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**“One new humanity” and it is getting older . . . : crumbling walls.
No man is an island, nor no woman neither.**

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Introduction: One New Humanity, Constructions and Destructions of Peace

Each autumn at Fresno Pacific University, a small group of dedicated staff, faculty, and students gather to organize the Building a Culture of Peace week. Events during the week (held during the first week of October to coincide with Gandhi's birthday) celebrate diversity, raise difficult questions, and challenge the campus community to think more deeply about what it takes to create a culture of peace in a violent world. A regular arts event for the last seven years has been the Performance Hour, coordinated by theater faculty Julia Reimer. Literally an hour, the Performance Hour has become a forum for the presentation of student essays and reflections, prose texts created by faculty especially for the event, and found literature, as well as original musical compositions. These performances are organized around a theme. The theme is typically chosen to correlate with the overall festival theme.

In fall 2008, the organizing committee chose Ephesians 2:11-22 as a focal Scripture reference for the week, with themes around the notions of Christ as the peacemaker and "breaking down the walls of hostility" emerging from the passage. The Performance Hour was given the title "One New Humanity," another theme expressed in the passage. The pieces presented during the evening's performance offered various perspectives on the challenges we face—individually and collectively—as people who are becoming, and also just as frequently not becoming, the new humanity that the Christ makes possible. The following two texts were original works of various lengths, created by faculty members and performed as a part of the 2008 Performance Hour.

“One New Humanity” and It Is Getting Older...: Crumbling Walls

DONNA CALLAHAN

I am getting older, a fact that is demonstrated daily as I struggle to get up and down and in and out of things. It is further evidenced by the number of things which are breaking down or in need of repair. But I am not alone. Oh no, since World War II we are all living longer. By 2050, 21 million people in the United States will be over 65 and 24 percent of those elders will be over 85 years of age. Facts can be comforting.

Being part of the fastest-growing demographic has its advantages. More of us are specializing in studies of the elderly and ways to meet their needs. They should have it figured out by the time I get there, don't you think? In the meantime I am reading everything I can get my hands on about this experience and I have a perfect human study going on in my own home. My mom is 84 and has Alzheimer's. One of the down sides of living so much longer is that over 85 you have a 50 percent chance of developing Alzheimer's or some other form of dementia.

Watching mom cope with the slow but nonetheless real loss of short-term memory and executive functions has been at once inspiring and frustrating, sad and joyous when I think how lucky I am to have her with me for this last journey. Henri Nouwen writes in *Aging: The Fulfillment of Life* that

[A]ging is the turning of the wheel, the gradual fulfillment of the life cycle in which receiving matures in giving and living makes dying worthwhile. Aging does not need to be hidden or denied, but can be understood, affirmed, and experienced as a process of growth by which the mystery of life is slowly revealed to us.

It is this sense of hope that we want to strengthen. When aging can be experienced as a growing by giving, not only of mind and heart, but life itself, then it can become a movement towards the hour when we can say with the author of the second letter to Timothy: *As for me, my life is al-*

ready being poured away as a libation, and the time has come for me to be gone. I have fought the good fight to the end. I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith. (2 Tm 4:6-7)

Will I have that courage? After all, there are a lot of realities that no one warns you about before you start to show signs of aging. For one thing, you lose your eyebrows, your hair thins and gets gray, everything sags, and you don't bounce back as quickly as you once did. Then as Nouwen says we must take stock of the many gifts the elderly have to give. I am more patient and much more convinced I can survive almost everything, because I have. I can teach by listening and asking better questions.

Elders still have something to give and need to be encouraged to become teachers again and to restore the broken connections among the generations. There is a temptation to want to wall them off and keep the reality of aging from touching our lives, but should we not recognize their worth and help them to make sense of life by sharing their wisdom as our teachers, "as the ones who tell us about the dangers as well as the possibilities in becoming old."

In caring for my mom and trying to let her teach me how to accept and revel in aging, I am receiving a gift, a dress rehearsal if you will. I now understand much better why Nouwen says "we speak of aging in order to show not just how we can take care of elderly people, but more, how we can allow the elderly to cure us of our separatist tendencies and bring us into a closer and more intimate contact with our own aging;" in other words, how we can make the dividing walls crumble and celebrate all of God's humanity.

References

Nouwen, H. J. M. (1974) *Aging: The Fulfillment of Life*. New York: Doubleday

No Man is an Island, Nor No Woman Neither

JULIA REIMER

No man is an island, entire of itself.

Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.

If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less,

as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were.

Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind.

And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls.

It tolls for thee.

I learned this piece on a family car trip back in high school. My dad and sister and I would say it over and over as Dad drove. I don't remember what my mom and brother were doing. Napping perhaps, or staring out the window at the desert drifting by. Europe and the sea seemed miles away. Riding along the interstate, we learned it image by image until it became a part of my bones, from the opening metaphor of the island to the final ominous tones of the death knell. The short meditation both affirmed a connected humanity and seemed to offer us a warning.

Do you know John Donne? I looked him up. English. 1572 to 1631. Contemporary of Shakespeare, Marlowe, Ben Jonson. A renaissance kind of guy.

He was a man, of course. "No *man* is an island." "Every *man* is a piece of the continent."

"Any *man's* death diminishes me, because I am involved in *mankind*." But women weren't quite people back then. It wasn't that they were *not* human; they just weren't quite as human as men. Or maybe, they were actually more human and that was the trouble. Eve, after all, was *the* original sinner. In any case, it was cultural; a product of the times. I'd like to think we've moved past all of that now. But never send to know for whom the bell tolls.

Donne's birth occurred while Queen Elizabeth was in office. Now there's a story. You know the Tudors, right? Henry the VIII, Elizabeth's father, was, of course, most famous for his many wives...as well as for his unique approach to getting what he wanted in that department. He certainly understood the idea that "the personal is political." Which meant, in Henry's case, starting up a new church, himself as its spiritual head. Producing a new denomination was apparently less difficult than finding the right woman to produce a male heir and getting the Pope to agree with your personal-political agenda. So, in with the new, out with the old. And death to the Catholics! Heretics all! And so the bell tolls. But I'm sure it was more complicated than that.

Of course, his daughter wasn't much better, although she didn't like her Daddy's church. Bloody Mary came honestly by her name. Burning Anglicans, the new heretics, at the stake was one of her *modus operandi*. She'd learned a few things from her father about how to deal with people you don't agree with. Death to the Anglicans! Heretics all! For whom the bell tolls. But that was centuries ago. We're different now, much more reasonable about our denominational differences. We're family after all. And there are other faiths scarier than the Anglicans, or is it the Episcopalians, down the road.

Donne grew up Catholic during Elizabeth's reign. Elizabeth preferred her Daddy's church to her sister's. So, up with the Anglicans! Down with the Catholics! Donne suffered the usual discriminations against the minority. But the family had connections. He went to Oxford and to Cambridge, good universities. And after six years of college education—at the age of 18 or so; college was actually high school back then—it was time to take the Oath of Supremacy. "I pledge allegiance to the Queen, and to the one true church for which she stands." But what if the keys to the kingdom are in the Pope's pocket over in Italy? What's a Catholic to do? So he refused. It cost him his diploma. Death to disloyalty! Traitors will not prosper! Never send to know...

If only his younger brother, Henry, had been so lucky. What's a piece of paper after all, compared to your life? At the age of 21 or so, Henry decided to back his faith with his works. He knowingly harbored an illegal in his house. He offered sanctuary to a Catholic priest. The law didn't take it kindly. The *Act of Uniformity* clearly forbade such activities. Homeland values must be protected. You must go

to Anglican church on Sundays, if you don't, you'll be fined. You are not allowed to harbor a priest or go to Catholic mass; subject to imprisonment. You are not allowed to convert someone to Catholicism or, if Anglican, to convert back; subject to death. Drawing and quartering was a favorite form of punishment; painful and messy, a just reward. Brother Henry was found guilty and imprisoned for one of the lesser of crimes of not being English enough. Languishing in his cell, he caught a fever and died. Any man's death diminishes me.

John got a little wild after that. He questioned his faith, and spent a lot of time and money on the ladies, books, and going to the theater. Now we all know how bad the Theater is for a person's soul. And, he started writing poetry. But eventually, he got a decent job and fell in love with his boss's niece, a girl of 17. Or 16. He was 29. Now, the age of consent for women at the time was 12. But John and Anne made a fatal mistake. It seems they forgot to ask for her father's permission. When the marriage was discovered, the entire family was incensed. There was no question of Donne keeping his job. And, he also lost his liberty for a time. "Statutory rape," may have been what they were all thinking. "John Donne, Anne Donne, undone" was what John wrote in prison. If only he could prove the legitimacy of the marriage, the family might realize there was nothing they could do. And so he did. And so they didn't. There's always something a family can do. Remove the offending member! Disown the prodigal son. If your daughter offends you, cut her off. The language of just desserts. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less. The couple lived in loving poverty for the next eight years or so.

Anne Donne died early. She was only 33. Most of her adult life was spent in childbearing. The last child, a stillborn, was too much for her. Her husband wrote her a sonnet.

*Since she whom I loved hath paid her last debt
To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead,
And her soul early into heaven ravishèd,
Wholly on heavenly things my mind is set.
Here the admiring her my mind did whet
To seek thee, God; so streams do show the head;
But though I have found thee, and thou my thirst hast fed,
A holy thirsty dropsy melts me yet.*

*But why should I beg more love, whenas thou
Dost woo my soul, for hers offering all thine:
And dost not only fear lest I allow
My love to saints and angels, things divine,
But in thy tender jealousy dost doubt
Lest the world, flesh, yea, devil put thee out.*

Donne eventually took his place in the Anglican church, and in the priesthood too. The outside pressures played a role; the king refused him any other preferment. And so he took the oath. Perhaps he preferred the world, the comforts of the flesh, to God's wooing of his soul. But maybe, too, he simply grew tired: tired of the hostilities of the world, its laws and ordinances, its commandments, its quickness to judge. Tired, as one who grows weary of the world and its selfish ways. Tired of the deaths and the failure of love. Yet, hopeful. Donne preached many an eloquent sermon; his wit and wisdom was well-known. And Death, in the end, was not the final word.

*Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those, whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy picture[s] be,
Much pleasure, then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou'rt slave to Fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as well,
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then ?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And Death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.*

References

- Donne, John. "Death Be Not Proud."
---. "No Man is an Island."
---. "Since She Whom I Loved."