guilty about them or not—could lead to disgrace. For they don’t. If enough, and enough well-placed people do them, the only disgrace you need fear is the failure to get away with it.” — Susan Neiman, Moral Clarity, 369.

In 1994 Quentin Tarantino’s film, *Pulp Fiction*, was released and immediately bent the needle of the outrage meter. No matter. It went on to win an Oscar and solidified Tarantino’s bad-boy status. Critics said it glorified violence, but they were not quite right. It didn’t glorify violence so much as trivialize the pain behind the violence.

After the outcry died down I went to see it. In one scene, John Travolta turns on a guy who is slumped in the back seat of the car they are riding in, and threatens him with a gun. But the gun accidentally goes off, splattering the guy’s brains all over the back window. Travolta’s reaction provoked an instant response in the theatre: almost everyone laughed. Nervously, at first, and in embarrassment, but laughter nonetheless. I felt three reactions in rapid succession: shock with revulsion, spasmodic hilarity, followed by shame and bewilderment. It was the shame that stayed with me long after the plot line had faded. I was trying to understand why I and so many others had reacted that way.

It’s not hard to figure that we cover our embarrassment with laughter, but why are we embarrassed? It’s not as if we need to apologize to the character, a fictional being after all. Would we have laughed watching it by ourselves? It occurred to me that one reason for our embarrassment was that we didn’t want others to think we were stone-cold and heartless. On reflection I came to think embarrassment was the appropriate response. It means that there’s still something in us that can’t bear to watch someone’s humiliation at their most vulnerable moment.

“Guilt,” says philosopher Susan Neiman, “is the internal sense that you’ve done something wrong, even if no one ever discovers it. Shame records your consciousness of wrong before a community whose values you honor.” There it is: our moral behavior has a powerful social kick behind it. We want to do right, to be in favor with God and man. Like it or not we carry the community with us and we measure ourselves up against its approval—“approbation” is what philosopher Adam Smith called it in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

Smith thought that we were basically good people, but he saw the approval or contempt of society as a means for keeping our conduct in line with social norms. It was in our interest to do right and receive the praise of others just as the implied threat of community anger at our actions would fill us with shame. That depends, of course, on whether we care at all what others think of us. Smith was pretty sure most people did care, leaving out the insane and the psychopaths, of course. And just as his “invisible hand” guided the spirit and function of capitalism, so his “moral sentiments” appealed to our self-interests, as well as the interests of a stable society. The balance and order was kept because most of us had both the need and capacity to love and be loved as well as the need to avoid the disapproval of our community.

Neiman makes a persuasive case that shamelessness is pervasive in our culture and our lack of shame is what made such violations of human rights as Abu Ghraib possible. “If the ideal of human rights is destroyed by the violations that were said to be needed to realize it, our children will pay the price. Many of them are already paying, for they believe in next to nothing.”

It’s easy to lose sight of the presence of human decency when we face into the perfect storm of perversity in the media every day. I’m not ranting about particular TV shows, films, fashions, musicians, Wall Street shysters, TV evangelists, or politicians. What I’m trying to get at is the underlying tone of mockery at the human plight that runs through so much of media culture. You can’t avoid it at movie previews where upcoming films, all PG-13 at least, are reduced to slapstick or thunderous exhibitions of firepower. It was there in the photos of grinning soldiers posing with heaps of humiliated and terrified Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib. It is there when Lance Armstrong, a symbol of courage and endurance to millions, bullies his way through years of doping, lying, and degrading the sport.

Neiman believes that the only way to reverse the erosion of shame is to “return to the language of good and evil.” In a culture such as ours, in which a helpless relativism reduces moral dialogue to diatribes or a pouty solipsism, this is strong stuff. The word “evil” is over-used and abused, trivialized and rendered almost meaningless when it is applied where it does not belong. But even more threatening to our own sense of human dignity is when we refuse to apply it to our own actions—we frail, bumbling, confused and pitifully arrogant human
Kant thought the foundational principle of right action was this: Act so that you never treat other people as a means to an end, but as ends in themselves. That means that we treat ourselves with respect and treat everyone else, even our enemies, with respect also. To demean and demonize them means first of all that we could wish for such a world in which everyone did just that.

We have the means but not the wisdom nor the right to call anyone evil. But recognizing our limitations in that regard does not mean we should give up on trying to understand why we—and others—may do evil actions. We are so easily drawn into situations in which evil actions are the consequence of fear and ignorance; we need a reverence toward words and language such that we could choose to speak of good and evil again.

The degradation of our humanity sometimes pulls us down through enormous events such as genocide or the systematic rape and exploitation of women. But if we regain, as a society, the capacity to be ashamed of our evil actions, there is hope. We can retrace our steps, make amends, learn humility, and receive grace.

If evil is not in our nature but in our actions, there is hope. We do have choices, tragic though they might be at times. But if we wish to remain human we cannot be passive. Our humanity erodes, slips away, sifts through our fingers when we look only to our own self-interest. This freedom to shape our responses in situations both mundane and extreme is what separates us from lentils and aphids. It truly is the image of God in us.

Barry L. Casey, a long-time Sligo member and a co-leader of the Believers and Doubters Sabbath School class, teaches philosophy and communications at Stevenson University, Trinity University DC, and Washington Adventist University.
This week our website has reached the milestone of 155,000 page views since our relaunch. However, we still have many areas that need some work. Some of those areas are:

- Sermon Archives
- About us, history page
- Home page
- Ministry pages
- And more

We also need help with our outreach website www.findhoptoday.com, our upcoming www.simpletruthsfolife.com website, our eWeekend newsletter and social media pages and profiles.

If you would like to be part of the web team, please fill out the form below. Everyone is welcome and we are particularly looking for:

- Graphic designers
- Writers
- Social Media users
- Webmasters
- And anyone who wants to help.

Training and orientation will be provided for those who want to join the team and need help getting up to speed.