



Movers and Shakers

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Who is it that moves and shakes our world these days?

Personally I have a whole list of saints and I don't know whom I should list first. There's Ivan Wheaton who taught me what it means to be a pastor ... that people are worth caring for. There are Don MacNeill and Bill Hillegonds who stirred my dreams and made me think about integrity. Get it started and the list of those who moved and shook me is endless. (I *know*. I've trimmed out two pages of names, and I hadn't even gotten started!) There are teachers who troweled open the springs of awareness; there are college, seminary and graduate school professors who affirmed, challenged and illustrated wisdom; pastors, neighbors and colleagues gave insight, pricked bubbles and offered encouragement; and there have always been friends whom a whimsical Providence has cast into my path ... and still does ... anchors of sanity. In the course of a checkered career *many* have urged me on and inspired the adventure with joy. And there's always family — my wife, Nancy, our three children, my mother and father and, tracing through the 'begats', a whole host of siblings and cousins, not least my sister, Marilyn. In my microcosm, all these were movers and shakers. 'So great a cloud of witnesses' surrounds me ... surrounds *each* of us.

In the course of a life the network interweaves and extends. We are all beholden (indeed, we are all debtors). My network ties together Japan with Hawaii with India with the Hudson Valley with the American Mid-West with California, Wyoming, Colorado, Michigan, with Jaffna in Sri Lanka with Madras with Arabia with Turkey with Cyprus and ... and ... and. We were *born* debtors. The question is: What do we do with our indebtedness? What do we do with the models of goodness and even greatness that God has given us to touch? And then we have to keep in mind the cloud of witnesses. The conscience must account.

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Every person in the universe has a list, and the names are specific ... human souls of ultimate value and fantastic radial outreach. In the end the debt can become quite intimidating. Stretching beyond our personal lists, our bond-holder becomes all humanity. We seek for meaning in the debt, and all that we can come up with is that, as individual human beings, we owe our living and our lives to our fellow humans. It's a family thing ... a clan commitment. Or, at least, that's how it *should* be.

In biblical terms, that human vocation is spoken of as the 'image of God' (Genesis 1:26 and other affirmations) — creator, sustainer, redeemer, instructor, conservator, lover — the human individual in all his or her marvelous potential. In Muslim expression, this idea is cast in vocational terms. We speak of human vice-regency or stewardship or even 'successorship' (*khilâfah*) in God's name for all creation. From our first involuntary breath and until (again involuntarily) we die, we humans bear a very tangible responsibility for the gift of living. "We belong to God, and to him we return." (*Qur'ân, Sûrah 2:109*) That 'belonging' evokes in each human soul the dignity of divinity. Or, at least, that's how it *should* be.

Yet, in the celestial dialogue between God and the angels, after God declared his intention to create the human being as his vice-regent on earth, there is a curious poignancy to the angels' objection: "Will you place thereon one who will corrupt it and shed blood, while we praise your glory and hallow you?" (*Qur'ân, Sûrah 2:30*) The angels' list of human atrocities, of course, could have been much longer, but they hit the high points — deliberate corruption and slaughter. Although God denies their insight, at least in the relatively short-term the angels seem to have had the right of it.

How it *should* be is not (yet) how it *is*. Looking toward the end-of-ends, we can all afford to be optimists. *Some day* humanity may well grow up and claim its maturity, but that is certainly not yet. We are, clearly, the perpetrators of corruption and those who shed blood with ever greater proficiency. Our world's environment is going to hell in a hand basket (corruption), and we are all being whistled into a calliope crescendo of bloody violence.

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So, who are the movers and shakers of our world? More to the point, to whom should we look to fulfill these offices? Of course, the real puzzle is, what have we done with our good models? Surely, they are a key to understanding God's somewhat cryptic response to the angels: "I know what you don't." God's obvious but evasive optimism challenges us always. As my son, Tom, asked, "How can we move from a path that confirms the angels' pessimism to one that proves God's hope?"

Don't expect quick answers. There are none. Power is now wielded in far too diffuse a manner for there to be any quick fixes. But there do come days when we who self-consciously desire to fulfill the 'image of God' in us, and who sense our responsibility under the terms of our vice-regency for creation, must become far more pro-active.

In the United States November is coming with portents of 'mid-term elections'. It is time to look for those who conform to our best models, those who strive to reflect the 'image of God'. For all of us — Muslim, Christian or Jew — the litmus test is to identify those who shoulder the burden of stewardship (*khilâfah*), candidates who have demonstrated resistance to corruption and to slaughter.

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We in the Middle East live in hope. We join our voices with all who sing the song of hope anywhere else in the world. There simply *must* come a day when we — *all* of us — will see a new day dawn. The corruptors will be unveiled, the violent will be de-fanged, and the peacemakers will be vindicated as children of God. That vindication can come, at least in part, through the ballot box. The neo-cons and the so-called 'Christian' Zionists need a stinging rebuke during the American elections in November. The rational side of the American military (that committed and loyal to its citizen base) needs to be empowered, and the greedy industrial base for weapons of war and mass destruction must be brought to heel, its Dr. Strangelove imagination curbed. There must come a time when the military and industry must be forced apart and no longer form a powerful coalition for violence.

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We have spoken about the correlation of interest between the Israeli and American military in earlier 'meditations'. This is not a myth. It exists and *has* existed for years. Israel provides a 'laboratory' for the American weapons industry be that in Gaza, in the Palestinian West Bank, or in Lebanon. As the United States moves toward an open confrontation with Iran over the nuclear issue a good deal of this data is proving instructive. For instance, the upgraded bunker-buster bombs recently tested in Lebanon may already be uploaded into units whose programmed targets are strategic sites in Iran. (We're talking about very nasty ordinance here, redolent with radioactivity.)

Is this all the conjuration of a hyperactive imagination? I only wish it were. It all feeds into a resonating system of the criminality of the violent mind that feeds upon itself. But we need to lock onto the fact that it is not self-funded. The whole system is a leach. It depends upon taxes and contributions. Cut (or critically control) these resources and the system implodes. Karl Marx was right: It's all economics. And the scriptures (Jewish, Christian and Muslim) are right: The power resides in the people and their collective conscience. The people are the movers and shakers!

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So back to our question: Who are the world's movers and shakers? The slippery answer is: We are *all* movers and shakers in our spheres of influence. The answer is 'slippery' because the politics of fear have greased the slide; our vertigo only gets worse as we lose moral traction. But reject the fear and your cleats start to dig in.

We have been told that global problems are so complex that we must leave the business to 'specialists' ... to 'experts'. But don't you believe it! We've all been given horse sense. The Arabic term is '*aql*'. The root yields the word for the hobble that restrains a camel or a horse turned out to pasture — '*aqâl*'. In a nifty correlation of symbols, the '*aqâl*' also anchors a man's head cloth!

I remember Abraham Lincoln's pithy saying: "You can fool all of the people *some* of the time; you can fool some of the people *all* of the time; but you can't fool *all* of the people *all* of the time." Even politicians can be called to account, and perhaps this November is as good a time as any. Each voter should hear and voice the rebuke to a wayward child — "*Kûn 'âqil!*" ... 'Use your horse sense!'

The vote is free. Candidates' money pursues vanity and chases after wind. That's *their* problem. But the *vote is free* ... *it* belongs to the citizen who, God willing, has some 'horse sense'. So let those of us who are American this November be rational in our use of that vote. Let's use our best models.

The moment is God-given to shake and move our world back to rationality. Our British friends will soon have their opportunity. Let us pray for a good result.

And I greet you from the lands of the morning.