



## The Elusive Virtue, *Gelassenheit*, and Feet Washing

**A**kin to grasping a slippery bar of soap is the Christian believer's attempt to possess humility. Humility is not to be confused with humiliation, which is the act of causing someone else to feel ashamed. Rather, to be humble means "to give place to another." Any human relationship that values reciprocal attention is a humble relationship when one sentient individual gives place to another. While a character quality may be non-material, it may be meaningfully expressed in physical ways. Jesus clearly exemplified humility (Phil. 2:5-8) and called his followers to embrace humble servanthood as a way of life. Yet, we who desire to truly follow Jesus often find humility to be so elusive! Why?

The life of Jesus was an illustration of humility and service. Jesus came not only to serve created humanity (Matt. 20:28), but also to call human disciples into humble service that involves self-denial and a commitment "to take up his cross and follow [Christ]" (Matt. 16:24-25). Within my Anabaptist religious tradition, *gelassenheit* (literal German meaning: yieldedness or resignation) was taught as *the* way to follow Christ.<sup>1</sup> For example, the Moravian Anabaptist, Hans Haffner, wrote a tract in the 1530s entitled, *About the True Soldier of Jesus Christ*, where he described *gelassenheit* as true surrender, a letting loose of everything for Christ:

True surrender (*gelassenheit*) is to put to death the flesh and to be born another time. The whole world wants to have Christ, but they pass him by. They do not find him because they want to have him only as a gift, only as a giver of grace and a mediator which he certainly is, but they do not want to have him in a suffering way.<sup>2</sup>

In listing character virtues in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:3-5), Jesus begins with poor in spirit, mourning, and meekness as the first three qualities of a Christ-like life.

In contrast to the way of Jesus, our society and culture call us to be proud, strong, and motivated to get ahead of others thereby demonstrating our superiority. Rather than giving place to another, we quickly claim our spot, and if possible try to add to our place by absorbing space from our competitors. We vie with each other to make the new

discovery and to get it published first. We cultivate relationships with those in administrative power, rather than the janitorial staff, because we know promotions have much to do with perceptions. We consider ourselves as above the average, e.g., based on self-evaluations, most college professors rate their teaching effectiveness above average. Can a Christian be a nonconformist to the world in this area and still be a successful scientist? What would happen if instead of explaining to my colleague or mentor the unique and creative insight that I have, I would take that time to describe how another colleague demonstrates creativity and initiative?

In my local congregation, we periodically practice the congregational ritual of foot washing to commemorate the humble example and command of Jesus (John 13:14). As a ceremonial participant when I stoop over the basin with a draped towel washing a fellow congregant's feet, it is sobering to think that even the practice of this lowly symbolic act of humility can be conducted with a proud heart. What does it say about me, when I think more about how "I look with my bare feet in church" or the "efficient foot washing job that I am doing" rather than about the needs and feelings of my brother? Oops! Again, humility slips out of my grasp, like a slimy bar of soap!

Although I too frequently express the characteristic of pride, my intention by God's grace is to walk in Christ's path of humility and to truly "wash my brother's feet" by periodically giving up my place for another's needs and concerns. When that happens, humility boosts an intimate spousal bond, facilitates the close fellowship of congregational believers, and promotes harmony and productivity by scientific colleagues in the laboratory.

Let's walk together. I will provide the basin and the water. Can you bring a towel? ■

Roman J. Miller, Editor

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), 66, 124.

<sup>2</sup>Peter Hoover, *The Secret of the Strength: What Would the Anabaptists Tell This Generation* (Shippensburg, PA: Benchmark Press, 1998), 34-5.



## In This Issue

### Four Articles ...

Can science operate as an enterprise without being bolstered by faith? In our first regular article, Christopher Kaiser makes a strong case for the persistence of medieval faith in modern scientists like Einstein. Can you identify with this position? How does your faith affect your process of science? (pp. 171–81).

What is the reality of the biblical Adam? Peter Rüst brings his perspective on inspiration, anthropology, and biblical interpretation to present Adam as a global Holocene inhabitant. How do you explain the variances in Genesis and historical anthropology? What is the common ground? (pp. 182–93).

Continuing on the theme of the interaction of scripture and science, David Siemens, Jr. provides an insight on biblical interpretation with the “Humpty Dumpty” metaphor. His survey of various traditional interpretations provides the background for his favorite approach. Are there other options which Siemens missed? (pp. 194–200).

In the final regular article, Ken Funk considers the ethics of technology. Funk lays out three essential principles that should guide our use of technology. The deeper question is whether or not technology by its very existence tends toward evil or is amoral. Can Christians provide the “redemption” of technology? (pp. 201–11).

### Four Communications ...

Co-authors Harry Poe and Chelsea Mytyk thoughtfully reflect on the development and evolution of the concept “methodological naturalism” (pp. 213–8). Then Michael Buratovich raises interesting speculations of the origin of complexity in eukaryote cells (pp. 219–23). Next John Korstad provides an illustrated testimonial how one university exercised stewardship of its aquatic resources (pp. 224–5). And finally, Robert Rogland considers and further reflects on the hypothesis of some young earth scientists that nuclear decay rates were accelerated some years ago (pp. 226–8).

### Other Sections ...

The book review section contains contributions of numerous readers who thoughtfully analyze twenty-eight books. One art eyes science contribution and two letters conclude the pages of this issue.

### Looking Ahead ...

The December 2007 issue of *PSCF* will feature the editorship passage from the old to the new by welcoming incoming editor, Dr. Arie Leegwater, who will assume responsibility for journal issues in 2008. The December 2007 issue will feature a discussion of global warming and contributions on origins, science education, and environmental ethics.

Happy Reading,  
**Roman J. Miller**, *Editor*

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## Looking Back: The Journal 50 Years Ago!

Fifty years ago in the September 1957 issue, the *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* published four major articles:

- “Dating with Radioactivity” by George Schweitzer
- “Illustrations of Spiritual Truths Using the Phenomena of Luminescence in Solids” by Richard Bube
- “Tranquilizing Drugs” by John McLennon
- “Revelation, History, and the Bible” by George Ladd

To hear these voices from the past, you can access these four articles online at the ASA website using the following link:

[www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1957/](http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1957/)