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*Wednesday October 8, 2014*

## **Like manna from heaven**

**By Jim Taylor**

**With Canadian Thanksgiving coming up this weekend, some biblical validation for the festival seemed appropriate. So here is a reading from Exodus, chapter 16:**

**The entire assembly complained about the leadership of Moses and his brother Aaron. They said, “Why did you lead us out of Egypt where McDonald’s was open 24/7, to bring us out to this wilderness where we will surely die of hunger?”**

**“Give us this day our daily burgers and fries,” they chanted.**

**So Moses said, “I will show you that all this was part of an intelligent design that reaches its pinnacle in self-actuating human beings. Tomorrow morning, you will receive whatever you need.”**

**In the morning, when the dew lifted, the people found flat flaky things lying on the sands.**

**They said to one another, “What are these?”**

**Moses said to them, “These things are credit cards. You may use them to gather whatever you need for the needs of your household.”**

**The people gathered up credit cards by the handful.**

**And the people took their credit cards, and hiked through the canyons and wadis to Walmart and Target and the Great Canadian Superstore, and bought everything that they could possibly need.**

**Now Moses had warned them, “Do not gather more food or clothing than you need for each day. Any treasure you lay up for yourselves will be corrupted by moth and rust.”**

**But the people didn’t listen. They stored their surplus goods in their**

tents, thinking they could sit back in their newly-acquired lounge chairs while the less fortunate had to make another trip to Costco. But when they got out their meat, it had maggots. Their cheese had grown mouldy. The children had already outgrown their new running shoes.

So the people took their purchases back for a refund. But the store managers pointed out that Moses had warned them against purchasing more than they needed. “Sufficient unto the day is the weevil thereof,” the managers said, peering into sacks of spoiled oatmeal.

The people discovered that they had nothing left of their purchases. Except a negative credit balance, on which they were expected to pay 19.84% annual interest.

“But if we can only buy enough for one day at a time,” the people protested, “how will we survive over statutory holidays and holiday weekends?”

So Moses established credit limits. To each family, he assigned a credit limit, sufficient to stock a refrigerator and freezer. But for special occasions when turkeys had to be ceremonially sacrificed, credit limits could be increased.

“Use your credit wisely,” Moses advised them. “For tomorrow the banks may change their policies, as they are entitled to do, at their discretion, without advising you, and you will be bound to minimum monthly payments on your debt forever and ever.”

“You told us we were escaping from bondage,” the people objected. “Once we were slaves in Egypt, and the Lord God led us out of Egypt to freedom.”

“Not to freedom,” Moses corrected them. “To the free market. Tyrants and pharaohs can no longer impose suffering upon you. Now you are free to get yourself into as much trouble as you want.”

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## **YOUR TURN**

I went out on a limb with last week’s column about science and the Bible. I’m grateful that none of you sawed it off.

**Dale Sattizahn wrote, “I enjoy the work of Stephen Hawking and the law of Physics. I get excited with news from the rovers on Mars and discovery of new planets. The ‘heavens’ do indeed declare the handiwork of God. Creation extends well beyond our own backyard, and so does the presence of the Creator. The ancient civilizations did not have the knowledge we do today.**

**“But I also believe that we are at the tip of iceberg of understanding the heavens. A thousand years from now our thinking will be ancient. With divine grace, we are moving forward.”**

**Isabel Gibson mused, “The more science learns about the origins of the universe and of life, the more unlikely (not to say improbable) the whole enterprise seems. I think the Bible at its core speaks to that reality -- and to the range of feelings and reactions even a vague appreciation of it engenders: awe, fear, joy, anxiety, surprise, deep contentment, gratitude.**

**“How lucky we are to have both.”**

**Nenke Jongkind felt that one of my sentences (“Science acknowledges and corrects its errors; true believers seem unwilling to do the same with the Bible”) “describes some of my family members perfectly. It is as though we don’t need a brain to be a believer -- something to which I cannot subscribe.”**

**Ted Wilson vented a little: “I have big problem with people who claim God stopped speaking to us 2000 years ago, or whatever time span it is. Could they not hear God speaking loud and clear when Martian Luther King told us ‘I Have a Dream’? Did they not hear that ‘The words of the Prophets are written on the subway walls and tenement halls, and echoed in the sounds of silence.’? Was that line [from Simon and Garfunkel’s ‘The Sounds of Silence’: JT] the inspiration, in part, for last week’s column?”**

**Steve Roney agreed with me, in part, “that the laws of mathematics and the laws of nature are part of God’s own nature. Along with the moral law and the laws of reason, these are the Logos. But I cannot see how you can properly call this ‘science.’ Science is a method for discovering the laws of nature. To say science is God is therefore an idolatry, and logically like saying the telescope creates the moon, or the e-reader has written the book.”**

**Steve added, “I’d also object to including the ‘social sciences’ as legitimate science.”**

**Fran Ota recalled some family wisdom: “It's funny how things our parents say stick with us. I remember, as a teen, hearing my father preach about science and the Bible. He said that science tells us the HOW of things, the Bible tells us the WHY. Maybe that's overly simplistic, but the main point was that the Bible was never intended to be taken literally, but was part of a story.”**

**And then, picking up the theme from the previous week's column, Fran continued, “Oh, and silence? I married a man who is a non-stop talker. Silence makes him uncomfortable, I think. After 43 years of marriage, I am not ashamed to say that when he goes off to Japan for a month or two, I revel in the peace and quiet. By the end of two months I am ready for him to be back, but those first couple of silent weeks are golden.”**

**Laurina Tallman also connected with childhood learnings: “I was raised by a scientist father and by a musician mother. I was raised to think that God IS science, the study of what we can see, but also that God IS the study of what we can hear: music, conversation, and particular kinds of interior awareness [that] constitute the Voice of God. Groups of people who sit in silence like the Quakers or some others who pray together expecting to hear God will come to astonishing agreement about that Voice...**

**“However, I have learned most of us hear no better than we see.**

**“The Bible is our testament in language of both those streams of growth in human perceptivity but perhaps especially of the evolution of agreement on hearing -- we can agree what is ‘good and holy’ or left-brained and ‘bad or evil’ or right-brained. Your paraphrases of the Psalms are a wonderful updating of that evolution in language. I think it is not when we see ‘face to face’ that we will know Heaven but when we hear ‘ear matched to ear’ that we shall know even as we are known.”**

**Laurina has done a lot of work on hearing and psychology. So she continued, “In response to Charles Hill, who works with those who have been imprisoned, I would say that a brief ‘time apart’ may allow a prisoner to ‘hear God,’ but that incarceration as a means of causing penitence is horrifically cruel and perfectly useless because extended periods of silence merely cause the brain to deteriorate so that one becomes increasingly less likely to be able to improve one's behaviour. *The Shawshank Redemption* prisoners, upon release, were so unable to cope that most of them committed suicide. Deafness in the ordinary sense affects over 40% of American prisoners (quoted by deaf psychologist Dr. David Myers in *A Quiet World: Living with Hearing Loss*) and, in my estimation, deafness of the type that defines mental**

inadequacies, the least of which is dyslexia, affects many more prisoners.

“Our concepts of penal reform are far more cruel and far less likely to cause reform than most of us can possibly imagine.”

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## **PSALM PARAPHRASES**

The recommended selection from Psalm 106 seemed to me to call for a small collection of character sketches.

### ***A fawning lackey grovels.***

1      Congratulations, Lord. You have achieved your goals magnificently.  
2      But who am I to brag about your achievements?  
I'm only a small cog in your mighty machinery.  
4      Still, don't forget me.  
I may be small, but I played a part in your success.  
5      If it's all right with you, I'd like to share in some of your glory.  
3      You should reward those who didn't rock your boat,  
who didn't break down under pressure,  
who didn't foul up the process.  
4      When you hand out the bonuses, please remember me.

### ***A corporate sinner confesses***

6      We have made bad decisions;  
we have pursued harmful policies.  
We sold our country and our culture to curry favor with our competitors;  
we traded our birthright for a mess of promises.  
It seemed expedient at the time.  
19     Our companies making war equipment profited from the misery of  
helpless people.  
20     We have written God into our constitution  
and written God out of our culture.  
21     We have no room for God in economics and politics.  
22     We have forgotten what God has done in the past;  
we have assumed that God will not act against us in the future.  
  
23     Now God is angry.

Please God, do not destroy us.

**I am no Moses, but I can plead with you too.  
Remember that we are your children, and you love us.**

**For paraphrases of most of the psalms used by the Revised Common  
Lectionary, you can order my book *Everyday Psalms* from Wood Lake  
Publishing, [info@woodlake.com](mailto:info@woodlake.com).**

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YOU SCRATCH MY BACK...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca).  
Or forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other web links worth pursuing, try

- Ralph Milton's HymnSight webpage, <http://www.hymnsight.ca>, with a vast gallery of photos you can use to enhance the appearance of the visual images you project for liturgical use (prayers, responses, hymn verses, etc.)
- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, [www.seemslkegod.org](http://www.seemslkegod.org);
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, [www.traditionaliconoclast.com](http://www.traditionaliconoclast.com)
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap," write [reynoldsrap@shaw.ca](mailto:reynoldsrap@shaw.ca)
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write [alvawood@gmail.com](mailto:alvawood@gmail.com) to get onto her mailing list.

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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Sunday called Sharp Edges, which tends to be somewhat more cutting about social and justice issues. To sign up for Sharp Edges, write to me directly, at [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca), or send a note to [sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca)

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