

Growing Edges

In this issue we are giving attention to "incarnational living." This is a matter we will return to in an even more intensive way in a future issue of the Perspective—likely next spring or summer. We are talking about how our life with God penetrates all we are and all we do. In this regard you will want to give special attention to the two books we are featuring in this issue, *The Reflective Executive: A Spirituality of Business and Enterprise* and *Messengers of God: The Sensuous Side of Spirituality* (p. 5). But first things first. To rightly understand incarnational living, we first need a proper understanding of the material world and our place in it.

A Good Earth

Christianity is the most materialistic of the world's religions; that is, it takes material things seriously as created goods God has given us to enjoy. The Christian faith does not, as is so often the case in Eastern religions, dismiss material things as inconsequential, or worse yet, as genuinely evil. The stuff of the material world—what Pierre Teilhard de Chardin called "holy matter"—was created by God and he declares it to be good, very good (Gen. 1:25, 31). Material goods are meant to enhance human life.



Deuteronomy 16:15 is typical of dozens of similar statements, "The Lord your God will bless you in all your produce, and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful." Note that the rejoicing is because of the abundant provision from the hand of God. The New Testament picks up this same theme of God's loving provision for his children. Jesus reminds us that as we seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, we are more adequately cared for than the birds of the air and the lilies of the field (Matt. 6:25-34).

Strange Distortions

Having said this, I must warn of the way by which people have taken the gracious teaching of Scripture on the goodness of creation and twisted it into a thing of their own. Animistic religions, for example, will invariably gravitate toward a deification of the material world and end up worshipping it. Today, Western culture is witnessing something of a revival of the ancient animistic religions.

But distortions occur in the Christian faith as well. Some, having never understood the biblical stress upon the goodness of the material world, take on a consuming asceticism that rejects the world, seeing it in opposition to true spirituality. Still others have turned Scripture's teaching on God's gracious provision for us into a religion of personal peace and prosperity, crudely stated, "Love Jesus and get rich."

A Limited Good

What we need to see is that the material world is a limited good—limited in the sense that we cannot make a life out of it. But, you see, we were never intended to make a life out of material things, because material things were never intended to function independently of God and his other created realities. No, we are created so as to receive life from God, who is Spirit, and to express that life through our bodies and in the material world in which we live. The spiritual and the physical are not in opposition to one another, but are complementary. Far from being evil, the physical is meant to be inhabited by the spiritual.

Redeemed by God through Christ, we are indwelt by the Spirit and experience a growing transformation of character as we use our bodies to come into a working harmony with the Spirit. Hence our embodied self becomes a portable sanctuary, and we learn throughout our daily activities and interactions how to function in cooperation with and in dependence upon the Spirit. Through time and experience we discover that everywhere we go is "holy ground," everything we do is "consecrated activity," and everything we think and say is "sanctified communication." The jagged line dividing the sacred and the secular must be erased for there simply is nothing that is outside the realm of God's purview and care. This is "incarnational living."

Peace and joy,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, which reads "Richard J. Foster".

Richard J. Foster

Growing Together

One of the best ways we can grasp the idea of an "incarnational lifestyle" is to look at people in the past who have blazed the trail ahead of us and have shared their journey with us. I list for your growth and reading selected individuals, along with some of their writings, that are shining examples. Some of these books are not presently in print—but, of course, that is why we have libraries.

John Woolman is, for me, perhaps the most stellar example of how this way of living actually works. Others have felt the same. Charles Lamb intones, "The only American book I ever read twice was the Journal of Woolman.... Get the writings of John Woolman by heart." Emerson agreed—I find more wisdom in these pages than in any other book written since the days of the apostles." Why would an eighteenth-century Quaker tailor, businessman, and minister of Christ engender such comments? Find out for yourself by reading *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*. I recommend the Phillips P. Moulton edition.

Those who wove their Christianity throughout a literary life are many and varied. For novelists we can do no better than turn to the Russians, in particular, **Fyodor Dostoyevsky**, **Leo Tolstoy**, and in our day **Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn**. Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov* are philosophical detective stories in which both the murderer and the meaning of life are simultaneously pursued. His novel *The Idiot* gives us an engaging Christ-figure in Prince Mishkin (you see, the Forrest Gump character is nothing new) and asks the penetrating question of all who blithely conform to contemporary societal norms, "Who is the real idiot?" Tolstoy is known for *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* in which he engages us in the great struggles of human souls from war to peace and love—love between men and women, love of country, and supremely Christian love. But I must admit I am not as intrigued with Tolstoy as a writer as I am with him as a tortured, struggling soul himself. And I am touched by his support of a small Russian sect, the Dukhobors, whom I had brief contact with as a college student. Solzhenitsyn ranks with the other two both as a literary figure and for the way he integrates his Christian witness into the very warp and woof of who he is and what he writes. *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, *Cancer Ward*, and *The Gulag Archipelago* will startle you, disturb you, and deepen you.

I like **Dorothy Sayers** for the way she could with equal ease write masterful detective fiction and powerful Christian apologetics in her plays and essays. Her detective stories with their amateur detective Lord Peter Wimsey are rated by those who know about these things (I'm not

qualified) as among the classics of the genre, being outstanding for their well-researched backgrounds, distinguished style, observant characterizations, and ingenious plotting. Her play *The Man Born To Be King* and essays—"Towards a Christian Aesthetic" and "The Mind of the Maker"—are all worth careful attention.

When we turn to music, there simply is no better example of incarnational living than **Johann Sebastian Bach**. Arguably the greatest composer ever, Bach wrote over three hundred cantatas which include five complete cycles in the Lutheran Church year. He wrote music of all kinds, and in each case he discretely indicated his dependence upon God. At the beginning of each work he would jot the letters J. J. (Jesu Juva, Jesus Help) or I. N. J. (In Nomine Jesu, In the Name of Jesus) At the end of each piece he often wrote S. D. G. (Solo Deo Gloria, To the Glory of God Alone) At the bottom of his Little Organ Book he wrote "For the glory of the most high God alone. And for my neighbor to learn from." For listening pleasure the Mass in B Minor, St. Matthew's Passion, the Christmas Oratorio, and a variety of the Cantatas are good places to begin. (John Rutter's renditions are excellent.) For reading enjoyment you might consider Albert Schweitzer's *J. S. Bach and his Bach's Complete Organ Works*. Or you might want to look at *Bach Among the Theologians* by Jaroslav Pelikan.

One more example of incarnational living will have to suffice—**Susanna Wesley**. Here was a brilliant woman (she learned Greek, Latin, and French in her teens) who devoted herself to home and family—she had nineteen children. The whole household life moved as if to a timetable under Susanna's leadership. She provided weekly one-on-one time with each child; Thursday afternoon was the appointed hour for time with her son John who was destined to found and lead the great Methodist movement that has so profoundly influenced the whole of Christian history. Another son, Charles, was to become the celebrated hymn writer that gave Methodists—indeed the whole Christian world—a wealth of hymns and songs. And it was Susannah that provided them with the intellectual development and spiritual discipline necessary for their great work. To learn more about Susanna, I suggest W. L. Doughty's *The Prayers of Susanna Wesley*, *Susanna Wesley* by Arnold A. Dallimore, and *Susanna Wesley: God's Catalyst for Revival* by Donald L. Kline.

Space hinders my continuing. I could just as quickly written about Michelangelo and Chaucer and Rembrandt and T. S. Eliot and Sir Isaac Newton and Samuel Johnson and William Wilburforce and so many others. These sterling examples of how to incarnate Christian witness into all walks of life are powerfully instructive as we seek to be faithful to Christ where we live day by day.

Richard J. Foster

Marketplace Spirituality

by Emilie Griffin

(The following excerpts are from *The Reflective Executive*. Emilie worked as an advertising executive in New York City for twenty years during which she helped develop television campaigns for ALCOA Aluminum and other major U. S. corporations and received over fifty awards for creativity.)

Cities are metaphors of consciousness. In and through them we see visions and dream dreams. In New York, Chicago, and London, massive economic power is felt in the roar of traffic, the howl of machinery, the tuning-fork vibrations of bridges, and the moan of tugs and barges. In search of fulfillment we rush down into subways, jounce to and from appointments on jarring, crowded buses, run to hail cabs, hurtle to airports, check in, rush to board, and wait on runways while frustrations mount. Disenchantment seizes us. Discouragement sets in. What, we wonder, are we living for? What path are we following? Sometimes, because of our disenchantment, we become more open to reminders of a simpler way. Whirrings of clock towers and sounds of church bells—even in the heart of the metropolis—call us to reflection and inwardness.

From my first office in New York City, on the thirty-seventh floor of a Fifth Avenue tower, I could look down on St. Patrick's Cathedral. It looked like a child's plaything, a toy cathedral that I could lift and carry somewhere. Something about this troubled me. Cathedrals, I felt, should be looked up to. Later, when I visited England, I saw how cathedrals can dominate landscapes. Then I understood the new power balance of twentieth-century life. Lever House and the Seagram's Building, I concluded, are our new cathedrals. The Chrysler Building and the Empire State our statements of value. Dwarfing the little churches on Park Avenue and Wall Street, they have created a new ethos. These buildings are proclamations of power. Do we as executives need to leave these buildings in order to experience faith? Or is God with us in the Marketplace?

What is revealed in the marketplace is a mystical vision: that of the New Jerusalem. Looking with secular eyes, one sees nothing more than steel and concrete, trash-filled streets, escalating poverty and homelessness, society out of control. But with eyes transformed by a biblical vision, one can see the face of God through the power of Manhattan, the splendor of the East River, Hudson, Harlem, in the singing bridges, the haze over Brooklyn and Queens. The metaphor of the metropolis, be it London or Chicago or Detroit, whether the vastness of Los Angeles or Miami,

shows God present in ways seen only with the eyes of faith. Silver cities rise. Your sons and daughters sing the greatest song.

God is here! He is actually present! It is not beneath him to dwell on the Staten Island ferry, heading for Lower Manhattan. He is willing to descend with us into the underground chambers of the subway, to be with us in discomfort, boredom, alienation. He accompanies us to the boardroom. He attends the year-end meeting. In the community formed by us, by colleagues, by purchasers, buyers and sellers, customers satisfied and unsatisfied, he is present, bearing our sorrows, acquainted with grief.

What a contrast to our common way of thinking: that business, which is by its very nature materialistic, somehow has to be spiritualized. The reality is otherwise. It is our mistake to think that we will somehow take business, which is unholy, and by some sacrifice or offering, make it holy. That tragic mistake is the crucial error we must expose. To correct this false notion we need not only action but contemplation.

From my view from the thirty-seventh floor, I first guessed at the possibility of a kind of entrepreneurial, even a corporate, poetics. In my first years in business I found out how to grasp—in a single insight, I thought—inner meanings, the inward life or soul of something generally considered to be "only" material. In writing about aluminum and its God-given qualities I unknowingly set out on a spiritual adventure. I ran with a raggle-taggle worldly company of television writers and film directors, not all of whom believed in God. By studying, exploring, and contemplating the familiar material, we hunted for some inner beauty, wanting to lay meanings bare. We were explorers, discoverers. Focusing intently on aluminum, we wanted to push back the boundaries of film, to stand television on its head. By reflection, by experiment, by thought, by hope, we supposed that, by some breakthrough we would say something that would move everyone.

I remember, as though it were yesterday, going uptown to the Herman Miller showroom to look at the Charles Eames chair. It was a quest! I was in pursuit not of aluminum, but of beauty, the inner truth the designer sees. Then in my mind's ear came the words to voice it all: "What is beauty? A frill? A trim? Or an aspect of texture and form?" There was vision, too, in the director's inner eye. With a burst of excitement he saw a way to shoot the scene: one continuous two-minute pullback, a visual exploration of one surprising aluminum artifact after another. This brief message, like the four or five others we crafted, was essentially contemplative. Reflectivity? Yes, there would be sun caught in the skin of a skyscraper; yes, there would be the sun's corona caught in the aluminum surface of a telescope. Words were used, but only as afterwords. First, we saw the meaning, as surely as if we had been finding the double helix or the formula for relativity. Mind to mind, heart to heart, we thought we had found something ineffable and holy.

To say that the aim of business is to serve is to speak not idealistically, but practically. Service is fundamental to the marketplace. Customers have the power to choose; marketers must please, cajole, offer, and persuade. Although no human choices are ever fully free, in a society of abundance marketers find themselves less powerful than they supposed. In spite of all the wit and will in the world, products may be launched, only to run aground. Ideas that seemed brilliant on the drawing board may be rejected by the public outright. Grittiness may be valued by some, yet appear false and foolish to others. Inflated market projects collapse; false ambitions fizzle; short-term marketing plans and long-term strategies fail.

This flawed system, the free market system, with all its vagaries and failings, is what idealists such as Thomas Johnson would push to new limits. We who are people of the promise are feeling a twitch upon the thread, a tug on the rope, the relentless pull of aspiration and grace. Our values are being challenged. Our weary, much-exercised competitive market economy is being called up higher. Johnson would have us, flawed people that we are, do more with and get more from this unwieldy system: produce more, cherish the earth, raise living standards, save lives. Is it possible? Is it within our grasp? Don't structures and systems have their limits? How can we satisfy a whole world's needs? For such an economic challenge, what power can we deploy? Yet we know, with Yahweh's help and our own God-given powers of creativity that we can stretch elastic structures of belief into new

configurations. Estimators we are, but we cannot fully estimate the power of ourselves together with God.

The reflective executive is one who walks by faith and thinks by metaphor; who sees in the terror and anxiety of the twentieth century a call to holiness, who understands daily experience as a call to conversion, who lives in dialogue with God, making intercession for others; who throws her own life into the breach when necessary; who manifests a concern for others; who takes into account, in business decisions, the intolerable sound of the word "trade-off" and at the same time the relentless necessity of compromise; who operates within the realm of the practical knowing that with God, all things are possible; who looks long, looks hard, looks prophetically and with vision at the improbable realignments that take place in society daily; who sets aside, to the extent possible, the biases, the *Scotists*, the distortions of ancient enmities and strife; and who longs for reconciliation, solidarity, sisterhood, brotherhood—perhaps for civility most of all.

The reflective executive is in short a hero and a saint, dressed in the ordinary garb of the marketplace. This executive is one who lives not only by getting things done but by getting the right things done because she lives in the sight of the Lord all days of her life. Her courage and her vision are unconquerable. She lives for her Master's counsel, and in his presence her heart is lifted up and consoled. She is anointed with the oil of gladness because she understands the generosity of the Lord's favor to her; and she is willing to walk through the canyons of cities built by commerce and weakened by double-dealing, to mend the broken statues, and to repair the shattered dreams.

Lord of the marketplace, I thank you for creating in me a heart sensitive to the needs of the whole human family; for giving me the creative apparatus to exercise executive leadership in your world of goods and services, of getting and spending, without, in the end, becoming estranged from you.



Emilie Griffin also writes about her faith experience in four other books, *Chasing the Kingdom*, *Clinging*, *Turning*, and *Homeward Voyage*. Now a free-lance marketing consultant, she and her husband, Bill, live in New Orleans.

Going Deeper

We feature in this issue two hard-to-find books that we believe need to be brought to the attention of the reading public—both dealing with aspects of "incarnational living."

The first—*The Reflective Executive: A Spirituality of Business and Enterprise*—is written by one of our RENOVARE team members, Emilie Griffin. Moving beyond religious dressing over the marketplace, she delves into the soul of business and enterprise: "To restructure the marketplace according to God's design for us is more than a matter of Bibles on desktops and times set aside for prayer during the business day. Although these signs of spirituality are worthwhile, they are still no more than random leaves of grass cropping up through the cracks of Wall Street."

It is a joy to hear Griffin's own stories developing advertising campaigns for companies like ALCOA Aluminum and Ivory Soap; equally enjoyable are the stories she tells of J. C. Penney, S. W. Graham, and others. Most of all I am encouraged by her call for "a kind of entrepreneurial, even a corporate, poetics" which can envision how "commerce might make the world better instead of worse, might lift the yoke of oppression and break the bonds, if not of political, then at least of economic enslavement."

Growing Pains

By the time you receive this, our annual Board of a Trustees meeting will be over (July 19-21). This is always a wonderful time of prayer, fellowship, nurture, encouragement, and challenge.

Several Board members are working intensely on various writing projects. Do pray for each person and their project as it comes to you.

- Marti Ensign is working on a collection of her experiences in Africa;

Arthur O. Roberts is a former philosophy professor of mine, and he kindly invited me to write the Foreword to his new book, *Messengers of God: The Sensuous Side of Spirituality*. Dr. Roberts sees the senses as "the of messengers of God" especially when "reason interrogates." the senses." By "senses" he is referring literally to our hearing and seeing and smelling and tasting and touching. Perhaps few of us have thought of these everyday experiences as having much to do with spiritual life. But Arthur Roberts seems them as crucial. "A practical spirituality," he writes, "acknowledges that God is in the communications loop made possible by our senses."

With the skill of one at home in the contrasting worlds of science and poetry, he has taken masses of technical data about the senses and makes them understandable to us, even significant. We are indeed "fearfully and wonderfully made."

Arthur Roberts invites us into a way of living that is world affirming and life giving. It is a way that involves "the intelligent interrogation of the senses acknowledged as the messengers of God, with appropriate disciplines to follow. A spiritual life can be a sensory life, but it need not be a vain and extravagant one." This is a way of living worth our best efforts. *Messengers of God* will help chart our course.

Richard J. Foster

- Richard Foster continues to write *Streams of Living Water*;
- Emilie Griffin hopes to complete a RENOVARE Resource on retreat, *Wilderness Time*, by January;
- Bill Vaswig is writing a RENOVARE Resource on the Gospels with the working title, *Living Stories*;
- Dallas Willard's magnum opus, *The Kingdom Among Us*, hopefully will be completed before the year is over.